

against all our privileges and freedoms, and to ruin the whole country and to treat us more cruelly than the Turks or Jews have ever treated their vanquished enemies; and that before Your Majesty and all Christian potentates and nations he falsely accused us of apostasy, rebellion and heresy and that we were unable to obtain audience or receive any comfort and consolation in the whole world. Then we were compelled to take up arms and to try in every possible way to free our poor oppressed fatherland from such atrocious tyranny. We would rather die one after the other than surrender to such a tyrant. This is still our intention, if Your Majesty is unwilling to graciously listen to our complaints, to administer right and justice to us against such violence. For we are not so ill-informed of God's Word, thank God, but that we know quite well that our lives and deaths are in God's care and that the death which no one in the world escapes, is only a passage to eternal life.

If therefore our death would please and help some people, we would rather die an honest death for the freedom and prosperity of our fatherland than be reduced to slavery and be trampled on by wanton foreigners, who have always displayed hatred and displeasure towards us. We should then indeed hand on to our descendants the honestly reaped glory that their forefathers refused to be slaves of the Spanish inquisitors and did not hesitate to redeem a shameful life by an honest death.

We fight for freedom of conscience,³ for the freedom of our wives and children, of our lives and possessions; the point is whether the duke of Alva and his adherents will be our tyrannical lord and the arbitrary master of all we cherish or whether we shall unto death preserve and protect our liberties with our sword in the service of God our Lord and Your Majesty our most gracious king.

***18 The prince of Orange to Philip Marnix, Delft, 28 November 1573*¹**

Marnix of St Aldegonde had fallen into the hands of the Spanish officer Julian Romero near Maaslandsluis (to the west of Rotterdam)

3 The religious problem and the freedom of conscience are specifically mentioned here, in contrast to Document 16, pp. 102ff.

1 Gachard, *Correspondance de Guillaume le Taciturne*, III, pp. 88ff.

on 4 November 1573. He was detained first at The Hague, afterwards at Utrecht. The Beggars for their part had taken the Spanish stadholder Bossu captive in the battle at the Zuyder Zee on 11 October. So there was the possibility of exchanging prisoners.

Monsieur Marnix, I have received your two letters, the first of the 7th and the second of the 21st day of this month. In these you dealt chiefly with two points, first of all telling me what happened at the time of your arrest. As to the apologies you offer, you may rest assured that I and the States are completely satisfied with the way you have carried out your duties. Your mind may be easy on that matter and you may rest assured that we will always support you and your affairs. I very much hope that Monsieur Noircarnes² and Seignior Francis Valdez will treat you as Seignior Julian Romero³ treated you. If they do otherwise, I will be forced to do the same to those whom we keep in captivity. I will be very pleased to hear what they think about exchanging prisoners, as I have written to Seignior Francis Valdez, but so far I have not had his answer to a note under cover of my letter in which I mentioned the persons to be exchanged in the first place; you were among them.

As to the other point I think that in order to deliver this people from this miserable war, you would like to induce and persuade me to enter into some treaty and prejudicial accord, which would ruin rather than save the country. I will not conceal from you the fact that I have communicated the contents of your letters to the States of these provinces and to other honest men of rank in order to get their advice on your proposals, and to hear their opinion. I did not wish to act on my own authority, in contravention of the oath and obligation I have towards them, or unknown to them, to undertake something on my own initiative. Rather, I wish to act in the same way as I do in other affairs concerning the well-being of the country, as every one knows. After mature deliberation on this matter with the other persons mentioned and after weighing all the circumstances properly, the States unanimously declared that they know, as I do too, that all men, and especially Christians, have been expressly commanded by God to pursue peace and that besides the duty which obliges them to render Him obedience, their natural inclination incites them to desire

2 Philip of St Aldegonde, lord of Noircarnes, the conqueror of the town of Valenciennes in March 1567 replaced Bossu as stadholder. He resided at Utrecht and died in March 1574.

