

*Phillip II to the Duchess of Parma, July 31, 1566.*

Introduction: This letter from Phillip II in Spain to the Dutchess of Parma, his Governor in the Low Countries, arrived in Brussels in mid-August just as the image breaking began the Netherlands. The King had a notary draw up a document which stated that the concessions he had made in these letters were extorted from him and did not bind him in conscience. This letter was published by E.H. Kossmann and A.F. Mellink, eds., *Texts Concerning the Revolt of The Netherlands*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1974, pp. 69-75.

Since my last letters of 6 May I have received several letters, to wit of the 4th and 29th of the same month brought by baron of Montigny and of 21 June and the 7th inst., with a duplicate of the one of the 4th which the marquis of Bergen, who has not yet arrived, was commissioned to bring me. All of them tell me of the great troubles and disturbances stirred up in the Netherlands to my regret, on the pretext of religion, after some confederates presented to you a petition in which they called the inquisition in question and asked to abolish the religious edicts and to draft others in collaboration with the States General, and to suspend the execution of both inquisition and edicts until I shall have made my decision. In these letters you also described to me the great danger and troubles into which the country would otherwise undoubtedly fall, as well as the daily increase in the numbers of the confederates and the boldness which the heretics and the sectarians have lately been displaying. Bearing arms and sticks for their protection they even dare to hold their sermons and meetings in public in the neighbourhood of the great towns you mentioned in your letters. And they claim that this is allowed by the apostil which you ordered to be added to the petition, and in which you stated that you would inform me and would give orders that the inquisitors as well as the other officers should, wherever they had so far been performing their tasks proceed with discretion and modesty. This they wrongly interpret as a provisional decision to stop the proceedings against heretics.

To remedy this you told me earlier that your advisers saw only two possibilities, namely to take up arms (which would be very difficult) or to give in on some points, to abolish the inquisition and to moderate the rigour of the edicts little by little. Some time later a memorandum was drawn up containing this suggestion, so that the provincial councils and the provincial States (each meeting separately) might be asked for advice about it. At the same time

a general pardon would be announced for those who had taken part in the confederacy. And though it was impossible to guarantee that this would remove the dangers, yet it was thought that much would thus be gained. The league or confederacy would be broken, several honourable men would be satisfied and be given security, and the latter could afterwards be used against the others. I would hear further particulars about all this from the afore-mentioned marquis of Bergen and Montigny, whom you decided to send to me for this purpose. You added that if the proposal were refused, several seigniors in the Low Countries dare not rely on those who have to assist them in case of need, nor take up arms to maintain the inquisition and the edicts in all their rigour and you ended by insisting on the necessity for me to make a decision immediately (because otherwise religion and my lands in the Low Countries would both be in immediate danger of being lost) and to advance the date of my journey - which is so necessary to remedy the disturbances which go continually from bad to worse thither Your letters give a detailed account of all these matters and contain still other points which I will answer later, but which to avoid prolixity I will not dwell upon, because they are well-known to you.

I am certain, Madame my dear sister, that you can easily imagine the great sorrow this very important matter causes me. What is at stake is on the one hand the respect for our holy Catholic faith which I have always had at heart and furthered with due zeal and in accordance with the obligation I have to maintain it; on the other hand I fear that great difficulties and trouble might come to so many of the honest vassals and subjects whom I have in the Low Countries: I cannot forget the natural affection I have always had and still have for them. In truth I cannot understand how this great evil originated and why it has increased so much in such a short time. Since my departure from there, I have not heard of any cruel execution or rigorous prosecution having been undertaken on the strength of the inquisition or the edicts, which might account for these difficulties.

In the old edict there was always the possibility of moderation or of grace. The letters I wrote to you from here last year did not contain any innovation in the religious field; they only said that there should not be any innovations concerning the inquisition and the edicts and that everything should remain as it had been in the times of the emperor my lord and father whom God has in His glory, and in my own life time.

I took a long time to answer your letters, because those of 4 May referred expressly to further information which the seigniors of Bergen and Montigny would give me and, secondly, because you also told me that, as mentioned above, you had asked for advice. Under these circumstances it seemed to me that I neither should nor could take a decision before the arrival of the two gentlemen and before having received that advice, and I therefore thought it necessary to wait. & the baron of Montigny has not yet brought all the papers, I have been waiting all the time for those that are missing to be brought either by the marquis or in some other way. When I realised at last that it was useless to wait any longer for the arrival of the marquis (I have heard since, that he was held up on his way by ill health) and that the papers he had with him and which he sent to me from his sick-bed did not contain the afore-said advice, I ordered the papers to be examined without any more delay because of the great urgency of the matter on which you insist in your letters and also in those of the 7<sup>th</sup> inst. I have now decided upon those three things: the inquisition, the moderation of the edicts as well as a general pardon, and my visit to the Low Countries, and everything connected with these things, as you will see. I should like to tell you that it is not only because of the necessity to act in this way (although your arguments are fully justified) that I have, without letting any other consideration influence my decision, complied with all requests so far as my good conscience and the obligation I have to serve God and to conserve the holy faith and the state allow me, but also because I am naturally inclined to treat my vassals and subjects rather with love and clemency than with rigour and severity.

