

The Goals of William the Silent, the Prince of Orange, 1573

Introduction: On February 5, 1573 William of Orange sent a letter to his brothers, the Counts John and Luis of Nassau, outlining his goals, which by 1573 included a commitment to Calvinism, hatred of the Spanish, distrust of Philipp II and skepticism about support from England's Elizabeth I. The letter is dated February 5, 1573 and was translated from the French by Herbert H. Rowen and published in his *The Low Countries in Early Modern Times: A Documentary History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), pp. 45-46.

My Dear Good Brothers, Counts John and Louis of Nassau, etc. I have received your letter and learned what the situation is from it as well as from the report of the person you sent to me. I cannot thank you too much for your many good offices on my behalf and the trouble and labors which you undertake. To answer the points that you raise, you know quite well that it was never and is not now my intention to seek the slightest advantage for myself. I have only aspired and claimed to seek the country's freedom in the matters of religious conscience and government, in which the foreigners tried to oppress it. I therefore see nothing else to propose but that it be permitted to practice the Reformed religion according to the word of God, and that this whole country and state return to its ancient privileges and liberty. To achieve this the foreigners in the government and the army, especially the Spaniards, must be driven out. But it will be most necessary of all that the King or the country pay off and satisfy the cavalymen and soldiers who served me in this cause in two campaigns. If we are granted these points and given good assurances on them, then people will indeed see that I want nothing more than peace and public tranquility, and that I am not stubbornly pursuing some foolish notions of my own. The whole difficulty lies in the fact that although such assurances have been repeatedly given in the past, those who gave them also took Oaths not to keep such contracts, being confident that they would be absolved from them by the Pope and therefore were not bound by them. I should be pleased if the Princes [in Germany] personally conferred among themselves on the means which could be proposed to give us good assurances. In view of the fact that for myself I confess that I can find no such means, at least none such as would be at all acceptable to the King, I therefore beg you to deliberate upon this matter. If you find something feasible, I will not fail on my part to accept it and to do what I can to persuade the States of the country to do so.

As for what you write about your coming here, I do not find it either expedient, or befitting your persons, or of advantage to the cause, to put yourselves in danger. It seems better to me that you go to Emden and then come by sea aboard two or three good, well-equipped ships.

As for the Queen of England, the Ambassadors of the States have written me that she did not want to get involved and that there was no hope there. Nonetheless, although they had decided to return at once, they have remained for a long period, so that I do not know whether there has been a change of opinion, but I do not expect it. I will not fail to inform you of what I hear. Now I recommend myself most affectionately to your good graces and pray God to keep you, my brothers, in His holy safeguard and protection. Written at Delft, this fifth of February, 1573.

Your most good brother, at your service,
William of Nassau.