

The Proscription of William the Silent, 1580

Introduction: On March 15, 1580, Phillip II issued the following edict, which called for the elimination of the leader of the Revolt of the Netherlands by assassination. An assassination attempt in 1582 wounded him and an attack on July 10, 1584 in Delft killed him. The document below was translated from the French and Dutch by Herbert H. Rowen and published in his *The Low Countries in Early Modern Times: A Documentary History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), pp. 78-79.

For these most just, right, and legitimate reasons and making use of the authority which we have over the said Orange both by virtue of the oaths of fidelity and obedience which he has often made to us and because we are absolute prince and sovereign of the said Low Countries, for all his perverse and baneful acts and because he alone is chief author and promoter of the troubles there and the principal disturber of our state, in brief is the plague of the Christian community, we do declare him to be a wicked traitor and an enemy to ourselves and the country. As such we have proscribed and do proscribe him for all time from our said countries and from all our other states, kingdoms, and lordships, and we forbid and prevent all our subjects, of whatever status, condition, or quality, from frequenting, living, discoursing, speaking, or communicating with him openly or in secret, or receiving or lodging him in their houses, or providing him with food, drink, fuel, or other necessities of any kind, under penalty of incurring our wrath, as shall be hereafter described.

But we give permission to all persons, whether our subjects or others, to arrest, hold, and make sure of his person, employing force and violence if need be in the execution of this declaration, baring the said William of Nassau to the whole world as an enemy of the human race; and we give to whoever can take and occupy or conquer them all his properties, real or personal, wherever situated or located, with the exception of the goods which are at present in our own hands and possession.

So that this purpose may be achieved more promptly and our people may be delivered more quickly from this tyranny and oppression, and wishing to reward virtue and punish crime, we promise upon the word of a king and as a servant of God that if there be someone, either our subject or a foreigner, with such good will and so strong a desire for our service and the public

good that he can enforce our said ordinance and rid us of this plague, delivering Orange to us dead or alive or even just killing him, we will give and furnish to him and to his heirs the sum of 25,000 gold crowns, in land or cash at his choice, immediately after the accomplishment of the deed. If he has committed any crime or breach of the law whatever, we promise to pardon him and do pardon him as of now. Further, if he is not a nobleman, we grant him nobility for his valor. And if the principal agent uses other persons to assist him in his enterprise or in the performance of his deed, we will reward them each according to his station and the service which he shall have rendered to us on this account, pardoning them too for whatever crimes they may have committed and likewise granting nobility to them. . . .