

SPAIN. SOVEREIGN (1556-1598: PHILIP II).
Philip II, King of Spain, Council of Trent document, 1564

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Descriptive Summary

Creator: Spain. Sovereign (1556-1598: Philip II).
Title: Philip II, King of Spain, Council of Trent document, 1564
Call Number: Manuscript Collection No. 143
Extent: 0.01 cubic ft. (3 pages)
Abstract: Contains official text, in Spanish, of the famous royal cedula by which King Philip II promulgated the Catholic Church's reply to the Protestant revolt from the church.
Language: Materials entirely in Spanish.

Administrative Information

Restrictions on Access

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Citation

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Collection Description

Biographical Note

Champion of the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation, Philip II was King of Spain from 1556 to 1598. During his reign the Spanish Empire attained its greatest power and widest geographical extent but also suffered setbacks in its relations with the Protestant nations of northern Europe.

Philip was born at Valladolid on May 21, 1527, the son of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V and Isabella of Portugal. From time to time, the Emperor wrote Philip secret memoranda, impressing on him the high duties to which God had called him and warning him against trusting any of his advisers too much. Philip, a very dutiful son, took this advice to heart. From 1543 Charles conferred on his son the regency of Spain whenever he himself was abroad. From 1548 until 1551, Philip travelled in Italy, Germany, and the Netherlands; but his great reserve and his inability to speak fluently any language except Castilian made him unpopular with the German and Flemish nobility.

Philip contracted four marriages. The first was with his cousin Maria of Portugal in 1543. She died in 1545, giving birth to the ill-fated Don Carlos. In 1554, Philip married Mary I of England and became joint sovereign of England until Mary's death, without issue, in 1558. Philip's third marriage, with Elizabeth of Valois, daughter of Henry II of France, in 1559, was the result of the Peace of Chateau-Cambrésis (1559), which for a generation ended the open wars between Spain and France. Elizabeth bore Philip two daughters, Isbella Clara Eugenia (1566-1633) and Catherine Micaela (1567-97). Elizabeth died in 1568, and in 1570 Philip married another cousin, Anna of Austria, daughter of the emperor Maximilian II. She died in 1580, her only surviving son being the later Philip III.

King of Spain. Philip had received the duchy of Milan from Charles V in 1540 and the kingdoms of Naples and Sicily in 1554 on the occasion of his marriage to Mary of England. On October 25, 1555, Charles resigned the Netherlands in Philip's favor, and on January 16, 1556, the kingdoms of Spain and the Spanish overseas empire. Shortly afterward Philip also received the Franche-Comté. The Habsburg dominions in Germany and the imperial title went to his uncle Ferdinand I. At this time Philip was in the Netherlands. After the victory over the French at St. Quentin (1557), the sight of the battlefield gave him a permanent distaste for war, though he did not shrink from it when he judged it necessary.

After his return to Spain from the Netherlands in 1559 Philip never again left the Iberian Peninsula. From Madrid he ruled his empire through his personal control of official appointments and all forms of patronage. Philip's subjects outside Castile, thus, never saw him, and they gradually turned not only against his ministers but against himself. This happened particularly in the Netherlands, in Granada, and in Aragon.

Method of government. By sheer hard work Philip tried to overcome the defects of this system. His methods have become famous. All work was done on paper, on the basis of *consultas* (that is, memoranda, reports, and advice presented him by his ministers). In Madrid, or in the gloomy magnificence of his palace of El Escorial, which he built (1563-84) on the slopes of the Sierra de Guadarrama, the King worked alone in his small office, giving his decisions or, as often, deferring them. Nothing is known of his order of work, but all his contemporaries agreed that his methods dangerously, and sometimes fatally, slowed down a system of government

already notorious for its dilatoriness. Painstaking and conscientious, Philip's craving for ever more information hid an inability to distinguish between the important and the trivial and a temperamental unwillingness to make decisions.

This was coupled with an almost pathological suspicion of even his most able and faithful servants. Margaret of Austria, duchess of Parma; the duke of Alba; Don John of Austria; Antonio Pérez; and finally, Alessandro Farnese - to name only the most distinguished - suffered disgrace. "His smile and his dagger were very close," wrote his official court historian, Cabrera de Córdoba. It was no exaggeration; for, in the case of Juan de Escobedo, the secretary of Don John of Austria, Philip even consented to murder. As a result, Philip's court became notorious for the bitterness of its faction fights. The atmosphere of the Spanish court did much to poison the whole Spanish system of government, and this played no small part in causing the rebellions of the Netherlanders (1568-1609), of the Moriscos of Granada (1568-70), and of the Aragonese (1591-92).

