

Philip of Marnix and ‘International Protestantism’: The Fears and Hopes of a Dutch Refugee in the 1570s

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on aspirations and strategies of Philip of Marnix, one of the most famous Dutch refugees, best known as an effective and prolific counsellor to William of Orange. He served the leader of the Dutch Revolt as a publicist and a diplomat from 1568 onwards until William’s death in 1584. Marnix embarked on several missions in order to convince foreign princes and other potential allies of the legitimacy of the uprising in the Netherlands against Spanish domination. Many of the contacts he established and consolidated during his travels and through his correspondence are part of a wider network that can be described as ‘international Protestantism.’ Marnix also contributed to the dynamics of European Calvinism by publishing well-translated and widely disseminated pamphlets and books on the Dutch Revolt and on confessional strife in general. This article highlights some of Marnix’s fears and hopes relating to the existence and effectiveness of international Protestant solidarity as they are particularly expressed in his political writings and letters of the 1570s.

Keywords: Philip of Marnix, Dutch Revolt, diplomacy, Protestant confessional networks, tracts

Like many young noblemen with Protestant sympathies, Philip of Marnix (1540–1598)¹ went to Geneva to study at the Academy founded by Calvin.

1. On Marnix in general, see H. Duits, ‘Bibliografie van de Marnix-studie 1940–2000,’

Under Beza's influence, this institution became not only the main centre of Reformed education but also an important meeting point for Calvinists from different parts of Europe, and thus for the developing international Calvinist network. When Marnix went back to the Low Countries in 1561, he had become a follower of Reformed doctrine. During the following years he encouraged the resistance and growth of the striving but persecuted Calvinist communities in the Netherlands.² In 1567 Marnix was forced into exile because of his faith and religious activities, his justification of the iconoclastic movement of 1566, and his participation from 1565 onwards in the Dutch nobility's opposition to the King of Spain's hard-line policy.³ Fleeing the Low Countries, where the severe repression of the Spanish Governor, the Duke of Alba, resulted in many victims among the Reformation minority, Philip of Marnix settled in the Holy Roman Empire, first in Emden, then in Bremen, and from 1569 onwards at the court of Frederick III, the crypto-Calvinist Elector Palatine, in Heidelberg.⁴ From his German exile, Marnix continued

in *Een intellectuele activist: Studies over leven en werk van Philips van Marnix van Sint Aldegonde*, ed. H. Duits and T. van Strien (Hilversum: Verloren, 2001), 107–121; I. Schoups and A. Wiggers (ed.), *Philips van Marnix van Sint Aldegonde* (Antwerp: Pandora, 1998); R. Van Roosbroeck, 'Philips van Marnix, heer van St-Aldegonde', in *Nationaal Biografisch Woordenboek*, 5, col. 591–606; A.A. van Schelven, *Marnix van Sint Aldegonde* (Utrecht: Oosthoek, 1939). In the abundant secondary literature on Marnix there is a shortage of studies on his international political activities, especially on his liaison with Huguenots. His formal diplomatic missions have been studied a lot as have been the political pamphlets. Most current research is on his literary work, his time in Antwerp, or on other aspects of his life and work. Some exceptions are A. van Deursen, 'Marnix van St. Aldegonde, een calvinistisch propagandist,' in Duits and Van Strien, *Een intellectuele activist*, 23–27; R. De Smet, 'Marnix in dienst van Oranje: diplomatie op Europees niveau,' in *Philips van Marnix van Sint Aldegonde*, ed. I. Schoups and W. Wiggers (Antwerp: Pandora, 1998), 23–67; F. Van Kalken, *Marnix van Sainte-Aldegonde 1540–1598: Le politique et le pamphlétaire* (Brussels: Office de Publicité SA Editeurs, 1952); Fr. Wittemans, 'Marnix als Staatsman,' in *Marnix van Sinte Aldegonde* (Brussel: Onze Tijd; Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 1939), 115–144.

2. G. Marnef, 'The Dynamics of Reformed Religious Militancy: the Netherlands,' in *Reformation, Revolt and Civil War in France and the Netherlands 1555–1585*, ed. Philip Benedict, G. Marnef, H. van Nierop and Marc Venard (Amsterdam, 1999), 51–68.
3. H.A. Enno van Gelder, 'Philips van Marnix van Sinte Aldegonde in de eerste jaren van het verzet tegen Filips II,' in *Marnix van Sinte Aldegonde* [1939], 245–276. For the context of the Dutch Revolt see Geoffrey Parker, *The Dutch Revolt* (London; Allen Lane, 1977).
4. On the Palatinate as a haven for Calvinist exiles and a support for international Cal-

to promote the organisation of a unified Dutch Reformed Church. In these years, he also wrote his most famous pamphlet against the Catholic Church, the *Biënkorf* (1569) or the *Beehive*, as it is known thanks to its many English editions.

