

## 96. THE ATTACK REPULSED

It is a quiet Sunday morning in Schoonhoven, a town along the Lek River in the province of South Holland.

Listen, you can hear the solemn singing of psalms from the nearby church building. The people of Schoonhoven are in church. A Counter Remonstrant minister is in the pulpit. When their beloved minister starts preaching his sermon, the congregation listens attentively.

Suddenly they hear a tumult outside. The sound of heavy footsteps distracts the listener's attention from the sermon. The noise gets louder. Then, suddenly, the outer door bursts open, and some police, led by their chief, charge into the building with a lot of commotion. The quiet reverence is rudely disturbed.

The minister stops preaching and watches the police march towards him. They roughly drag him out of the pulpit and march him off like a criminal. They haul him to the town gates, open the door and push him roughly out of the town. The gate door slams shut behind him, and the police chief with his men return home with a mean smirk on their faces.

Meanwhile, the congregation has left the church building looking worried and upset. They wonder: 'Why does this have to happen? Are we not even allowed to come together to hear God's Word preached anymore? Is persecution starting again?'

Unfortunately, yes! True, the stakes are not burning yet, but much has happened in Schoonhoven recently. A minister and an elder were banned from the town. When five elders and a deacon sided with their expelled minister, they lost their town citizenship and were no longer allowed to trade or work in Schoonhoven. Their fellow citizens banished them.

Those families experienced so much misery and sorrow! The banished consistory members tried to continue their occupation outside the town. But the Council stopped them, and they had to pay a hefty fine for trying!

Yet the congregation did not give up. The following Sunday, the brothers and sisters went to church again as usual, but that was not permitted anymore. Well then, if they are not allowed to meet *inside* the gates, they will follow their minister and meet *outside* the gates. One of the church members makes his barn available for the services. But traitors, eager for a brawl, betray them to the chief of police. He and his men immediately march to the barn and roughly disperse the congregation. The leader then commands his men to demolish the barn, and soon nothing is left but a pile of firewood. It looks as if the time of the Inquisition has returned! Is this allowed to continue? Is there no justice left in The Netherlands? The banished elders and deacons travel to the Hague and complain to the governor.

However, when they finally arrive, they are bullied by Oldenbarnevelt and sent away. Shameful!

This event clearly shows that the intensity of the struggle for justice had not changed. This happened in the year 1615, six years after the death of Arminius.

### THE BATTLE CONTINUES

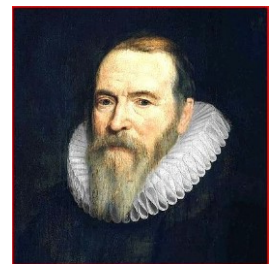
Yes, indeed, the battle continues undiminished. Oldenbarnevelt has no intention of abandoning the fight. He *has* to win this battle, come what may!

In the year 1614, the province of Holland passes **The Tolerance Act**.

What is that about?

Let me explain:

That Act states that both parties should practice patience, and the State will determine what can



*Johan van  
Oldenbarnevelt.  
1547-1619.*

*A very skilled and  
influential man, the  
main leader of the  
Dutch Republic. He  
was beheaded in  
1619.*

be taught by the ministers. In practice, this means: the Remonstrants are free to preach as they wish, but the Counter Remonstrants must keep quiet. It was now illegal for them to warn the people against the Remonstrant teachings. If they still do, they will be expelled from their office and, at times, ill-treated and banished. They must show tolerance. In the eyes of the government, *The Counter Remonstrants* were intolerant. Some towns in the province of Holland refused to sign **The Tolerance Act**, but the majority agreed.

### REVEREND GESELIUS OF ROTTERDAM

A faithful minister lives in Rotterdam: Reverend Geselius. At that time, most of Rotterdam is Remonstrant. Especially the city mayor *Hugo Grotius* is a zealous Remonstrant who supports them wherever he can. Rev. Geselius is the only Reformed minister left in the entire city. He is a thorn in the side of the Remonstrants. This minister has to go as well!