Yet the "black legend" that, in Protestant countries, represented Philip II as a monster of bigotry, ambition, lust, and cruelty is certainly false. Philip's spare and elegant appearance is known from the famous portraits by Titian and by Antonis Mor (Sir Anthony More). He was a lover of books and pictures, and Spain's literary Golden Age began in his reign. An affectionate father to his daughters, he lived an austere and dedicated life. "You may assure His Holiness," Philip wrote to his ambassador in Rome in 1566, "that rather than suffer the least damage to religion and the service of God, I would lose all my states and an hundred lives, if I had them; for I do not propose nor desire to be the ruler of heretics." This remark may be regarded as the motto of his reign. To accomplish the task set him by God of preserving his subjects in the true Catholic religion, Philip felt in duty bound to use his royal powers, if need be, to the point of the most ruthless political tyranny, as he did in the Netherlands. Even the popes found it sometimes difficult to distinguish between Philip's views as to what was the service of God and what the service of the Spanish monarchy.

Foreign policy. For the first 20 years of his reign, Philip sought to preserve peace with his neighbors in Western Europe. He was fighting a major naval war with the Ottoman Empire in the Mediterranean and from 1568, he was faced with rebellion and war in the Netherlands. From the late 1570's, his policy gradually changed. The death (August 1578) without heirs of his nephew, King Sebastian of Portugal, opened up the prospect of Philip's secession to Portugal. He had to conquer (1580) by force what he regarded as his just, hereditary rights, but the rest of Europe was alarmed at this growth in Spanish power. Both England and France gave increasing support to the rebellious provinces of the Netherlands. Gradually, in the 1580's, Philip became convinced that the Catholic religion in western Europe, and his own authority in the Netherlands, could be saved only by open intervention against England and France. To this end he fitted out the Armada that, with the help of the Spanish Army in the Netherlands, was intended to conquer England (1588). He sent money and troops to support the League, the ultra-Catholic party in France, against Henry of Navarre and the Huguenots. He even claimed the throne of France for his daughter, Isabella Clara Eugenia, after the murder of Henry III in 1589. Again, even his Catholic allies found it difficult to distinguish between Philip's championship of the Catholic Church and the interests of Spain.

All these plans failed. Henry of Navarre became a Catholic (1593) and Philip had to accept (Peace of Vervins, 1598) his succession as Henry IV of France. England and the northern

Netherlands remained Protestant and unconquered. Yet Philip's reign as a whole was not a failure. He had defeated the great Ottoman offensive in the Mediterranean at the Battle of Lepanto (1571). In the Iberian Peninsula he had completed the work of unification begun by the "Catholic Kings," Ferdinand and Isabella. Most important of all, in his own eyes, he had won great victories for the Catholic Church. If England, Scotland, and the northern Netherlands were lost, the southern Netherlands (the modern Belgium) had been preserved. In Spain and Italy he had prevented the spread of heresy, and his intervention in France was one of the factors that forced Henry IV to become a Catholic. When Philip II died of cancer at El Escorial on September 13, 1598, Spain was still at the height of its power; it took almost 50 years before it was clear that the Counter-Reformation would make no further major conquests.

Biographical Source: *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Volume 14, pages 227-229.

Scope and Content Note

Contemporary official text, in Spanish, of the famous royal cedula by which the reluctant King Philip II at last promulgated the Catholic Church's reply to the Protestant revolt from the church. This ratifies for the Spanish dominions, the profound reforms of the great Council meeting at Trent from 1545 to 1552 and finally in 1562-1563. Apparently unpublished save in the now rare Spanish translation of the Tridentine proceedings of Lopez de Ayala (*El Sacrosanto y ecumenico Conilio de Trento...: Madrid, Imprenta Real, 1785*), and absent from the mostly less important Tridentine documents in the *Col. de Documentos Ineditos (IX)* this manuscript is contemporary with the cedula, and was entirely written by a high Chancery official. Though Philip reluctantly accepted as much of the reforms as he could, this is the document that specifically excepts all royal powers in the Church from infringement.