Marnix had always been sensitive to the fate of the Dutch Reformed refugees, but his own condition as an exile made him even more strongly supportive of their claims for assistance. As early as 1562 he had visited the exile churches in London in order to assist them in their predicament.⁵ In 1568–1569 he wrote a special theological and ecclesiastical tract for the Dutch-speaking Calvinist community in London, and entitled *Advysen*. These were the beginnings of a life-long commitment reaching its apotheosis one year later, in October 1570. This was Marnix's indirect but striking intervention at the Reichstag in Speyer.

Speyer 1570

This imperial assembly dealt with the interior crisis that the conversion to crypto-Calvinism of the Elector Palatine had created.⁶ Another major subject was the troubles linked to the military conflict in the Netherlands, which were technically a part of the Holy Roman Empire and a strategic territory in the border zone with France. What attitude should the German neighbours adopt in this civil war with both political and religious roots in order to limit its effects and to prevent its extension? Both the Spanish royal authorities and their Dutch adversaries tried to convince Emperor Maximilian and the German estates of the necessity to intervene on their side. However, the fragility of the imperial system made any form of direct intervention impossible.⁷

vinism, see R. Van Roosbroek, *Emigranten. Nederlandse vluchtelingen in Duitsland (1550–1600)* (Leuven: Davidsfonds, 1968), 204–214; C.P. Clasen, *The Palatinate in European History 1555–1618* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966); A. Kluckhohn, *Friedrich der Fromme. Kurfürst von der Pfalz, der Schützer der reformierten Kirche 1559–1579* (Nördlingen: C.H. Beck, 1879).

5. On the Dutch refugees in London, see R. Esser, *Niederländische Exulanten im England des 16. und frühen 17. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Duncker and Humblot, 1996); Andrew Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities in Sixteenth-Century London* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986).
6. See M. Lanzinner, *Friedenssicherung und politische Einheit des Reiches unter Kaiser Maximilian II (1564–1576)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1992).
7. Cf. Monique Weis, *Les Pays-Bas espagnols et les États du Saint Empire: Priorités et enjeux de la diplomatie en temps de troubles (1559–1579)* (Brussels: Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2003), 303–339; J. Arndt, *Das Heilige Römische Reich und die Nieder-*

Philip of Marnix is most probably the author of the *Libellus supplex*, read out at Speyer by the unofficial ‘rebel’ delegation from the Netherlands.⁸ This supplication insisted particularly on the fate of the Dutch refugees, exiled not only in England, but also in the Holy Roman Empire. It advocated their return to a pacified country granting them the retrieval of their confiscated property and, most important of all, freedom of religion. It also asked the German princes not to cooperate with the Duke of Alba’s regime in the pursuit and punishment of the exiles from the Netherlands.

An English translation of the *Libellus supplex* was published in London by John Day in 1571. Its title encapsulates the pamphlet’s contents: *A Defence and True Declaration of the things lately done in the Low Country, whereby may easily be seen to whom all the beginning and cause of the late troubles and calamities is to be imputed. And therewith also the slanders wherewith the adversaries do burden the churches of the low country are plainly refuted.*⁹ In this pamphlet Marnix first presents the historical background of the Dutch Revolt. He insists on the cruelty of the Inquisition and more particularly on the harshness of Alba’s repression. The Germans should worry about what is happening in the Low Countries, because they could suffer themselves from the effects of the Spanish greed, intolerance and brutality: ‘The Spaniard will not suffer our young men [from the Netherlands] to come unto your universities, your solemn markets and fairs, or to any of your provinces, lest peradventure they

lande 1566 bis 1648. *Politisch-konfessionelle Verflechtung und Publizistik im Achtzigjährigen Krieg* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1998), 55–60; M. Lanzinner, ‘Der Aufstand der Niederlande und der Reichstag zu Speier 1570,’ in *Fortschritte der Geschichtswissenschaft durch Reichstagsaktenforschung*, ed. H. Angermeier and E. Meuthen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1988), 102–117; M. Lanzinner (ed.), *Der Reichstag von Speyer* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1988); L. Gross, R. Lacroix and J.K. Mayer (ed.), *Urkunden und Aktenstücke des Staatsarchivs Wien zur reichsrechtlichen Stellung des burgundischen Kreises*, vol. 2 (Wien: Holzhausen, 1945).