Rev. Geselius knows very well that they want to get rid of him and is extremely careful. He wants to continue serving his congregation, so he bends over backwards to accommodate as much as possible. Wherever and whenever he preaches, hostile enemies are part of his audience. He knows they are trying to catch him out, hoping he will say something that disagrees with what the Remonstrant ministers teach so they can complain about him to the city council. This explains why Rev. Geselius is so extremely cautious in how he says things. Their wicked plan fails till...one Sunday, Rev. Geselius' chosen text is Heb. 12:4:



Reverend Geselius.

*'You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.'*

The enemies smirk in anticipation. Ha, now they have him! Rev Geselius has urged the people to rebel because he said they should resist! He has

not preached tolerance, but resistance!

Of course, this accusation is untrue. Rev. Geselius says that they must fight against *sin*, not the Remonstrants! Yet based on that *false* accusation, Rev Geselius is banished by the city government. First, he is dismissed from office and denied access to the pulpit. Yet the faithful preacher does not want to abandon his congregation. So, he organises meetings in their homes. The Remonstrants do not tolerate that either, so they expel Rev. Geselius from Rotterdam.

On top of that, the council passes a new law forbidding the Counter Remonstrants to have church services, even outside the city! If they do, they must pay a fine of 300 guilders (a large sum of money in those days), and the place they meet will be confiscated. Now those pesky Counter Remonstrants know *exactly* what to expect!

This happened in Rotterdam, where Hugo Grotius and his friends were in power.

### REVEREND VENATOR IN ALKMAAR

In the city of Alkmaar lives a zealous Remonstrant minister named Rev. Venator. He does some foolish things and offends a lot of people that way.

For example, he has some boys boarding with him whom he encourages to perform ungodly plays in their spare time. Someone complains about him to the consistory, who, in turn, takes it to classis. Classis Alkmaar dismisses Rev. Venator and four other Remonstrant ministers. They are no longer allowed to preach. That decision is correct; the Counter Remonstrant classis decision is in line with the doctrinal standards.

The Remonstrant *governors* of the province Holland (Alkmaar is a city in that province) are furious when they hear about it. They demand



*Hugo Grotius  
1583 – 1645  
Mayor of Rotterdam  
and zealous  
Remonstrant*

that the city council of Alkmaar reinstate Rev. Venator so he can preach again.

The Alkmaar city council refuses to obey that demand, as does the consistory of Alkmaar. But the governors of the province of Holland do not take no for an answer. It must go *their* way at all costs. They dismiss the city council of Alkmaar and send them home.

Prince Maurice, who has the power to appoint city councils, now has to choose a new government for Alkmaar, which he does, and ...he only chooses Reformed men, meaning Counter Remonstrants. This new council does not want to compel the classis to reinstate Rev. Venator, and consequently, the situation remains unchanged. Rev. Venator is *not* allowed to preach. And do you know what happened then?... The governors of the province of Holland also dismiss this newly appointed council and, this time, choose a *third* city council themselves! Guess what...this third set of councillors is exclusively made up of *Remonstrants!*

They have no right to do that because that is the task of Prince Maurice. But there was no justice in the land in those days. *Injustice* reigns supreme. Of course, that third city council, the Remonstrant council, ensures that the godless Rev. Venator can enter the pulpit again! Terrible!



*A group of councillors in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Painting by Frans Hals. They were often people from wealthy families and enjoyed much political influence.*

It gets so bad that the Counter Remonstrants can no longer come together to read the Bible! It looks like the days of the Spanish Inquisition from the time of the Great Reformation have returned!

### REVEREND ROSAEUS IN THE HAGUE

It is impossible to recount everything that happened. Yet we must tell you one more story. This one occurred in The Hague!

The Remonstrant leaders live in The Hague. The powerful Governor of Holland, Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, lives there too.

All the prominent and influential people in this city are Remonstrants.

The Hague is the headquarters of the Remonstrants! Here the struggle between the Remonstrants and the Counter-Remonstrants is incredibly intense.

A young Counter-Remonstrant minister, *Reverend Rosaeus*, also lives in The Hague. The Lord had given him a sharp intellect. He is an excellent orator and an ardent follower of Gomarus.

