

*Sir William Temple, The Religion of the Dutch Republic, 1673*

Introduction: Sir William Temple (1628-1699) served as the English Ambassador to the Dutch Republic from 1668 to 1672 and again from 1674 to 1679. He provided one of the most penetrating analysis and vivid descriptions of the Republic in his *Observations Upon he United Provinces of the Netherlands*, first published in 1672. The selections below are from chapter V, "Of their Religion" in the 1673 edition, which was reprinted, with an interesting introduction, in Sir George Clark's edition (Oxford 1972). The idiosyncratic spelling of the original publication has been retained.

*Of their Religion*

I intend not here to speak of Religion at all as a Divine, but as a meer Secular man, when I observe the occasions that seem to have establisht it in the Forms, or with the Liberties wherewith It is now attended in the United Provinces. I believe the Reformed Religion was introduced there, as well as in England; and the many other Countreys where it is profess'd, by the operation of Divine Will and Providence; And by the same, I believe the Roman-Catholique was continued in France...'Tis enough that God Almighty infuses belief into the hearts of men, or else ordains it to grow out of Religious Enquiries and Instructions; And that wherever the generality of a Nation come by these means to be of a belief, It is by the force of this concurrence introduced into the Government, and becomes the Establisht Religion of That Countrey...

Now the way to our future happiness, has been perpetually disputed throughout the World, and must be left at last to the Impressions made upon every man's Belief and Conscience, either by natural or supernatural Arguments and Means; Which Impressions men may disguise or dissemble, but no man. Can resist. For Belief is no more in a man's power, than his Stature or his Feature; And he that tells me, I must change my Opinion for his, because 'tis the truer and the better, without other arguments, that have to me the force of conviction, May as well tell me, I must change my gray eyes for others like his that are black, because these are lovelier, or more in esteem...

One of the great Causes of the first Revolt in the LowCountreys, appeared to be, The Oppression of men's Consciences, or Persecution in their Liberties, their Estates, and their Lives, upon pretence of Religion. And this at a time, when there seemed to be a conspiring-disposition

in most Countreys of Christendom, to seek the reformation of some abuses, grown in the Doctrine and Discipline of the Church, either by the Rust of Time, by Negligence, or by Humane Inventions, Passions and Interests. The rigid opposition given at Rome to this general Humour, was followed by a defection of mighty numbers in all those several Countreys, Who professed to reform themselves according to such Rules as they thought were necessary for the reformation of the Church. These persons, though they agreed in the main of disowning the Papal Power, and reducing Belief from the authority of Tradition to that of the Scripture; Yet they differ'd much among themselves in other circumstances, especially of Discipline, according to the Perswasions and Impressions of the Leading-Doctors in their several Countreys. So the Reformed of France became universally Calvinists: But for those of Germany, though they were generally Lutherans, yet there was a great mixture both of Calvinists and Anabaptists among them.

The first Persecutions of these Reformed, arose in Germany in the time of Charles the Fifth, and drove great numbers of them down into the Seventeen Provinces, especially Holland and Brabant, where the Priviledges of the Cities were greater, and the Emperors' Government was less severe, as among the Subjects of his own Native Countreys. This was the occasion that in the year 1566, when upon the first Insurrection in Flanders, those of the Reformed Profession began to form Consistories, and levy Contributions among themselves, for support of their Common Cause. It was resolved upon consultation among the Heads of them, that for declining all differences among themselves, at a time of common exigence, The publique Profession of their Party should be that of the Lutherans, though with liberty and indulgence to those of different Opinions. By the Union of Utrecht concluded in 1579, Each of the Provinces was left to order the matter of Religion as they thought fit and most conducing to the welfare of their Province; With this provision, that every man should remain free in his Religion, and none be examined or entrapped for that cause, according to the Pacification at Gant. But in the year 1583, it was enacted by general agreement, That the Evangelical Religion should be only professed in all the Seven Provinces: Which came thereby to be the establisht Religion of this State...

Since this Establishment, as well as before, the great Care of this State has ever been, To favour no particular or curious Inquisition into the Faith or Religious Principles of any peaceable man, who came to live under the protection of their Laws, And to suffer no Violence or

Oppression upon any Mans Conscience, whose Opinions broke not out into Expressions or Actions of ill consequence to the State. A free Form of Government either making way for more freedom in Religion, Or else having newly contended so far themselves for Liberty in this point, they thought it the more unreasonable for them to oppress others. Perhaps while they were so threatened and endanger'd by Forreign Armies, they thought it the more necessary to provide against Discontents within, which can never be dangerous where they are not grounded or fathered upon Oppression in point either of Religion or Liberty, But in those two Cases the Flame often proves most violent in a State, the more 'tis shut up, or the longer concealed.

The Roman-Catholique Religion was alone excepted from the common protection of their Laws, Making Men (as the States believed) worse Subjects than the rest, by the acknowledgement of a Forreign and Superior Jurisdiction... Besides, this Profession seemed still a retainer of the Spanish Government, which was then the great Patron of it in the world: Yet such was the care of this State to give all men ease in this point, who askt no more than to serve God, and save their own souls, in their own Way and Forms; That what was not provided for by the Constitutions of their Government, was so, in a very great degree, by the connivence of their Officers, Who upon certain constant Payments from every Family, suffer the exercise of the Roman-Catholique Religion in their several Jurisdictions, as free and easie, though not so cheap and so avowed as the rest...

