

*William of Orange's Proclamation as the leader of the Revolt of the Netherlands, 1568*

The Prince of Orange, William of Nassau, was appalled both by the violence of the *Beeldenstorm* (the breaking of images) and the Duke of Alva's repression of rebellion. William, who was famous for keeping his own counsel—and thus the name, William the Silent--reluctantly became the leader of the rebellion in April of 1568. He announced his aim as the restoration of order in the Low Countries and the military defeat of the Duke of Alva's repression, but he initially did so in the name of the king. His proclamation below 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. 38-39.

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William, by the grace of God, Prince of Orange, Lord of Nassau, Katzenellenbogen, Vianden, Dietz, and Baron of Breda, Diest, etc. To all who shall see or hear these presents, let it be known that out of the great affection which we do bear for the King of Spain, our gracious lord, and for His Majesty's hereditary Netherlands;

And in order to prevent the ruin and desolation of these lands, which are being assaulted by the Spaniards, whose steady purpose it is only to bring them and hold them in intolerable slavery, sorrow, and misery under their government, despite the contracts, leagues, and privileges which they violate every day, upon which the prosperity of this country is wholly dependent and which His Majesty has affirmed, confirmed and sworn by solemn oath, so that the result is great and unspeakable antipathy to His Majesty and harm and loss for these lands;

And because the Spaniards further endeavor by promulgation and renewal of edicts to extirpate the pure word of God, so as to achieve more effectively their designs and aims in other, adjacent lands, as we have seen in France, where the realm was thrown into uproar when some liberty of religion was permitted;

And because, as these purposes have moved toward accomplishment, these Low Countries have faced the danger not only of being robbed of their contracts, leagues, and privileges, but also of being so enslaved that no one could be sure of life or property, or indeed even of the honor of his wife and daughters;

And because the Spaniards, using false accusations and slanders, banned all those who fled the country so as to avoid their tyranny, and imprisoned others who stayed but were under any suspicion whatever, thus by a single stroke gaining the upper hand in the country and

making provision for themselves by means of confiscations;

And because these are all things which should not have to be borne by those who bear affection to the service of His Majesty and the prosperity of their country, in view of the great loyalty which its inhabitants have always displayed;

Therefore, having been earnestly beseeched by the inhabitants of the country of both Protestant and Roman faiths to take action with the counsel of the Estates General of the country for the service of His Majesty and to protect the freedom and liberty of everyone in his religion and conscience, we have asked and begged our dearly beloved brother, Louis, Count of Nassau, to contend against these conditions with such soldiers as he shall have need of, and we hereby give him power and authority to do this as well as to recruit and bring into his service for his greater success such additional soldiers as he shall need, after he has, with God's help, won success in these endeavors. At our request, he has accepted this task out of love and affection for the King and for the Low Countries. We therefore call upon one and all to favor, help, and assist him in the performance of these tasks, as a duty in the service of His Majesty, their own welfare, and that of their fatherland, and we shall gladly consider all such actions to have been done as if by ourselves.

In witness whereof, we have placed our name below and caused our privy seal to be attached thereto. Given at Dillenburg, on the 6th of April in the year of Our Lord 1568.