8. *Libellus Supplex Imperatoriae Maiestati, caeterisque sacri imperii Electoribus, Principibus, atque Ordinibus, nomine Belgarum ex inferiori Germania, Evangelicae Religionis causa, per Albani Ducis tyrannidem eiectorum, in comittis Spirensibus exhibitus* (1570). See: *Belgica Typographica 1541–1600* (Nieuwkoop: De Graaf, 1968), no. 1901. On Marnix’s authorship see D. Nauta, ‘Marnix auteur van de *Libellus supplex* aan de rijksdag van Spiers (1570),’ *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis* 55 (1975): 151–70. The *Libellus Supplex* has traditionally been attributed to Petrus Dathenus, preacher at the Palatine court, but nowadays it is generally acknowledged as being by Marnix.
9. This translation by Elias Newcomen has been edited in a source book in English on the Dutch Revolt by Martin van Gelderen (ed.), *The Dutch Revolt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1–77. According to Van Gelderen, Marnix might have been one of several authors of the *Libellus Supplex*.

should return infected of some spot of heresy.¹⁰ Marnix then concentrates on the fate of the Dutch exiles:

By this he [the Spaniard] drives some out of their country, and makes some return home against their wills. By this he takes from some all their liberties, riches, and life, to others he gives full licence to prey upon other men's goods, and with all wickedness to shed the innocent blood. To be brief, under this pretence of Religion, he does whatsoever pleases him, though it be contrary to the laws of God and man. By this also, with most extreme and unaccustomed tyranny, he goes about to establish and to give all sovereign power in low Germany unto the Bishops of the Spanish Inquisition, that from thence, if it be possible, they might stretch the same, by their deceits and privy practices, throughout all Europe.¹¹

The keywords in this quotation are, of course, 'tyranny' and 'Spanish Inquisition.' The threat of a Spanish Catholic conspiracy against all Protestant territories was a powerful argument used by many pamphleteers in the second half of the sixteenth century. According to Marnix, the German princes should be particularly aware of this danger:

Do you not think (most noble Princes) that these things do not pertain unto you? For they [the Spaniards] do most especially bend their force against you, and your Germany. For there remains as yet, yea there is nourished (I say) in the Spaniards' hearts and bowels the great grief, which they of late conceived, when they saw the government of Germany (whereof they thought themselves in full possession) to be plucked out from between their jaws. They do as yet try their old counsels, whereby they make subject all the world to their holy Inquisition, and retain unto themselves the full superiority of all things; they have not as yet buried their old arts and crafty policies; they have not as yet abolished their leagues, societies and conspiracies; whereby they bound themselves utterly to subvert all those, whom they thought would withstand the increase of their tyranny.¹²

The theme of a general Catholic conspiracy with Spain as instigator and leader is a major one in Marnix' discourse. The Germans are naturally expected to have deep fears about this and thus to react with appropriate action by joining the Dutch in their struggle, or at least by backing their just cause.¹³ Marnix insists on the fact that the religion of the Dutch exiles is not

10. *Defence and True Declaration*, 71.

11. *Defence and True Declaration*, 71–72.

12. *Defence and True Declaration*, 72.

13. The fear of a general Catholic conspiracy against Protestantism was widespread among

fundamentally different from the Augsburg Confession. He knows about the Lutheran distrust of Calvinists and wants to prevent it from being an obstacle to a larger Protestant solidarity. He uses an argument that is designed to convince the Germans: by giving support to the exiles from the Netherlands they would above all help resist Spanish ambitions and thereby serve their own interest:

But we pray you, most noble Princes, to regard more the commandment of God (who command you to receive stranger and poor banished men, not only within your gates or walls but even in your houses, and to cherish them with all humanity) than the commandments of a few Spanish priests, which with the Duke of Alva contend and labour to have us thrown out of your Empire. Suffer not the fear and terror of the Spanish name to be of more force with you, than the name and friendship of the German.¹⁴

This appeal for consideration was more or less acted on by the German princes who sheltered Dutch refugees in their territories. The Duke of Alva's claims for extradition remained unanswered. While effective in fanning hostility towards the King of Spain's official delegates at the Reichstag in Speyer, Marnix's *Libellus Supplex* from 1570 failed, however, to bring about more concrete intervention in favour of the Dutch Calvinists.

Worms 1578

During the following years, the common policy of the German states remained one of prudence and wait-and-see-policy¹⁵. Except for some committed Protestant princes (the Elector Palatine, the Counts of Nassau and to a lesser extent the Duke of Württemberg and the Landgrave of Hesse) most of them refused to give any financial, political or military support to

the German princes. See Monique Weis, 'La peur du grand complot catholique. La diplomatie espagnole face aux soupçons des protestants allemands (1560–1570),' *Francia: Forschungen zur westeuropäischen Geschichte* 32(2), (2005): 15–30.

14. *Defence and True Declaration*, 75.

