



Declaration of Reasons William of Orange (1688)

In 1688, England underwent what came to be called the Glorious Revolution, when King James II was overthrown by his son-in-law William of Orange, who invaded England from the Netherlands (where William already ruled some Dutch provinces). James, a convert to Catholicism, had drawn the ire of English Protestants for attempting to abolish legal restrictions imposed on English Catholics; also, he had attempted to increase the power of the monarchy by claiming the right to overrule Parliament's legislative powers. William, on the other hand, won support for his coup against James by promising to preserve the legal restrictions on Catholics and to restore the powers of Parliament.

The reading below comes from a declaration to the English people that William distributed in order to win public support for his invasion. The document promotes a political ideology which insists that the liberties of the people must be protected from "arbitrary government." An enduring legacy of the Glorious Revolution was that this ideology became enshrined in England's political culture; a century later, the same ideology was invoked by the colonists who launched the American Revolution. William's declaration illustrates how this ideology of "liberty vs. tyranny" had roots in anti-Catholicism—which would prove to be the case in US history as well.

It is both certain and evident to all men that the public peace and happiness of any state or kingdom cannot be preserved where the laws, liberties, and customs established by the lawful authority in it are openly transgressed and annulled, more especially where the alteration of religion is endeavored and where a religion which is contrary to law is endeavored to be introduced; upon which, those who are most immediately concerned in it are indispensably bound to endeavor to preserve and maintain the established laws, liberties, and customs and, above all, the religion and worship of God that is established among them, and to take such an effectual care that the inhabitants of the said state or kingdom may be deprived neither of their religion nor of their civil rights; which is so much the more necessary because the greatness and security both of kings' royal families and of all such as are in authority, as well as the happiness of their subjects and people, depend in a most especial manner upon the exact observation and maintenance of these their laws, liberties, and customs.

Upon these grounds it is that we cannot any longer forbear to declare that, to our great regret, we see that those counsellors who have now the chief credit with the King have overturned the religion, laws, and liberties of those realms and subjected them, in all things relating to their consciences, liberties, and properties, to arbitrary government; and that not only by secret and indirect ways but in an open and undisguised manner.

Those evil counsellors, for the advancing and coloring this with some plausible pretexts, did invent and set on foot the King's dispensing power, by virtue of which they pretend that, according to law, he can suspend and dispense with the execution of the laws that have been enacted by the authority of the King and Parliament for the security and happiness of the subjects, and so have rendered those laws of no effect; though there is nothing more certain than that as no laws can be made but by the joint concurrence of King and Parliament, so likewise

laws so enacted, which secure the public peace and safety of the nation and the lives and liberties of every subject in it, cannot be repealed or suspended but by the same authority. [...]

It is also manifest and notorious that as his Majesty was, upon his coming to the crown, received and acknowledged by all the subjects of England, Scotland, and Ireland as their king without the least opposition, though he made then open profession of the popish religion, so he did then promise and solemnly swear at his coronation that he would maintain his subjects in the free enjoyment of their laws, rights, and liberties and, in particular, that he would maintain the Church of England as it was established by law. It is likewise certain that there have been, at divers and sundry times, several laws enacted for the preservation of those rights and liberties and of the Protestant religion; and among other securities, it has been enacted that all persons whatsoever that are advanced to any ecclesiastical dignity, or to bear office in either university, as likewise all others that should be put in any employment, civil or military, should declare that they were not papists but were of the Protestant religion, and that by their taking of the Oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy and the Test; yet these evil counsellors have in effect annulled and abolished all those laws, both with relation to ecclesiastical and civil employments. [...]

And though there are many express laws against all churches or chapels for the exercise of the popish religion, and also against all monasteries and convents, and more particularly against the order of the Jesuits, yet those evil counsellors have procured orders for the building of several churches and chapels for the exercise of that religion. They have also procured divers monasteries to be erected, and, in contempt of the law, they have not only set up several colleges of Jesuits in divers places, for the corrupting of the youth, but have raised up one of the order to be a privy counsellor and a minister of state. [...]

They have likewise disposed of all military employments in the same manner; for though the laws have not only excluded papists from all such employments but have in particular provided that they should be disarmed, yet they, in contempt of these laws, have not only armed the papists but have likewise raised them up to the greatest military trusts, both by sea and land, strangers as well as natives, and Irish as well as English; so that by those means having rendered themselves masters of the affairs of the church, of the government of the nation, and of the course of justice, and subjected them all to a despotic and arbitrary power, they might be in a capacity to maintain and execute their wicked designs by the assistance of the army and thereby to enslave the nation.

The dismal effects of this subversion of the established religion, laws, and liberties in England appear more evidently to us by what we see done in Ireland, where the whole government is put in the hands of papists and where all the Protestant inhabitants are under the daily fears of what may be justly apprehended from the arbitrary power which is set up there; which has made great numbers of them leave that kingdom and abandon their estates in it, remembering well that cruel and bloody massacre which fell out in that island in the year 1641. [...]

THEREFORE it is that we have thought fit to go over to England and to carry over with us a force sufficient, by the blessing of God, to defend us from the violence of those evil counsellors. AND WE, being desirous that our intentions in this may be rightly understood, have for this end prepared this declaration, in which, as we have hitherto given a true account of the reasons

inducing us to it, so we now think fit to DECLARE that this our expedition is intended for no other design but to have a free and lawful Parliament assembled as soon as is possible; [...] that also none be suffered to choose or to be chosen members of Parliament but such as are qualified by law, and that the members of Parliament being thus lawfully chosen shall meet and sit in full freedom; that so the two Houses may concur in the preparing of such laws as they, upon full and free debate, shall judge necessary and convenient both for the confirming and executing the law concerning the Test and such other laws as are necessary for the security and maintenance of the Protestant religion; [...] as also for the covering and securing of all such who will live peaceably under the government, as becomes good subjects, from all persecution upon the account of their religion, even papists themselves not excepted; and for the doing of all other things which the two Houses of Parliament shall find necessary for the peace, honor, and safety of the nation, so that there may be no more danger of the nation's falling at any time hereafter under arbitrary government.

Source: *The Declaration of His Highnes [sic] William Henry, by the Grace of God Prince of Orange, &c. of the Reasons Inducing Him to Appear in Armes in the Kingdome of England [...]* (The Hague: Arnold Leers, 1688), 1-9, https://books.google.com/books?id=4_xPAAAAcAAJ. Public domain, Google-digitized.

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