

5. The edict was a declaration made by the king alone, without the advice or assistance of any other governmental institution. What does it reveal about the power of the monarch? About the king's role in religious affairs?

•76•

## William of Orange

### *The Apology*

(1580)

William the Silent, Prince of Orange (1533–1584), was one of the leading nobles in the Spanish Netherlands. He was chosen as an advisor to Philip II and Margaret of Parma and sat on the Council of State that governed Philip's Burgundian inheritance. Although born and raised Catholic, William converted to Lutheranism and opposed the heavy-handed measures introduced to eradicate Protestants in the Low Countries. He left government service and retired to his German lands until the beginning of the revolt of the Netherlands in 1565. He quickly became the leader of the northern Protestant provinces and advocated a policy of toleration for both Catholics and Protestants. He was made stadtholder of the United Provinces in 1579, an office that became hereditary in his family. William was leader of the ultimately successful revolt against Spain until his assassination in 1584. He died without realizing his dream of a single Dutch nation tolerant of all religions.

*The Apology* was William's defense against charges that he was disloyal to his sovereign. It was composed largely by his chaplain but expressed the prince's own motives and included his attack upon Spanish administration in the Netherlands.

**APOLOGY OR DEFENSE OF HIS SERENE  
HIGHNESS WILLIAM BY THE GRACE OF  
GOD PRINCE OF ORANGE ETC. AGAINST  
THE BAN OR EDICT PUBLISHED BY THE  
KING OF SPAIN, 1581**

Does the king not realise that if he is duke of Bra-

bant, then I am one of the principal members of Brabant because of my baronies? Does he not realise his obligations towards me, my brothers and companions and the good towns of this country? And on what terms does he govern this state? Does he not recall his oath? Or if he does, does he attach so little importance to what he

promised God and the country or to the conditions connected with his ducal rank? I need not remind you, gentlemen, of what he promised us before we swore to serve him. Most of you know it only too well. But there are many others who will read this defence, and so I would like to imprint once more upon your memories a summary of his oath.

You know, gentlemen, the obligations which bind him, and that he is not free to do what he likes as he can in the Indies. He may not by force compel any of his subjects to do anything unless the customs of the local courts of justice, which have jurisdiction over him, permit it. Nor can he change the general state of the country in any way by ordinance or decree. He must be satisfied with his customary and regular income. He cannot levy and demand any taxes contrary to the privileges of the country or without its express permission. He may not bring soldiers into the country without its consent. He may not debase the currency without the permission of the States. He cannot have a subject arrested until the local magistrate has examined the case, nor can he send a prisoner out of the country.

When you hear even so brief a summary, gentlemen, do you not realise, that if the barons and nobles of the country entrusted with its defence by virtue of their prerogatives, did not rise in opposition, when these clauses are not only broken but tyrannically and haughtily trodden under foot—not one single clause, but all of them, not once but a million times, and not only by the duke himself but by barbaric foreigners; if I say, the nobles did not honour their oath and obligations and force the duke to make reparation for his misdeeds, would they not then themselves be convicted of perjury, disloyalty and rebellion against the States of the country? As for myself, I have a special and more personal reason for acting as I do, for contrary to the privileges and without any form of justice I have been robbed of all my goods. Moreover what happened to my son the count of Buren is such a clear proof of the enemy's lack of faith and dis-

regard of privileges, that no one can doubt my right to take up arms.

If in my first campaign I did not obtain a foothold in the country (with this I am upbraided), is this so new? Has this not happened to the greatest captains in the world? Did it not happen to him, on the many occasions when he entered Holland and Zeeland with large and powerful armies and was shamefully driven out of the country by a handful of soldiers with the help of the States of these provinces? Did it not happen too to that great captain, the duke of Alva and his successor, so that the king does not now have in these provinces a square foot of land at his disposal nor, I hope, with your assistance, will he have in the rest of these countries in the near future? . . .

The threats which accompany this ban are intended to shock you into leaving me. They make it seem that this war is being waged against me and not against you, just as the wolf would like to make the sheep believe that he intends to fight only against the dogs, and having killed them, would be on good terms with the herd, for it is the dogs who always start the fights. But, gentlemen, after I left for Germany, were there in my absence no more burnings at the stake? Was there no more bloodshed? Were there no longer any people drowned? Was your freedom maintained by that gentle man, the duke of Alva? Was it not at that very time that your ambassadors, the lords of Bergen and Montigny, died so piteously in Spain? Was it not at that time that the heads of your most prominent captains and governors were displayed and presented to you on spears?

The other thing they intend above all, is the extermination of the true religion. I will not discuss here, gentlemen, which is the true religion, the one in which God is truly served and invoked according to His Word. I leave this to people better trained in this area than I am, especially as every one can gather what my beliefs are from the profession I make. But I tell you frankly that the condition of your country is such that if the practice of the reformed religion is no longer

allowed the country cannot survive for even three days. You see how miraculously the numbers of its adherents have increased and that hatred of the pope has taken deep root in the hearts of all the inhabitants of the country because his evil practices against this whole state have been so clearly exposed. Who can pride himself on loving this country and still recommend that so many people should be driven out of it, people who will leave the country desolate, poor and waste and will populate and enrich foreign countries? But if they refuse to go away, who can force them to do so? Let us look at our neighbours and at what happened in our own country; unless we are raving mad we will never follow such evil advice, advice which will completely upset this country.