15. See Volker Press, 'Wilhelm von Oranien, die deutschen Reichsstände und der Niederländische Aufstand,' *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 99 (1984): 677–707; Johannes Arndt, *Das Heilige Römische Reich und die Niederlande 1566 bis 1648: Politisch-konfessionelle Verflechtung und Publizistik im Achtzigjährigen Krieg* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1998); Monique Weis, *Les Pays-Bas espagnols et les États du Saint Empire: Priorités et enjeux de la diplomatie en temps de troubles (1559–1579)* (Brussels: Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles). For the earlier years, see also H. Klink, *Opstand, politiek en religie bij Willem van Oranje 1559–1568. Een thematische biografie* (Heerenveen: Groen, 1998).

either of the parties involved in the so-called Dutch Revolt. Philip of Marnix's many efforts to awaken a wider Protestant solidarity in the Holy Roman Empire were vain. In November 1572 he expressed his disappointment to John of Nassau: 'Ich wolte gern ettwas hören von den Örtern, ob auch die Fürsten und Herren mit einmal werden ausz ihrem Schlaff erwachen.' [I would really like to hear something from those places [the Germanies]; I do wonder if these princes and lords will ever wake up from their sleep].¹⁶ They would never wake up, in spite of his claims.

The bitterest disappointment for Marnix's high hopes of German Protestant solidarity came in 1578, when the *Deputationstag* at Worms, an assembly of delegates from all over the Empire, again tackled the situation in the war-stricken Netherlands. This time, Marnix was no longer a refugee, rather the official ambassador of the new governor chosen by the Dutch insurgents, Archduke Matthias of Austria. On 7 May 1578, Marnix pronounced one of his most famous speeches, the *Oratio Philippi de Marnix* or *Oraison des Ambassadeurs*, in the absence of Philip II's ambassadors, his major enemies at the Worms Assembly.¹⁷ This important text circulated throughout Europe thanks to versions in Dutch, French and German, but unfortunately no English translation is available.¹⁸

16. Groen van Prinsterer (ed.), *Archives ou correspondance inédite de la Maison d'Orange-Nassau, 1552–1789*, 1st series, vol. 4 (Leiden: [s.n.], 1837), no. 393.

17. *Oratio Philippi de Marnix pro serenissimo archiduce Austriae Matthia, & ordinibus Belgicis, ad delegatos septemviri ceterorumque principum, & ordinum Sacri Imperii, WORMATIANO conventu habita* ([s.l.] [s.n.] 1578); *Oraison des Ambassadeurs du Serenissime Prince Matthias Archiduc d'Autriche, &c. Gouverneur des païs bas: & des Etats generaux desdits païs: Recitee en la Diete tenue à Wormes devant les Conseillers deputez par les Princes Electeurs, &c. autres Ambassadeurs et commis du St. Empire Romain: l'an de nostre Seigneur M.D.LXXVIII. le VII. iour de May* (1578). Cf. *Belgica Typographica*, nos. 2048, 2049, 2050 and 2051.

18. The Latin version has been published, in parallel with a Dutch translation: J. Scheltema (ed.), 'Redevoering van Philips van Marnix, heer van Mont St. Aldegonde, aan het hoofd van een gezantschap uit de Nederlanden, gehouden bij den Rijksdag te Worms, 1578,' in Jacobus Scheltema, *Geschied- en letterkundig mengelwerk*, IV.1 (Utrecht: J.G. van Terveen, 1825), 1–154. The French and German versions have also been published: A. Lacroix (ed.), *Oeuvres de Philippe de Marnix de Sainte Aldegonde. Écrits politiques et historiques* (Brussels, 1859), 109–150; Monique Weis, *Philippe de Marnix et le Saint Empire (1566–1578): Les connexions allemandes d'un porte-parole de la Révolte des Pays-Bas* (Brussels: Société royale d'Histoire du Protestantisme belge, 2004), 66–139. According to É.M. Braekman, Marnix's French translation of the *Oratio* is written in a different, more precious style than his other works in French. See É.M. Braekman, *Les écrits en langue française de Philippe de Marnix, seigneur de Mont-Sainte-Aldegonde (1540–1598)* [unpublished, Brussels, 2001], 53.

Marnix again stressed the historical background, highlighting the recent developments of the revolt in the Netherlands.¹⁹ The main elements of his appeal are not the fate of the refugees and claims for freedom of religion as in 1570, but the legitimacy of the uprising and of any action that could help the insurgents in their fight against tyranny. The arguments Marnix uses to convince the Germans of the necessity of intervening in the conflict are manifold: ancient constitutional ties, prosperity through undisturbed trade, and, of course, the dangers of Spanish imperialism:

Et si quelqu'un estime après que les Belges seront oppressez, que les Espagnols se tiendront oisifs & en repos, & qu'ils n'envahiront puis apres l'Alemaigne avecques leurs armes victorieuses, cestuy-là erre grandement. Car certainement ceste tant desbordee et desmesuree convoitise de dominer, ne peut estre limitee en un si petit pays comme la basse Alemaigne, ne l'ardeur bouillonnante de l'orgueil & outrecuidance Espagnole ne peut estre retenue ou enserree & close entre les dicques & bornes du pays bas, veu qu'à peine tout le monde luy suffit il, la monarchie duquel ils ont desia pieça devoree de tout leur cœur.²⁰

[He who thinks that the Spaniards will be satisfied with the oppression of the Belgians and that they will not invade Germany with their victorious armies is very wrong. Be certain that their excessive hunger for power will not be limited to such a small country, and that Spanish pride will not be restricted and confined within the frontiers of the Low Countries, given that domination over the whole world is scarcely enough for them, obsessed with it as they are.]