But the Remonstrant minister Rev. Uytenbogeart also lives in that same city, and after Arminius' death, he was the leader of the Remonstrants. He is a competent man with enormous influence. He was one of the authors of 'The Remonstrance' sent to the province of Holland, remember? The

congregation of Rev. Rosaeus are mainly ordinary people, as ordinary people tend to side with the Counter Remonstrants. The prominent and distinguished side with the Remonstrants and go to church with Rev. Uytenbogeart. Inevitably, the issue leads to a clash between those two ministers.

Governor Oldenbarnevelt gets involved in that dispute. He demands that Rev. Rosaeus should live in peace with Rev. Uytenbogeart. Yes, he even

says they must celebrate Holy Supper together! Rev Rosaeus can not do that; he steadfastly refuses. Governor Oldenbarnevelt resents that so much that he dismisses the God-fearing Rev. Rosaeus as a minister. Whoever will not bend *their* will to *his* has to be made of no account! That is how the Remonstrants operate. When Oldenbarnevelt later meets Rosaeus, the Governor mockingly says:  
 "Ha, now you are on your own!"  
 Do you know how Rev. Rosaeus responds?  
 "Oh no, sir, you are mistaken! I do not stand alone. God, the Lord, is with me. In this country, thousands of true believers still agree with me."  
 We do not know what Oldenbarnevelt answered to that.

Rev. Rosaeus is no longer permitted to preach in The Hague, but do you know what he does? He goes to Rijswijk, a small town in the neighbourhood of The Hague, where he preaches Sunday after Sunday. Then it becomes clear that he still has many friends in The Hague. More than seven hundred people walk from The Hague to Rijswijk every Sunday to listen to their deposed minister. They would rather walk for hours to Rijswijk than listen to the preaching of the Remonstrant Rev. Uytenbogeart. When those people return to The Hague in the evening, dog-tired, they are mocked and ridiculed as Rijswijk-runners and as 'Mudbeggars' because when it rains, they come home wet and mud-stained. At times they are even pelted with stones. These 'stubborn' actions of the 'Mudbeggars' are not to Governor Oldenbarnevelt's liking. This travelling to Rijswijk has to stop! Those stubborn people should not go to Rijswijk. They can easily go to church in The Hague!  
 Therefore, he proposes to the governors of the province of Holland that they should order Prince Maurice to put a stop to that, using military force. Until now, Prince Maurice, who also lives in The Hague, has not interfered much with those religious arguments. But that was about to change.

### PRINCE MAURICE GETS INVOLVED

Some Counter-Remonstrant ministers, including the well-known Rev Trigland, now visit the Prince.

Respectfully they ask him to allow the Counter Remonstrants to go to church in The Hague because walking to Rijswijk in winter was difficult, especially for the women and children. They add: "Your Highness, you need not even give us a church building. We will be more than satisfied with just a barn."

At these last words, Maurice shakes his head and firmly responds:

"What? Are we to have services in houses or barns? No way! We have a right to those church buildings, and we will get them!"

Greatly relieved, the visitors leave. All the 'Mudbeggars' are encouraged and decide not to travel to Rijswijk anymore. Instead, they prepare a barn in The Hague to serve as a church building. When the council of The Hague hears that, they lock up the building. That is a big disappointment. What now? Deep down, the people hope Prince Maurice will support them.

And?

When Maurice hears that the council of The Hague has locked that barn, he is outraged.

"What?" he cries out, "if those people do not receive a place to meet, then I will offer them my palace as a meeting place."

He urgently advises the local government to offer the Large Church to the Counter Remonstrants. The Remonstrant governors refuse to even *consider* it! The Large Church? No way! Those rebels aren't getting a thing! They must submit themselves! Oldenbarnevelt is angry when he hears that Prince Maurice chose to side with those



*Reverend Trigland. He was a delegate to the Synod of Dordt and helped write the Canons of Dordt.*



*Prince Maurice of Orange (1567-1625)*



despised 'Mudbeggars'. He has no intention of giving in but even wants Prince Maurice to submit to him. But Maurice will *not* submit!

The Prince has an accountant in his service, a Mr Musch, who handles his day-to-day affairs. Maurice tells him to arrange for the oppressed congregation of Rev. Rosaeus to meet in his palace, and Mr Musch organises this. So that Sunday, a church service is held there for the Counter-Remonstrants.



