

*Letter from Phillip II to the Duchess of Parma, 1565*

Introduction: On October 17, 1565, Phillip II wrote from Spain to the Duchess of Parma, the Governor of the Netherlands and his half-sister, concerning the religious and civil unrest in the Low Countries. The document is printed in E.H. Kossmann and A.F. Mellink, eds., *Texts Concerning the Revolt of The Netherlands*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1974, pp. 53-56.

Madame my dear sister, I answer your letter of 22 July in which you told me, as you did in your preceding letters, how you have started to comply with the instructions transmitted by my cousin the prince of Gavre, and have been trying to remedy the religious problems. I understand that, as I had ordained, you have convoked at Brussels the bishops of Ypres, Namur and St Omer and the presidents of Flanders and Utrecht with the councillor, Muelerus, and also the theologians and Doctors Tiletanus and Jansenius, nominated as bishop of Ghent, and with them Doctor Wulmarus, canonist, whose statements in Latin, signed in their own handwriting, you have sent me together with the minutes. I am very pleased to learn that the assembly was constituted by men of such quality and such zeal for our religion and I value their advice on various points, and also on matters in which it does not seem suitable to make innovations, as you will see from the enclosed answers to their statements. I have added some other points which I think are important in the matter of religion and I instruct you to have these executed without fail in the best manner possible. I rely upon you in this.

You say that I did not make it clear in the afore-mentioned instruction that it was not my intention to ask you or the seigniors of the state council in the Netherlands for more advice in this matter but in fact you were made to understand my definitive intention. As to whether I would wish to ask the advice of the private and great councils and of the governors and provincial councils, this would be a considerable waste of time since my mind is made up. I have not asked others at all but followed the advice of the above-mentioned assembly as much as possible and as seemed fitting, and I have been very pleased to hear that you have already begun to apply the other canonical remedies, such as having good preachers and pastors, founding good schools and reforming the ecclesiastics in accordance with my instruction, and, moreover, publishing the decrees of the council and all that is connected with it . . .

As to the proceedings of the inquisitors of Louvain [the theological faculty at the University of Louvain played an important part in the fight against heresy], you must endeavour to support them as well as the others in all that concerns the exercise and administration of their charges. For this makes for the strength and maintenance of religion.

I cannot but be very much affected by the lampoons which are continually spread abroad and posted up in the Netherlands without the offenders being punished. This, of course, happens because the authors of earlier ones were not punished. You should consider what remains of my authority and yours, and of the service of God, when it is possible to do such things with impunity in your very presence. Therefore I pray you, take the necessary measures so that this does not remain unpunished. These things are not so secret but that several men hear of them and if some are not seen to be punished, the daring increases daily and in the end so much liberty is taken that we must fear most dangerous consequences . . .

As to the resentment you have noticed at some of the things which the prince of Gavre says I told him and which don't seem to correspond with my letters from Valladolids and with the negotiations in progress over the matter of religion, I don't see or understand that I wrote anything different in these letters from what was entrusted to the prince of Gavre. For as to the inquisition, my intention is that it should be carried out by the inquisitors, as they have done up till now and as it appertains to them by virtue of divine and human rights. This is nothing new, because this was always done in the days of the late emperor my seignior and father, whom God has in His glory, and by me. If one fears disturbances there is no reason to think that they are more imminent and will be greater when one does allow the inquisitors to perform their proper duties and when one does assist them. You know the importance of this and I command you urgently to do in this matter all that is so necessary and not to agree to any different policy. You know how much I have these things at heart and what pleasure and satisfaction this will give me.

I have heard how insubstantial are the objections raised by the inhabitants of Bruges against Titelman [a notorious inquisitor in Flanders]; you would do well not to permit anything to be done to undermine his authority. I am sure that being well informed of what happens (as I believe you are) you won't fail to take the necessary steps.

As to the Anabaptists, what I wrote to you about them was in answer to what you asked

me about the punishment of some prisoners.' This did not differ from what the prince of Gavre reported. For though you have to deliberate about proposals for altering punishments, this does not mean that they should cease until a resolution is taken. These prisoners must be punished as I told you in my letter from Valladolid. This also answers your representations to me in your letter of 22 July about state-affairs. I cannot refrain from telling you that considering the condition of religious affairs in the Netherlands as I understand it, this is no time to make any alteration. On the contrary, His Majesty's edicts should be executed; think that the cause of the past evil and its subsequent growth and advance has been the negligence, leniency and duplicity of the judges, about which I will give you more particulars later. I told the prince of Gavre that since the men condemned to die advance to execution not in silence, but as martyrs dying for a cause you should consider whether they ought not to be executed in secret in some way or other (though it is true that a public execution also serves to set an example) . . .

For the rest I can only thank you for all you propose to me, but assure you that my orders are designed for the welfare of religion and of my provinces and are worth nothing if they are not obeyed. In this way you can keep my provinces in justice, peace and tranquility. Now that you know the importance of this, I pray you again to take steps to bring this state of affairs into being. Thus I shall be most satisfied with you and with the seigniors who are with you. You must pass on my wishes to them. I trust that they won't fail to do what I want as they know what satisfaction this will give me. Thus they will do their duty according to their rank and to the obligation they have to serve God and me, and to further the common welfare of the provinces in the Netherlands on which they are themselves dependent.

So far, etc.

From the Segovia woods, 17 October 1565