Marnix repeats the argument of a wider Catholic conspiracy and of the enormous threat it represents for many, including the German princes, their subjects and territories. This highly religious dimension is used here in a very political way because at Worms, Marnix addresses both Protestants and Catholics. The extension of the Spanish Inquisition is no longer the main fear Marnix refers to; it has been replaced by the more general spectre of Spanish imperialism, of the unstoppable Spanish ambition to dominate both the Low Countries and the Germanies.

19. On the *Oratio*, see also Weis, *Philippe de Marnix et le Saint Empire*, 40–52; Braekman, *Les écrits*, 51–52; Johannes Arndt, *Das Heilige Römische Reich und die Niederlande 1566 bis 1648. Politisch-konfessionelle Verflechtung und Publizistik im Achtzigjährigen Krieg* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1998), 246–247; Martin van Gelderen, *The Political Thought of the Dutch Revolt 1555–1590* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 139–140; A.M. Geurts, *De Nederlandse Opstand in de pampfletten, 1566–1584* (Nijmegen: Centrale Drukerij, 1956), 74–76, 217–220, 290–293.

20. *Oraison des Ambassadeurs*, (1578), f. 4^v.

Links with the Huguenots

During the 1570s, Philip of Marnix served William of Orange (1533–1584), the leader of the Dutch Revolt, as a counsellor and a propagandist, but also a diplomat, initially in their common German exile, and later in the provinces of the northern Netherlands.²¹ He accomplished several missions in order to convince foreign princes and other potential allies of the legitimacy of the uprising in the Netherlands. Most of them had no tangible results. This caused a lot of disappointment among the Dutch rebels, most of all in the ranks of the more militant Calvinists.

Even in Protestant states such as Denmark or England, the fear of confronting the King of Spain overtly and so involvement in a bigger European conflict prevailed over the urge to help the persecuted brethren in faith from the Low Countries. Queen Elizabeth would intervene overtly in the war only several years later, in the 1580s, when the support of the Dutch Revolt became part of a wider struggle against Catholic Spain and its threats to England. The distrust of Calvinists, which was very strong among the other Protestants and especially among the Lutherans of central and northern Europe, was another reason why there were so few measures of support in favour of the Dutch Revolt in the 1570s. Similarly there was widespread fear of disrupting international trade in such vital areas as the North Sea and the Baltic.

The only real assistance the uprising in the Netherlands could count on during those years, apart from that of the Elector Palatine, came from the Huguenots, themselves a pressed Reformed minority whose power had dwindled in the aftermath of the Saint Bartholomew massacres.²² The Francophile Marnix played a major role in cultivating regular links with the French Calvinists. For him, those connections were at the core of 'international Calvinism,' expanding throughout Europe. In October 1580, Marnix wrote to Henri de La Tour

21. R. Rijkse, 'Marnix van Sint Aldegonde: God, Nederland en Oranje,' in *Philips van Marnix van Sint Aldegonde*, ed. I. Schoups and A. Wiggers (Antwerp: Pandora, 1998), 163–206; Rudolf De Smet, 'Marnix in dienst van Oranje: diplomatie op Europees niveau,' in Schoups and Wiggers, *Philips van Marnix van Sint Aldegonde*, 23–67; Aloïs Gerlo, 'Oranje en Marnix,' in *Herdenking Willem van Oranje 1584–1984* (Brussels: aleis der Academiën, 1984), 17–27.

22. There is almost no new work on the connections between the protagonists of the Dutch Revolt and the Huguenots. For research perspectives, see Monique Weis, 'Les Huguenots et les Gueux. Des relations entre les calvinistes français et leurs coreligionnaires des Pays-Bas pendant la deuxième moitié du XVI^e siècle,' in *Les relations religieuses entre la France et les Pays-Bas du Nord*, ed. Olivier Christin and Yves Krumenacker (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes), forthcoming. On Marnix's French connections during the 1580s, cf. De Smet, 'Marnix in dienst van Oranje,' 59–64.

d'Auvergne, Vicomte de Turenne about this natural understanding with the Huguenots and about the jealousy it created among their enemies:

*Le bien des Eglises des Pays-Bas et de Monsieur le Prince d'Oranges est tellement conjoint avecq celluy du Roy de Navarre, le vostre, et de toutes les Eglises de pardeça, que l'ung dépend entièrement de l'autre; au regard de quoy aussy les ennemyz communs n'ont oublié aulcune ruse ny stratagème (dont ilz se soient peu adviser) pour les tenir non seulement esloignez les ungs des aultres sans qu'ils se peussent donner mutuel secours, mais aussy les rendre comme séparez les ungs d'avecq les aultres, affin que l'effect et fruyt que devoit redonder de la ditte union et conjunction, fut rendu du tout inutile.*²³

[The well-being of the churches in the Low Countries and that of the Prince of Orange is so closely linked to that of the King of Navarre, to yours and to that of all the churches in France that they are truly interdependent. For this reason, the enemy has used every stratagem he could think of to keep them apart, to prevent them from helping each other and to separate them, in order to bring to nothing any effects and fruits their union and association could bring about.]

For Marnix this was the main reason to retain and even reinforce the links between the Calvinists in the Netherlands and the Huguenots. During the following years many of his letters insist on the necessity of such a Dutch-French cooperation based on confessional roots and common political measures.

England 1576

The year 1576 could have been a turning point in the foreign policy of Elizabethan England. Instead, it was a disappointing year for those who had put their hopes in Elizabeth and her solidarity with the Dutch Calvinists.²⁴ The year before, the States General of the Netherlands had abjured Spanish sovereignty and started looking for a new protector for the insurgent provinces. The Queen of England was seen as a good choice since she was a Protes-

23. Cf. *Marnixi Epistulae: De briefwisseling van Marnix van Sint-Aldegonde. Een kritische uitgave*, ed. Aloïs Gerlo and Rudolf De Smet, Pars III (Houten: Hes and De Graaf, 1996), no. 173–180, 10 16 T, 203.

24. On Elizabethan foreign policy, mainly in connection with the Dutch Revolt, see E.I. Kouri, 'For true faith or national interest? Queen Elizabeth I and the Protestant powers,' in *Politics and Society in Reformation Europe: Essays for Sir Geoffrey Elton*, ed. E.I. Kouri and Tom Scott (London: Macmillan, 1986), 411–436; C. Wilson, *Queen Elizabeth and the Revolt of the Netherlands* (London: Macmillan, 1970); R.B. Wernham, *Before the Armada. The Growth of English Foreign Policy 1488–1588* (London: Cape, 1966), 278–404.

tant, was descended from the ancient Counts of Holland, and because of the importance of Anglo-Dutch trade. In December 1575 Philip of Marnix and Paul Buys, another of William of Orange's counsellors, went to London to offer sovereignty over Holland and Zeeland to the Queen of England in exchange for her financial and military help.²⁵

At the English Court both diplomats had to compete with the mission of Frederick Perrenot de Champagney, the King of Spain's ambassador, whom Requesens, Philip II's governor in the Netherlands, sent to London in January 1576. This was not an easy task as the Queen showed herself very receptive to Champagney's arguments. Marnix could count on the support of influential Court counsellors such as the Secretary of State, Francis Walsingham, and Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, the royal favourite. Both were pressing for a more active intervention in the Dutch Revolt. But in these delicate matters of authority and legitimacy, Queen Elizabeth chose to rather follow the advice of the more prudent William Cecil, Lord Burghley. In April 1576 Philip of Marnix went back to the Netherlands without any notable results.

Queen Elizabeth's position changed slightly several months later, after the conclusion of the Pacification of Ghent in November 1576. She then agreed to lend some money to the States General. She even promised troops, in order to prevent the Guises and other French Catholics from intervening in the Low Countries on the side of the King of Spain and his new governor Don John. But in the main she continued to advocate a settlement by mediation. Philip II should agree to a withdrawal of his military forces and a return to home-rule in the Netherlands. In 1576, political and commercial priorities, the will to keep France at bay and to preserve peace with Spain, as well as the need to continue commerce with Antwerp (still a major centre for the Merchant Adventurers) were stronger than Elizabeth's sympathies for the Protestant cause abroad and her plans to create a Protestant alliance in Europe.