Of all other Religions, every man enjoys the free exercise in his own Chamber, or his own House, unquestioned and unespied: And if the followers of any Sect grow so numerous in any place, that they affect a publique Congregation, and are content to purchase a place of Assembly, to bear the charge of a Pastor or Teacher, and to pay for this Liberty to the Publique; They go and propose their desire to the Magistrates of the place, where they reside, Who inform themselves of their Opinions, and manners of Worship, and if they find nothing in either, destructive to Civil Society, or prejudicial to the Constitutions of their State, And content themselves with the price that is offer'd for the purchase of this Liberty, They easily allow it; But with the condition, That one or more Commissioners shall be appointed, who shall have free admission at all their meetings, shall be both the Observers and Witnesses of all that is acted or preached among them, and whose testimony shall be received concerning any thing that passes

there to the prejudice of the State; In which case the Laws and Executions are as severe as against any Civil Crimes.

Thus the Jews have their allowed Synagogues in Amsterdam and Rotterdam; And in the first, almost all Sects that are known among Christians, have their publique Meeting-places; and some, whose Names are almost worn out in all other parts as the Brownists, Familists, and others. The Arminians, though they make a great Name among them, by being rather the distinction of a Party in the State, than a Sect in the Church; Yet are, in comparison of others, but few in number, Though considerable by the persons, who are of the better quality, the more learned and intelligent men, and many of them in the Government. The Anabaptists are just the contrary, very numerous, but in the lower ranks of people, Mechanics and Sea-men, and abound chiefly in North-Holland.

The Calvinists make the body of the people, and are possessed of all the publique Churches in the Dominions of the State, as well as of the only Ministers or Pastors who are maintained by the Publique; But these have neither Lands, nor Tythes, nor any authorized Contributions from the people, but certain Salaries from the State, upon whom they wholly depend: And though they are often very bold in taxing and preaching publicly against the Vices, and sometimes the innocent Entertainments of persons most considerable in the Government, as well as of the Vulgar; yet they are never heard to censure or controul the publique Actions or Resolutions of the State: They are in general, throughout the Countrey, passionate Friends to the Interests of the House of Orange; And during the intermission of that Authority, found ways of expressing their affections to the Person and Fortunes of this Prince, without offending the State, as it was then constituted. They are fierce Enemies of the Arminian Party...

It is hardly to be imagined how all the violence and sharpness, which accompanies the differences of Religion in other Countreys, seems to be appeased or softened here, by the general freedom which all men enjoy, either by allowance or connivence; Nor how Faction and Ambition are thereby disabled to colour their Interested and Seditious Designs, with the pretences of Religion, Which has cost the Christian World so much blood for these last Hundred and fifty years. No man can here complain of pressure in his Conscience, Of being

forced to any publique profession of his private Faith; Of being restrained from his own manner of worship in his House, Or obliged to any other abroad; And whoever asks more in point of Religion, without the undisputed evidence of a particular Mission from Heaven, may be justly suspected, not to ask for God's sake, but for his own; since pretending to Sovereignty instead of Liberty in Opinion, is indeed pretending the same in Authority too, Which consists chiefly in Opinion; And what Man or Party soever, can gain the common and firm belief, of being most immediately inspired, instructed, or favoured of God, Will easily obtain the prerogative of being most honour'd and obey'd by men.

But in this Commonwealth, no man having any reason to complain of oppression in Conscience; and no man having hopes by advancing his Religion, to form a Party, or break in upon the State, The differences in Opinion make none in Affections, and little in Conversation, where it serves but for entertainment and variety. They argue without interest or anger; They differ without enmity or scorn, And they agree without confederacy. Men live together like Citizens of the World, associated by the common ties of Humanity, and by the bonds of Peace, Under the impartial protection of indifferent Laws, With equal encouragement of all Art and Industry, and equal freedom of Speculation and Enquiry; All men enjoying their imaginary excellencies and acquisitions of knowledg, with as much safety, as their more real possessions and improvements of Fortune. The power of Religion among them, where it is, lies in every man's heart; The appearance of it, is but like a piece of Humanity, by which every one falls most into the company or conversation of those whose Customs and Humours, whose Talk and Disposition they like best: And as in other places, 'tis in every man's choice, With whom he will eat or lodg, with whom go to Market, or to Court; So it seems to be here, with whom he will pray or go to Church, or associate in the Service and Worship of God; Nor is any more notice taken, or more censure past, of what every one chuses in these cases, than in the other.

I believe the force of Commerce, Alliances, and Acquaintance, spreading so far as they do in small circuits (such as the Province of Holland) may contribute much to make conversation, and all the offices of common life, so easie, among so different Opinions, Of which so many several persons are often in every man's eye; And no man checks or takes offence at Faces, or Customs, or Ceremonies he sees every day, As at those he hears of in places

far distant, and perhaps by partial relations, and comes to see late in his life, and after he has long been possest by passion or prejudice against them. However it is, Religion may possibly do more good in other places, But it does less hurt here; And wherever the invisible effects of it are the greatest and most advantageous, I am sure the visible are so in this Countrey, by the continual and undisturbed Civil Peace of their government for so long a course of years; And by so mighty an encrease of their people, Wherein will appear to consist chiefly the vast growth of their Trade and Riches, and consequently the strength and greatness of their State.