3 Francis Valdez was the commander of the Spanish troops which had laid siege to Leiden. Romero was an old campaigner of Charles V and Alva.

union, concord and peace. You know very well that from the beginning and ever afterwards, we have desired nothing so much as the tranquillity and prosperity of the country based on a good and sure peace and this is what we still desire. The innumerable cruelties, unjust decisions, brutalities, and other outrages perpetrated contrary to all divine and human rights, which caused these troubles and forced us all, each according to his place and rank, to take up arms, always distressed us deeply and still do so.

As you know, we do not fight His Majesty but must protect ourselves and avoid being finally overwhelmed and ruined completely and placed forever in intolerable servitude, and made slaves of a master who tyrannises over our bodies, possessions and consciences. Such tyranny will inevitably cause horrible desolation, because the greater part of the inhabitants of the country will flee to the woods and forests with their wives and children, and be in an even more calamitous and miserable condition than troubles and wars waged with a clear conscience before God could bring about. Wars always cause endless suffering and disasters. There is therefore nothing the States and I desire more fervently than to see the miseries and desolation mentioned above brought to a conclusion, so that we may live in happy prosperity and in complete obedience to His Majesty, and we feel ourselves obliged before God and moved in our hearts to pursue and embrace such a great good. If the issue is whether we should make an accord or peace causing more misfortune, misery and still greater injury to the glory of God, which we are bound to pursue above all things, as well as to the fatherland, we feel obliged rather to endure all the misfortune, calamities and discomfort of the war than for some relief, for some imaginary tranquillity and an ill-assured and therefore short-lived peace willingly and knowingly to rush headlong into the enormous and horrible evils we have in our own time seen arising from such accords. For you will remember that the only result of the accord concluded in the year 1566 with so much pomp and circumstance at the command of madame the duchess of Parma herself,⁴ regent at the time, and her councillors, was the extirpation of the true religion according to the Word of God, the slaughter of many thousands of God's children and the execution and banishment of seigniors, nobles, burghers and many other persons of all walks of life and both sexes, who, relying upon similar pardons and treaties, were miserably deceived, and lost their lives and possessions. Memory of the massacre in France too, which happened in

4 The accord of 23 August 1566 concluded by order of the governess with the confederate nobles (see Document 7, note 2).

spite of a peace so solemnly sworn,⁵ cannot be effaced from our hearts and teaches us where to place our trust. We cannot forget that it took place a long time after the war, in time of peace and even during a wedding-feast. We should truly consider what would in all probability be in store for us, with our country still full of soldiers and especially Spanish soldiers.

***19 The prince of Orange to Count John of Nassau, Dordrecht, 7 May 1574*¹**

This letter from the prince of Orange to his brother John was intercepted; only in 1593 did it fall into the hands of John's son William Louis, who sent it to prince Maurice. John of Nassau (born 1536), the prince's eldest brother, left the army to fetch money from Cologne some days before it was crushed in the battle of Mook on 14 April 1574.

Monsieur my brother, the last day of last month I received your letters of the 25th inst. and was very sad to hear that, despite your great diligence, you have not succeeded in getting reliable information about the lot of His Highness duke Christopher or of my brothers.² In truth great injustice is done to you as well as to me, if their death is being concealed from us - if indeed the Lord God decided to let them die. I wish to assure you that this secrecy has done more harm than good to our cause and I personally have been much blamed for it, because all those who ask me about it, think that I conceal the truth from them because I feel uneasy about the future and, suspecting that this is the reason, every one talks of it as they list, and the greater number of them think that the situation is entirely hopeless because their death is kept a secret. I confess to you that

5 The massacre of St Bartholomew's Eve, 24 August 1572.

1 Groen van Prinsterer ed., *Archives ou Correspondance inédite de la Maison d'Orange-Nassau*, le série, IV, pp. 385ff.

2 Christopher, son of the Elector Palatine Frederick III, Louis of Nassau (born 1538) and Henry of Nassau (born 1550) were all three killed in the battle of Mook, where Sancho d'Avila with his Spanish troops was victorious. The Spaniards had been forced temporarily to raise the siege of Leyden to counter the invasion by Louis of Nassau and his men.