

*The 'Compromise: The Petition of the Nobles to Phillip II, April 5, 1566*

Introduction: At the Compromise meeting of nobles who petitioned Phillip II to end to the inquisition in the Netherlands in late 1565, a Catholic who remained faithful to Phillip whispered that the petitioners were a band of Gueux, or beggars. During the following decade, Gueux became a general name for resisters to Spanish rule. Below is the Compromise petition of the "Beggary Nobles," translated by Herbert H. Rowen and published in his *The Low Countries in Early Modern Times: A Documentary History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), pp. 30-33.

To all who shall see these presents, know that we who have put our signatures below have been told and have learned with adequate assurances that a host of foreigners-men without any concern for the welfare and prosperity of these Low Countries, with no care for the glory and honor of God or for the public interest but desiring only to satisfy their own ambitions and avarice even at the expense of the King and all his subjects, although they falsely pleaded their great zeal to maintain the Catholic faith and the union of the people-have nevertheless managed to win over His Majesty by their well-turned remonstrances and false teachings, so that he has been persuaded, in violation of his oaths and of the hope which he always nourished in us, not only to refrain from moderating the edicts already issued concerning religion but even to reinforce them and to introduce the Inquisition among us in all its strength. Not only is this Inquisition iniquitous and contrary to all laws of God and man, in its barbarity exceeding the worst practices of tyrants; it cannot but result in great dishonor to God's name and in the utter ruin and desolation of all these Low Countries. This would be all the more true because, under cover of a few persons lying hypocrisy, it would destroy all public law and order and all equity, completely weaken the sanction and respect for the ancient laws, customs, and ordinances which have been observed from time immemorial, and deprive the States of the country of any freedom to express their opinions; it would abolish all ancient privileges, liberties, and immunities and thereby not only make the burghers and common people of this country wretched and everlasting slaves of the Inquisitors, who are themselves men of no quality, but would also compel the magistrates, officials, and the entire nobility to submit to the mercy of their inquiries and searches, and in the end it would expose every loyal subject of the King to continued and open peril of his life and property. Not only would the honor of God and the Holy Catholic faith

(which they claim to be defending) be gravely involved therein, but also the majesty [sovereignty] of the King, our head, would be lessened and he would face great danger of losing his entire state, for ordinary business would come to a halt, the trades would be abandoned, the garrisons of the frontier towns neglected, and the people incited to continual sedition. In a word, nothing could result from it but horrible derangement and disorder everywhere. Having carefully weighed all these things and having fully considered and taken into account our callings and the duty to which we are all bound as faithful vassals of His Majesty and especially as men of gentle birth, being all in this regard His Majesty's helpers by our prompt and willing service in maintaining his authority and greatness and in providing for the welfare and safety of the country, we have come to the judgment, which we still hold, that we cannot fulfill our duty except by eliminating these wrongs while at the same time providing for the safety of our property and persons so that we may not become the prey of those who wish to become rich at the expense of our blood and our goods under the pretext of religion. For this reason we have decided to form a holy and lawful confederation and alliance by which we promise to bind ourselves mutually under solemn oath to use all our efforts to prevent the reception or introduction of this Inquisition in any way, open or concealed, under any pretext or in any disguise whatever, whether it be called inquisition, visitation, edicts, or otherwise, but to extirpate and eradicate it completely as the mother and the cause of all disorders and injustices. We have before our eyes the example of the people of the kingdom of Naples, who have rejected it to the great relief and repose of their entire country. Nonetheless we protest in good conscience before God and all men that we seek nothing which may in any way turn to God's dishonor or the diminution of the grandeur and the majesty of the King or his states; on the contrary, our purpose is only to maintain the King in his state and to preserve in it all good order and law, resisting to the best of our ability every kind of sedition, popular tumult, monopoly, factiousness, or partisanship. We have promised and sworn and do now promise and swear to uphold this confederation and alliance as sacred and inviolable for all time, without any break, as long as we live. We take God the sovereign lord as witness of our consciences that neither in deed nor in word, neither directly nor indirectly will we knowingly and willingly contravene this confederation in any fashion whatever. And, in order to ratify this alliance and confederation and

to make it stable and firm for all time, we have promised and do promise each other full assistance with our bodies and our goods, as brothers and faithful companions, joining hands so that none among us and our confederates may be investigated, harassed, molested or persecuted in any way, either in our lives or our property, for any cause emanation from this. Inquisition or based in any way upon the edicts favoring it, or indeed because of this present confederation. And, in the event that anyone, in any way whatever, visit any molestation or persecution upon any of our brothers and allies, we have promised and sworn and do promise and swear to help him with our lives and our property, and in fact to do everything we can, sparing nothing and avoiding all evasions and subterfuges, just as if we were involved in person; with a specific and quite express understanding that we will in no way be exempted or absolved from this, our confederation, because the said molesters or persecutors may try to cover their persecutions by some other pretense or pretext (for instance, if they claim that they are only punishing rebellion or some such pretext), until it has been demonstrated in fact to us that these reasons are true. We maintain this position especially because we hold that in such cases it cannot be claimed that the crime of rebellion has been committed when its source proceeds from a holy zeal and praiseworthy desire to maintain the glory of God, the majesty of the King, the public tranquility and the safety of our lives and goods. Nonetheless we agree and mutually promise that in such an event each of us will follow the common opinion of all his brothers and allies, or of those who will be given such duties, in order that this sacred union may be maintained among us and that what will be done will be more certain and stable because it is done with common agreement. In witness whereof and in assurance of this confederation and alliance, we have invoked and do invoke the most sacred name of God, the Sovereign Lord, who created the sky and the earth, as our judge who sees into our consciences and thoughts and knows that this is our decision and resolution. We most humbly pray that by His power from on high He will keep us firm and steady and give us such prudence and discretion of spirit that, always possessing good and mature counsel, we may achieve our purpose with a good and happy success, bringing glory to His name, to the service of His Majesty, the King, and to the welfare and safety of the public. Amen.