Moreover, gentlemen, it is true that among the adherents of the Roman Catholic Church there are many honest and patriotic men and some of them have done their duties honourably; among those who are devoted to the [reformed] religion, however, there is definitely not a single person who has any understanding or association with the enemy for all of them are unanimously hostile to him. Though there are some among them who, like wanton and mischievous children, have by their imprudence given trouble at home, they certainly had no dealings with the common enemy.

As you know the enemies' intention, gentlemen, you must start taking appropriate measures. How? By giving effect to what you keep saying and to what is symbolised by the sheaf of arrows which you gave orders to be engraved on your seal. No limb of this fine body should look after its own interests indifferent to what concerns the whole body; no part of the body should usurp the food prepared for the whole body but each should allow the stomach (which stands for the council you will establish) to digest it and then send it on through the veins to all other parts of this state; and medicine should be sent swiftly to wherever a malady may manifest itself; and the sick should patiently bear their pains for a time so as to enjoy their

recovery the more deeply later. We are governing so fine a state and possess such fine means, that it would be to our everlasting shame if we allowed ourselves through miserable avarice and the desire to get rich at the expense of our fellow-countrymen—one party pulling with all their strength on one side, the other on the opposite—to be crushed at a stroke by our mortal enemies. Remember, gentlemen, how much this state's riches declined after Duke Charles died, merely because of trivial debates between the provinces over pretended privileges and some advantages, whilst the people's true interests were neglected. And do not suppose, gentlemen, things being as they are, that I can resist the enemy for long with the very few means that you know I have at my disposal. But on the other hand, having some experience as I have, in the field of government and war, knowing well, as I do, the country and the power of the enemy, be sure that should all the armies of Spain and Italy (which already threaten us) attack us, they would accomplish next year as little or even much less than the duke of Alva did in Holland and Zeeland. If it is within your power (as in truth it is) to make preparations and if you fail to do so, what shall we say of such dereliction, committed by you, gentlemen, now assembled here? All these honest men rely and depend on you. They take you for their fathers and protectors, and are ready to embrace a good ordinance as a gift from heaven (if only you will issue it). Have pity on yourselves. And if you cannot be moved by your own needs, have pity at least on the many poor people utterly ruined, on the many poor widows and orphans; think of the many murders and bloodshed committed in the bowels of your country, of the many churches destroyed, of the many pastors wandering with their poor flocks. Remember the cruel and barbaric execution carried out by Count Mansfeld at Nivelles. All such disasters you can avoid. And you can easily transfer all the misery of this war to the territory of the enemy, simply by holding aloof from faction and harmoniously and with courage making

use of all you have, without sparing, I do not say that which lies at the bottom of your purses, but which abounds therein.

And as for myself in particular, you see, gentlemen, that it is this head they are after, it is this head they have destined for death, putting upon it so high a price and so large a sum of money, and saying that as long as I remain among you this war will not come to an end. I wish it were God's will, gentlemen, that either my eternal exile or even my death could indeed deliver you from all the evil and misery the Spaniards have in store for you. I have so often heard them deliberating in the council and giving their opinion in private, and I know them inside and out. How sweet would such a ban be to me and how delightful a death for such purpose! For why did I leave all my goods at the mercy of the enemy? Was it to get rich? Why did I lose my own brothers, who were dearer to me than life? Was it to find others? Why have I left my son so long under arrest, my son whom did I correctly call myself a father, I should long for? Does it lie within your power to give me another or to give him back to me? Why have I risked my life so often? What price or reward could I expect for my long trouble and toil in your service, in which I have grown old and lost all my goods, other than to win and buy your freedom even, if

necessary, with my blood? If gentlemen you therefore believe that my absence or even death may be of use to you, I am willing to obey. Bid me go to the end of the world, and I shall willingly do so. Here is my head over which no prince or potentate but you alone have power; do with it what you please to bring prosperity to you and to maintain your commonwealth. But should you think the small experience and little diligence I have attained through such long and unremitting toil, should you think that what is left of my goods and my life will still be of use to you (for I devote it entirely to you and to the country), make up your minds to do what I have proposed to you. And should you think I have some love of the fatherland, some capacity to give good advice, then believe that this is the only way to protect and save yourselves. This done, let us go forward together with a good heart and will, and let us together undertake to protect these upright people who are only in need of good counsel and are eager to follow it. If, in so doing you should continue to show me favour, I hope, through your help and God's grace (of which I have so often in the past been conscious in desperate circumstances) that what you decide for your welfare, and the survival of yourselves, your wives and children and all holy and sacred things.

1. William makes much of his standing as a prince in *The Apology*. How might his hereditary position help him in his dispute with the Spanish monarchy?
2. *The Apology* is directed at public opinion and so involves an effort to be as persuasive as possible. How successful is William?
3. How have the Spanish forfeited their right to rule in the Netherlands?
4. How is religion an issue in the Dutch revolt?
5. What is William of Orange's biggest problem in fighting the Spanish? How does he attempt to overcome the divisions among his allies?