Philip of Marnix was disappointed with his English mission of 1576, as he would be in 1578 with the failure of his intervention at the Worms Diet. In the following years Marnix kept up correspondence with some of the contacts he had made in London, mainly with Walsingham and Leicester, the two chief friends of William of Orange and his party at the Elizabethan court. These connections helped to keep the relations with Queen Elizabeth peaceful, in spite of the damages the Dutch insurgents caused to English merchant

25. Rudolf De Smet, 'Marnix in dienst van Oranje: diplomatie op Europees niveau,' in Schoups and Wiggers, *Philips van Marnix*, 53–54; Wilson, *Queen Elizabeth*, 35–38.

ships. In some of his letters Marnix clearly appealed to feelings of Protestant fraternity. In August 1576, for instance, he complained to Walsingham about the confiscation of three ships from the Netherlands. He insisted on the fact that the acts of piracy the English accused the Dutch of were due to the difficult circumstances of the war against 'Spanish tyranny'. Instead of punishing them, the English should show compassion to fellow-believers and help them to fight the 'common enemy':

Si nous étions princes ou que nous nous voulussions egaler a Sa Majeste, elle pourroit avoir occasion de s'en venger, mais là où nous avons nostre seul recours à sa pitie et misericorde, nous trouvans opprésés et presque accablés par la tyrannie et cruauté des ennemis communs de tous ceux qui font la profession que fait Sa Majeste, il vient a considerer quelle gloire ou honneur ce sera à Sa Majeste de s'attaquer a nous, ausquels elle peut commander comme lon dit, a baguette, vous assurant qu'elle y trouvera toute obéissance en tout ce qui est possible de faire sans nostre ruine et calamité²⁶.

[If we were princes or had the wish to be Her Majesty's equals, she would be right to take revenge. But her pity and compassion are our only support under the oppression and cruelty of the Spanish tyranny and the common enemy of all who profess the faith of Her Majesty. One most wonder what glory or honour Her Majesty would have in turning against us, whom she can command at the wave of a baton, as they say. Rest assured that she can count on our obedience without having to ruin us.]

One way to support the Dutch in their legitimate uprising would be to stop trading with Spain and to trade with the insurgent provinces instead:

Mais, Monsieur, je vous prie de considerer que le trafficq qui se fait avecq nos ennemis ne peut estre maintenu en son cours sans que nous serions accablez, car cest le vray glaive dont lennemy nous coupe la gorge. Que si on reclame les promesses, je di derechef que nous ne sommes ni princes ni monarques pour entrer en telles capitulations avec Sa Majeste, mais supplions seulement qu'elle ait esgard a nostre conservation, afin que luy puissions faire treshumble service.²⁷

[But, Sir, I am asking that commerce with our enemies be interrupted; otherwise it will lead to our ruin, as it is the real sword with which the enemy cuts our throats. We yearn for your promises, but we know that we are not princes and that we cannot make contracts with Her Majesty. All we ask for is that she be mindful of our preservation; in return, we could offer her our most humble service.]

26. *Marnixi Epistulae*, Pars I, no. 65–76 08 24 W, 299–304 (here: 301–302).

27. *Marnixi Epistulae*, 302.

Marnix adds that the Spanish presence in the North Sea is a constant threat to all Protestant territories, including England:

*Je veux bien que le royaume soit assés puissant pour se maintenir contre tous ceux qui le voudroient envahir, mais tant y a qu'ayant lespagnol si pres il faudra tenir plus de forces et plus estroitte garde, et, quant ainsy ne seroit, toutesfois quel avantage sera ce à Sa Majeste d'avoir ceste reputation que Monseigneur le prince d'Orenge avec tous ceux qui, par une admirable providence et singuliere grace de Dieu ont si longtams soutenu, avec si peu de forces une guerre si furieuse, et ont si longtams maintenu la doctrine de Levangile malgré la tyrannie espagnolle, aient esté ruinés, et le regne de Christ exterminé de ces païs icy à loccasion de Sa Majeste, et mesme à une telle occasion qui ne pourra apporter nul avantage à icelle?*²⁸

[I very much wish that your kingdom may indeed be strong enough to defend itself against invaders, but as long as the Spaniard is so near, you will need more men to keep it protected. Even if this were not the case, what advantage would the ruin of the Prince of Orange bring to Her Majesty? Why would she want to contribute to the failure of those who have fought this terrible war for so long and with so few means under God's protection and adhered to the teaching of the gospel in spite of Spanish tyranny? Why would she want to occasion the end of the reign of Christ with no advantage to herself?]

The letter to Walsingham ends with a quite sentimental appeal to Queen Elizabeth's compassion and to her fidelity to God:

*Mais jay veu telle la vertu, constance et magnanimité de Sa Majeste, que cela ne luy vient point en sa pensée. Que reste il doncq? Sinon qu'elle ouvre les yeux de sa clémence et miséricorde, et de sa grace nous eslargisse ce moyen par lequel nous puissions nous soustenir et mettre ordre à tous desordres passés, et par là elle nous rendra tellement ses treshumbles et fidelles serviteurs que nous aurons occasion de prier Dieu pour laccroissement de sa grandeur, en toute prospérité. Je vous prie, monsieur, d'y vouloir tenir la bonne main, et vous y ferés une œuvre digne d'un chrestien, et par laquelle vous rendrez tous les fidelles affligés vos obligés.*²⁹

[I have seen in such virtue, constancy and magnanimity in Her Majesty that this does not enter into her mind. What else can we ask of her but her clemency and compassion and to give us the opportunity to put an end to all disorders that have occurred? This would make loyal servants out of us and we would pray God for the growth of her prosperity and power. I beg you, Sir, to intervene in this matter: it is a work worthy of a Christian and it will bring you thereby the indebtedness of all afflicted believers.]

