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Philip II and his Problems with the Netherlands

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Poster Presentation 48

PHILIP II AND HIS PROBLEMS WITH THE NETHERLANDS

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When Philip II inherited the Spanish Empire from his father, Charles V, the empire was at the height of its power with territory covering parts of the Americas, Naples, Sicily, Milan, the Netherlands, the Philippines and other Caribbean islands. Spain lost most of its possessions and worldly status, and in particular Spain lost control of the majority of the Netherlands due to some errors in Philip's decisions during his reign.

One of Philip's most detrimental problems was his lack of communication with the Netherlands. Because of his refusal to learn other languages besides Spanish, he was unable to comprehend either the Dutch or the French which was spoken in the Netherlands. Thus, Philip had to rely on interpreters to relay his messages to the provinces.

Another problem was the long traveling time between Spain and the provinces in which messages were often slow in coming and often too late to have much of an impact on the governance of the provinces. Therefore, the king's sphere of influence was limited to appointing governors to rule for him in the provinces. Philip also did not like to travel much and therefore never visited the Netherlands during his reign. This lack of communication and presence in the Netherlands proved to be one of the main reasons why Spain lost control of the Netherlands.

The main problem was Philip's strict adherence to the Catholic faith and his concern over religion in the Netherlands. The Dutch were considered to be religious liberals. Philip saw this as a sign of possible rebellion by the Dutch as well as a clear dispersion from the true Catholic religion.

All these problems led to the eventual rebellion of the Netherlands against Spanish rule. Under Philip II's rule, Spain lost the lower half of the Netherlands with the rest of the provinces to shortly follow. If Philip II was a man more conscious of his faults and more sensitive to the different ways of life of the Dutch, perhaps history would have taken a different course.