Taking the various points separately and first of all that about the inquisition, I know how important this is. It is the only means the Church has at her disposal of making every one live and behave according to her commandments. It is an instrument which has been applied since ancient times and is fully legitimate according to canon and civil law, to Holy Scripture and natural reason. Its purpose is to see that those who don't behave as they should and fail to do as the Church commands, should be admonished and brought back to the right path and reprimanded, if necessary. If the inquisition were abolished, this would no longer be possible, and it would seem that then every one would be permitted to live almost as he likes. However, as the inquisition was originally introduced into my territories in the Law Courts because there were not enough bishops then and because the persons in charge were negligent, I feel that the

situation is now different. The present bishops are good pastors and can give their flock the care to which they are entitled, so that they may behave in accordance with the ordinances of our holy mother Church and also with the moral conceptions upheld in that region, as can be concluded from the instruction given to baron Montigny. Taking also into consideration the wishes expressed by the seigniors, the character of the time we live in and especially the nature of this matter, I have decided after long and mature deliberation to acquiesce in this. As the Episcopal jurisdiction is now fully and firmly established I am content for the inquisition to cease.

As to the request to moderate the edicts and to revise them accordingly, it is most improbable that this would be useful. The heretics and sectarians who as they daily give to understand in the booklets they distribute, demand absolute religious liberty, will be just as little satisfied as the confederates who, it seems from their petition, have a different end in view and desire that an entirely new edict should be framed on the advice of the States General. Add to this that for honest people it is unnecessary to make such or any other ordinance; even the four chief towns of Brabant have expressly declared in their request that they will obey the edicts). Thus it seems to follow that a new ordinance is totally unnecessary or, at any rate not required immediately. However, in view of the arguments put forward in your letters and because in the Low Countries it is hoped that the confederation might be broken in this way and those gentlemen be enabled to deal firmly with the evil-minded, I think it right to agree to this now, and, the sooner the better . . .

I have therefore found it appropriate and necessary to moderate the edict in some way or another on condition that the holy Catholic faith and my authority be maintained and that special notice be taken of the points and articles mentioned. You must send the proposal to me and I shall take a decision without further delay, as I think right; and I shall do all that is possible.

As to the general pardon, there is reason to fear that hardly any profit will arise from it over there, because it is doubtful whether the sectarians and confederates will give up their malevolent attitude when they see that their plans for almost complete religious liberty are thwarted. I am not sure, moreover, what is meant by a general pardon, and whether it applies only to the confederates or rather to the conventiclers and in general to all heretics and those who broke the edicts . . . B ut I have always been inclined to treat my vassals and subjects with the

utmost clemency, abhorring nothing so much as the use of severity when things may be remedied in another way. If therefore you see that the difficulties are being overcome by means of the above-mentioned measures and that a general pardon would be the final measure to pacify the country, I grant you permission to give it in the form and way you think best. You may make it applicable to the confederates only or to the others too; to people sentenced in the past and to people who have not yet been brought to trial at the date of the proclamation of this pardon. My condition, however, is that these leagues and confederations will be broken up and that those who have been guilty of taking part in leagues, confederations, conventicles and sects or of breaking the edicts in any other way, do not do this any longer and will behave in future as is becoming to good Catholics, vassals and subjects of mine. And as to the three points mentioned it is my intention that my orders be carried out in the prescribed form and manner. But before starting upon this course you must make certain that these seigniors will meanwhile do their utmost to maintain the holy religion and the peace of the state and oppose all leagues, confederations, assemblies, riots and similar things.

As for my journey to the Low Countries, I certainly have a great desire to be there before this winter, and I have examined all possible routes, even over the ocean, but there are several difficulties and it is already so late in the year that I do not see how I could do it. At the moment I am considering which of the two ways I had better take, either the one I have just mentioned, or by the Mediterranean. But by whichever way I go, I will not fail to come, please God. I expect to be with you at the latest next spring and if there is a way of going earlier, be sure that I won't fail to use it.

Meanwhile the situation there must be improved; the religious services and most pernicious and dangerous assemblies with all the troubles that may ensue from them must be stopped. You had better send some troops of ordinance (the nucleus of a standing army, composed of cavalry led by great nobles, which dated from the reign of Charles the Bold in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century) to the places where they are held, and foot-soldiers from the garrisons, to hinder and disturb them. For the rest, do what should be done . . . And if it becomes necessary to give you more assistance and troops, I am negotiating to send some cavalry and foot soldiers from Germany to support you; I shall give particulars in my later dispatches. I shall also take care to

send you with the next dispatch a provision of 300,000 ecus about which I shall then write to you in detail.

From the Segovia woods, the last day of July 1566

Post data. Before this letter was closed, your letter of the 19th inst. arrived with news about the state of affairs over there and among other things about the proposal to assemble the States General as the only solution at present; you add the arguments pro and contra. Together with this letter I have also read the written considerations and I wish to answer you more fully in my next letter. Meanwhile I demand and instruct you not to tolerate in any way the holding of such a general assembly.