*William Lodewijk. He was the governor of the northern provinces in the Netherlands.*

Oldenbarnevelt is furious. He shall have that impertinent Mr Musch killed because he dared to defy the commands of the local government openly! However, the government in The Hague does not dare to go that way when he suggests that to them. Kill Mr Musch? Openly resist the Prince; who allowed that?

No, they don't quite dare do that. Besides, William Lodewijk, the governor of Groningen and Friesland (two provinces in the North of The Netherlands), supports the Prince. William has already encouraged Maurice for some time to take a stand and get involved with those church issues. The Remonstrants have little influence in Friesland and Groningen, where William Lodewijk rules. They have no chance to ill-treat the Counter Remonstrants there.

Finally, at the insistence of Prince Maurice, the Counter Remonstrants may use a little church in The Hague, the so-called Guest Church. But that is far too small and unsuitable for that purpose.

The government does not know what to do next. They call a meeting and invite Prince Maurice to be present. They ask the Prince what he intends to do.

In 1586 Maurice had become governor. On that occasion, he took the oath that he would maintain and protect the Reformed religion.

In response to their question, Maurice has the minutes of that occasion read to them. Then he states that he shall keep that oath and protect and defend the pure doctrine for as long as he lives. The Remonstrant governors and Oldenbarnevelt try to convince Prince Maurice that the Remonstrant doctrine is as sound as the Counter Remonstrants. However, Maurice does not agree. He debates with Oldenbarnevelt, who eventually can no longer defend himself. Once again, Maurice advises them to call a National Synod, and then the ministers from the entire nation can discuss this matter and come to a decision. But the Remonstrant governors stubbornly refuse, and so the struggle continues. How long still?

### TRANSFORMING THE GUN FACTORY

It is Sunday, July 6, 1617. A large crowd gathers in front of the large 'Monastery Church'. This church used to belong to a monastery but was changed into a gun factory. The large nave was very suitable for that purpose. On that Sunday, the area in front of that church is packed with people. Why? It's Sunday. It is not a regular workday.



*The Monastery Church, later called 'The Prince Church' of The Hague which was a gun factory at one time.*

But those people are not there to work. The city council of The Hague has promised to have that gun factory refitted as a church, which the Counter Remonstrants will be allowed to use. Those oppressed people are so happy as now they will have their own church building and listen to their beloved minister without having to walk to Rijswijk anymore.

But their patience is put to the test. True, the city council has promised it, but it takes soooo long! Weeks and months passed, but nothing happened, and their patience has worn thin. So now, on this Sunday, July 6, they forcibly take possession of that building. That's why a large crowd gathers in front of the old gun factory. They force the doors open and stream inside. All kinds of things are still everywhere, but nothing deters them. The first service is held there that Sunday morning, with the congregation sitting on workbenches and other objects as there are no pews. Hundreds who cannot find a seat remain standing. The service proceeds peacefully and orderly.

Early Monday morning, they all return, drag all the tools and equipment outside, and empty the nave. They thoroughly clean and even repaint the whole inside of the building. Everyone joins in with this busy bee whenever they can. The entire week they work hard from early morning till late evening. They build a pulpit, install new pews, and when it is Saturday evening, that big project is finished. Hundreds of people worked on it.

On Sunday, the doors open, and everyone can see the old gun factory's transformation into a beautiful church. The impossible can be accomplished when everyone puts their shoulder to the wheel in complete harmony. This is also a lesson for us today. The city council of

The Hague did not dare to interfere this time.

### THE SITUATION ESCALATES

It is Sunday again, several weeks later. Look, Prince Maurice and his entourage leave the palace. They are going to church. Nothing unusual is it? However, they do not attend the 'Large Church' where Rev. Uytenbogeart will preach. No, they walk past those open doors. They walk past the home of Oldenbarnevelt. Finally, they arrive at the Monastery Church and enter *there*. Maurice *publicly* shows that he has chosen the side of the despised 'Mudbeggars'. We understand these people are very thankful to receive such a powerful ally. Since then, they have called that church the 'The Prince's Church'. You may be sure

that on that Sunday, there was much joy in the homes of those ordinary people. Would their suffering soon end now?