Marnix wrote other letters with similar contents to his friends at the Eng-

28. *Marnixi Epistulae*, 302.

29. *Marnixi Epistulae*, 303.

lish court, but before the 1580s none of them could convince Queen Elizabeth to intervene directly on the sides of the Dutch ‘rebels.’

Assessment of Marnix's Networking

In fact, the efficacy of Marnix's efforts to promote the Dutch cause in the 1570s did not lie in the occasional measures acts of confessional solidarity they engendered, rather in the valuable contacts he made while promoting this cause.³⁰ Many of the connections he established and consolidated at that time through his travels and his correspondence were indeed to become part of a wider network that can be described as ‘international Protestantism’ (rather than ‘international Calvinism,’ as many of his contacts were Lutherans).³¹ Those links were to have a major influence on international politics during the last decades of the sixteenth century, when the winds started to blow from a different direction and in one more favourable to the Dutch ‘rebels’ and Calvinists.

This is particularly true of Marnix's connections with Elizabethan England and with the House of Navarre. Both were to play a central role in the later developments of the Low Countries on their long way to independence. In 1589/1590 (after his troublesome time as Mayor of Antwerp and a long period of retreat), Philip of Marnix accomplished two last missions which were to crown his long career as a diplomat. They led him to the courts of Henry of Navarre, the future Henry IV of France, and of Elizabeth I of England, the two protagonists of Protestant politics. According to Marnix they

30. For reflections on the importance of Marnix's correspondence networks and on his role in the ‘Geneva connection,’ see De Smet, *Marnix in dienst van Oranje*, 25–26, 36–41.

31. On ‘international Calvinism’ and its influence on the European political system, see, for example, the works of Heinz Schilling: ‘La confessionnalisation et le système international,’ in *L'Europe des traités de Westphalie: Esprit de la diplomatie et diplomatie de l'esprit*, ed. L. Bély (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2000), 411–428; Schilling, ‘Formung und Gestaltung des internationalen Systems in der werdenden Neuzeit: Phasen und bewegende Kräfte,’ in *Ausgewählte Abhandlungen zur europäischen Reformations- und Konfessionsgeschichte*, hrsg. v. Luise Schorn-Schütte und Olaf Mörke, *Historische Forschungen*, 75 (Berlin: Duncker and Humblot, 2002), 588–617; Schilling, ‘Konfessionalisierung und Formierung eines internationalen Systems während der frühen Neuzeit,’ in *Die Reformation in Deutschland und Europa: Interpretationen und Debatten*, ed. H. Guggisberg and G. Krodel (Gütersloh, Verein für Reformationsgeschichte, 1993), 597–613; Schilling, ‘Konfessionalisierung und Staatsinteressen: Internationale Beziehungen 1559–1660,’ in *Handbuch der Geschichte der internationalen Beziehungen*, vol. 2, ed. Heinz Duchhardt and Franz Knipping (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2007), 112–119.

were the two pillars of the Reformed faith at the end of the sixteenth century. His late successes as a diplomat had been prepared by decades of correspondence and networking. They were the result of the contacts he had made in the less successful 1570s.

Yet Marnix's major contribution to the dynamics of 'international Protestantism' were probably the pamphlets and treatises he published on the Dutch Revolt and, more generally, on confessional strife. They were translated into several languages and disseminated throughout Europe thanks to the networks of the Protestant book industry. There are, of course, the *Beehive* of 1569 already mentioned, the *Libellus supplex* of 1570 and the *Oraison des Ambassadeurs* of 1578, only three examples among others. Many of Marnix's writings from the 1570s, including printed works as well as his letters, express his ideas about the need for solidarity between Protestant leaders and communities throughout Europe. These writings show that he was conscious of playing a role in the diverse and developing connections of 'international Protestantism.'

Moreover, they confirm that, haunted as he was by fears of a wide and dangerous Catholic coalition of a conspiratorial kind, he continued to put all his hopes in this insecure community based on confessional solidarity. That Marnix had experienced religious exile and had been a victim of Catholic persecution was decisive for his political and literary action in favour of a 'Protestant international,' and for his repeated attempts to counteract the dreaded 'Catholic international.' Even so, both 'international Protestantism' and its Catholic counterpart were little more than mythical mirror images in the mental framework that shaped European politics in the 1570s. But their effects were very real and prove that strong political myths can be of greater importance than political realities.³²

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