

*William of Orange calls for the separation of the Low Countries from Spain, 1572*

Introduction: By 1572 Alva seemed to be close to final victory in his suppression of the rebellion in the Low Countries. However, early in 1572, a band of privateer “Water Geuzen,” Sea Beggars, who had been commissioned by William of Orange, found themselves barred from their English ports by Elizabeth I. They turned into one of the mouths of the Rhine (down river from Rotterdam) and found the small port of Den Briel without a Spanish garrison. Subsequently, bands of determined Sea Beggars and Calvinist activists took over one town after another in the North. Seizing the opportunity, William of Orange issued the following call for a popular uprising against the Duke of Alva. His call to arms of April 14, 1572, was translated from the 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. 40-42.

We, William, by the grace of God, prince of Orange, count of Nassau, etc., bannerette of Breda, Diest, Grimbergen, etc., burggrave of Antwerp, etc., lieutenant general of his Royal Majesty in Holland, Zeeland, Friesland and Utrecht, seek for each and every estate, lord, knight, nobleman, captain, bailiff, sheriff, steward, burgomaster, alderman, tax receiver, guild, trade, civic guard and its officers, and burgher, and for all the good inhabitants of the Netherlands of every station, freedom and deliverance from the present enslavement by cruel, foreign, and bloodthirsty oppressors.

We suffer with all our heart over the multitudinous and excessively cruel violences, the excessive burdens, taxes of ten, twenty, and thirty per cent, and other imposts, exactions, burdens, seizures, slayings, expulsions, confiscations, executions, and innumerable other unparalleled and intolerable inflictions, intimidations, and oppressions which the common enemy, with his Spaniards, bishops, inquisitors and other dependents, continues daily with unprecedented novelty and violence to inflict upon you, your wives, and your daughters, and your souls, bodies, and goods. After so many years, this now grows steadily worse under the name of His Royal Majesty, but without his knowledge, in violation of his oath, and contrary to the liberties and privileges of the country, although in fact at the instigation of Cardinal Granvelle and the Spanish Inquisitors, whose purpose it is to put into effect the decisions of the Council of Trent and the Inquisition of Spain. These events are so public and well known, especially to you who see, fear, and suffer them yourselves that I do not need to give any broader account of them.

You know and the whole world knows with what diligence and cost of money, difficulties, and troubles, we have worked these last four years in order to restore to each and all of you, and to our beloved fatherland, your former freedom, prosperity, and wealth, and to deliver you from foreign tyrants and oppressors, for the sake of our own conscience and the fulfillment of our oath, which binds and obligates us to you for the true service of the King, the liberties of the country and the deliverance of the oppressed; and also to enable you to enjoy the freedom of your consciences and of the word of God, in proper obedience and true constant service to his Royal Majesty, without having to bear any longer these fears, anxieties, persecutions, slayings, robberies, and harassments by the tyrants, the Spanish foreigners, the inquisitions, bishops, and the edicts.

As a member of the community of the Netherlands, we would long since have aided you and brought you to that favorable condition, with God's grace, if you had not been made blind and deaf by the inordinate fear, the vain hopes, and false temptations instilled in you by governors who were put in place by the enemy and are truly betrayers of the fatherland and sworn servants of the tyrant; if until now you had not been negligent for so long in helping and supporting us to achieve your own welfare and deliverance. We hope that you now understand this better and will acquit yourself more adequately and give us more help, especially since you now see the great opportunities which we have at this time and which draw you on, and you know that we have not faltered but have ceaselessly sought by all feasible means to achieve these aims. Now various lords and friends are ready to offer us renewed help and assistance on sea and on land. Indeed, the enemy has already suffered notable damage from ourselves and our collaborators who have entered this country and taken over various harbors, cities, places, and districts which have placed themselves in our hands for their deliverance on behalf of his Royal Majesty. They have shown what each and every one of you should do if you do not wish to draw perpetual harm upon yourselves, through your own guilt, bringing yourselves and your descendants into perpetual slavery and peril of soul, body, and property. For it is greatly to be feared that if you do not take advantage of this favorable situation, when the common enemy suffers from a shortage of troops, with many sick, and a shortage of ships and supplies, and when we already hold so many streams and waterways that the enemy finds it difficult to move about,

then God will never again grant such a great opportunity. For you will have shamefully and evilly scorned and wasted the means which He sends to you so that you can now easily attain the freedom of His word and your consciences and of your fatherland, your bodies, wives, children, and the preservation of your privileges, rights, and goods, all in the true service of the King. We ask God in His grace to spare you all these evils and to give us and you His blessing, and strength and prosperity. With these, after expelling the tyrannical oppressors, together we shall see the Netherlands in their ancient freedom, governed again without any violence, with proper obedience to the King and security for your consciences, and according to the advice of the States General. To achieve this, if you will help by giving yourselves over into our hands, we wish to contribute all our strength; but if you do not do so and bring shame, violence, and grief upon yourselves, we do not want to have the fault laid upon us. Given at Dillenburg, April 14, 1572.

Guillaume de Nassau.