Oldenbarnevelt hears what has happened but has no intention of backing down. He continues to push his own opinion, come what may.

In August 1617, at the persistent urging of Oldenbarnevelt, the '**SHARP RESOLUTION**' law was accepted by the provinces of Holland and Utrecht.

#### The Sharp Resolution:

1. There will be no National Synod.
2. Cities may enlist soldiers (Local Militia).
3. City councillors to settle religious disputes.



'The famous Dom-Church in Utrecht was given to the Counter Remonstrants.'

In the 1<sup>st</sup> place, this law stipulates that there will be *no national synod*! Obviously, the Remonstrants are afraid of the outcome of a national Synod.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> place, the law also stipulates that the cities are authorised to enlist soldiers, a 'local militia'. Prince Maurice is the Commander in Chief of the national army and navy, and all officers and soldiers must obey him. But the local militia need *not* obey the Prince. They are employed and paid by the city council and must follow *their* commands.

Now there are *two* armies in The Netherlands. That was a dangerous situation because this increased the possibility of civil war! Maybe you ask:

"But what is the duty of the local militia?"

Remember how Oldenbarnevelt asked Prince Maurice to use the national army to force the Counter Remonstrants to stop their opposition to the Remonstrants? At that time, the Prince was asked to stop the 700 Counter Remonstrants from walking to Rijswijk every Sunday. When the Prince refused, Oldenbarnevelt could do nothing about it, as he had no authority over the national army.

So now, with this *Sharp Resolution*, the cities recruit their own army over which *Prince Maurice* has no say! Now the city council can use their local militia to compel the Counter Remonstrants

to stay home, and Prince Maurice can't do anything about it!

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> place, the *Sharp Resolution* stipulates that the civil justice system may no longer handle ecclesiastical complaints. Instead, the *councillors* will settle any religious dispute. Do you see what they have in mind? They know there are many Counter Remonstrants among the judges. This law will prevent them from judging religious disputes, because they will agree with the Counter Remonstrants, and *that was not allowed*!

Oldenbarnevelt was the main instigator of all this.

This *Sharp Resolution* brings the country into great danger. It amounts to *high treason*! One province wants to lord it over all the other provinces. Now the disputes are no longer simply ecclesiastical, but they become political. A government-controlled State Church, of which Johan van Oldenbarnevelt and his Remonstrant friends are great advocates, *must* be maintained. That *Sharp Resolution* strengthens the influence of the State over the Church. A *National Synod* must be approved by the Remonstrant councillors, and they will never do that!

Do you see how cleverly the devil works? By accepting the *Sharp Resolution*, this law of high treason makes the situation extremely dangerous.

It brings the entire nation into crisis; immediate

intervention is essential and critical! Thankfully, the Federal Government realises that too. The Federal Government consists of representatives from all the Dutch provinces, and these representatives are mostly Counter Remonstrant. The Federal Government takes a decisive hand in the matter. They make two important decisions: First, they command that a National Synod *must* be held. The Remonstrants have no input in this decision. It simply has to happen!

Second, the Federal Government instructs Prince Maurice to discharge



The 'Large Church' of The Hague, where Rev Uytenbogeart preached.



the local militia and, if necessary, to replace the local councillors in some cities.

Prince Maurice carries out his orders promptly and competently. Without any bloodshed, all the local militia are discharged and sent home. God spared The Netherlands from a bloody civil war.

#### HOW IT ALL ENDED.

Maurice, with a few representatives from the Federal Government, makes an unexpected appearance in Utrecht, a Remonstrant stronghold in the middle of the country. The city council is in session in the City Hall. Hugo Grotius, a fanatic Remonstrant and Mayor of Rotterdam, is also present. He is about to advise his Utrecht friends on what to do. Suddenly, Prince Maurice enters the room. This does not please those 'gentlemen' at all! They get a terrible shock!

Maurice bluntly tells them why he is there. In the first place, the local militia in Utrecht must be discharged. Secondly, the oppression of the Counter Remonstrants must stop immediately! And thirdly, they must allow for a National Synod to be held. Maurice conveys the demands short and sharp!

Well, uhm..., the city council needs time to discuss these matters before they respond...

Fine, that's OK. Maurice calmly leaves their meeting to let them discuss the three demands at their leisure. However, the next day Maurice still has no answer. So, the Prince decides to take prompt action! Those gentlemen must realise he is deadly serious and will not be messed with! Do they refuse to discharge the local militia? OK, then *he* will do it. Early the following morning, at about 3.30 am, he orders his troops to surround the marketplace of the city of Utrecht. The cannons are set up and loaded. Together with a few of his sergeants, Maurice enters

the city square. He orders the commander of the local militia to down arms.

"Sorry, but I received no instruction to do so from my leaders," the commanding officer answers.

"Very well", Maurice says with a smile, "then you shall have to *fight* for your leaders."

Fight?

Fight against the well-trained soldiers of Maurice?

No, those untrained militiamen have no appetite for that. They don't dare! They toss their weapons on a heap and go home. All the militiamen from the city of Utrecht are disarmed and sent home. Most of the city council is also discharged and replaced by others. A cathedral, the famous Dom church, is given to the Counter Remonstrants. What a lot of sudden changes, and they all happened without any bloodshed!

The same things happened in the other cities of the provinces of Utrecht and Holland, both Remonstrant hotbeds.

But it does not stop there. The principal leaders of the Remonstrants, Oldenbarnevelt and Hugo Grotius, are taken prisoner. At 71, Oldenbarnevelt is condemned to death by a court in The Hague, consisting of twenty-four judges. It is a heavy punishment but. . . *just*! His stubborn attitude has



Johan van Oldenbarnevelt beheaded 13 05 1619



brought the church into great danger and the country to the brink of civil war. He had committed *high treason*.

For many years, he rendered invaluable service to The Netherlands, which is why he is not immediately put to death. He deserves to be! Because of his irresponsible actions and his boundless lust for power, he only has himself to blame for getting the death sentence. However, even after his conviction, there is still a chance for him to save his life. If, even after everything that has happened, he asks Maurice for pardon, he would have received it! Maurice *waits* for it! The Prince repeatedly asks if the governor has asked for pardon. But Oldenbarnevelt maintains till the end that he is innocent. His family does not ask for pardon for him either— not his wife, not his children, no one!

Eventually, on May 13, 1619, the sentence was carried out. Even on the scaffold, he maintains his innocence. He says:

"O God, what is the end of man".

Indeed, what is the end of a person claiming he is right despite all evidence against him? How blinded he was!

His gravestone states: *'Let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he falls!'*

That is a serious warning, also for us!

We will not go into detail about how Hugo Grotius escaped in a bookcase from Loevestein castle, where he was imprisoned.

This history teaches us that God watched over His church and preserved The Netherlands from the horror of a bloody civil war.

## QUESTIONS

1. How were the Counter Remonstrants persecuted?
2. What was the Tolerance Act of 1614?
3. Who was Geselius?
4. How did the enemy accuse Geselius? What was the result?
5. Who was Hugo Grotius, and how did he escape the Loevestein Castle?
6. Why did the city council of Alkmaar refuse to obey the command of the province of Holland?
7. What was the reaction of Prince Maurice?
8. What step did the province of Holland then take? Why was this illegal and unjust?
9. Who was:
  - a. Rosaeus
  - b. Uytenbogeart
10. What action did Rosaeus take when he could no longer preach in The Hague? What was the reaction of the people?
11. How did Maurice oppose the plans of Oldenbarnevelt?
12. What was the Guest-Church? The Monastery Church?
13. What were the three laws of the 'Sharp Resolution'? What were the serious consequences of this resolution?
14. How had the ecclesiastical disputes become political?
15. What decisions did the Federal Government make?
16. What actions did Prince Maurice take against the decisions of the *Sharp Resolution*?
17. Why was Oldenbarnevelt condemned to death? Could he have been pardoned?

## FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Give possible reasons why the church/state relationship was so stormy in The Netherlands.
2. Oldenbarnevelt testified, *'O God, what is the end of man!'* Quote a text from the Bible to show the end of those who oppose the Lord and support error or sin.