

## 95. A DANGEROUS ATTACK ON CHRIST'S CHURCH.

### TROUBLE IN THE VILLAGE

The rain is pouring down, saturating everything outside. The roads are full of puddles, and the howling wind whistles through the trees. The heavy tree branches creak and groan. With difficulty, a group of men, women, boys and girls struggle against the blustery wind and the lashing rain. The downpour soaks every thread of their clothing. They plod on cold, wet and shivering, doing their best to avoid the slippery mud and deep puddles. Most of them look very sad. Splatters of mud soil their clothing. What else would you expect?

But thankfully, the village church towers are slowly becoming visible in the hazy distance, and their destination is finally in sight. They must persevere just a bit longer, and they will be home. Then they can warm themselves in front of their crackling wood fires and change their wet clothes for dry ones. Finally, they approach the open city gate. But when they look ahead and see what is beyond the dark opening, a worried and anxious expression appears on their faces. But they keep walking.

'You filthy Mud-beggars<sup>1</sup>! Schismatics!' people yell at them.



*There was little tolerance between the Remonstrants and the Contra Remonstrants.*

Who is yelling that?

And why?

Just look.

Despite the bad weather, the streets are crowded. Their fellow villagers are waiting for the dog-tired travellers.

However, they are not greeted very kindly. On the contrary! The villagers watch them coming home with angry eyes, hurling mean comments and rude words at them. Hatred flickers in their eyes.

"Rebels," cries a teenager and gives a woman walking past such a hard push that she loses her balance and falls right in the middle of a big puddle. With a painful groan, the woman struggles to get up and stumbles on without a word.

The villagers laugh scornfully.

A stone whizzes through the air, hitting an older man on his neck. A flash of anger glows in the man's eyes for a second, but he quickly controls it and trudges on.

What is all this about?

Where do those drenched and muddy people come from, and why are they treated so horribly? This group of travellers went to church in a neighbouring village and are now returning home. But are there no churches in their own village where they can go? Oh, yes, plenty of churches!

The violent crowd waiting for them also went to church, but they had been back for quite some time already. They have already been home. But when they hear the cry:

"The Mud-beggars are coming!" they run outside, ignoring the pouring rain. This happens Sunday after Sunday.

But why do those 'Mud-beggars' go to church in another village? Is that not allowed?

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<sup>1</sup> The name 'mud-beggars' originally was a nick name for people who begged for change'.

At that time, there was only one Reformed Church in the country, and the villagers say to each other: "Why is our church not good enough for those filthy Mudbeggars ... those Schismatics, those stirrers! Why do they travel to another village? They should go to church in their own village! They *deserve* our scorn".

If we ask the 'Mud-beggars' that question, they will sadly shake their head and say: "We would be more than happy to go to church in our own village. Do you think walking such a long way every Sunday is fun? Through rain or sunshine, cold or heat? But we can't go to our own church anymore because the truth is no longer preached in our village! In our village, the ministers have become unfaithful. They follow the *Remonstrants!*"

Remonstrants? Who are they? Well, that is a sad story.

Listen.

From the previous chapter, we know that in 1575 the city of Leiden received a university as a reward from William of Orange (see picture). This allowed future ministers to study there, removing the need to travel to universities in other countries. That university has been a great blessing for God's Church in The Netherlands.

But at the beginning of the 17th century, serious trouble developed at this uni: two professors had a serious disagreement.

Remember that at the Leiden University, the students were not only taught Bible knowledge,



*University of Leiden. This building was donated by William of Orange in 1575 and financed with possessions confiscated from Roman Catholics.*

but they also had to know the confessions, namely the Belgic Confession, written by Guido de Bres, and the Heidelberg Catechism, written by Ursinus and Olevianus.

Every professor was required to submit to and base their teaching on the Bible and confessions.

### ARMINIUS

In 1602 two professors died from the plague. The following year, 1603, *Arminius* replaced one of these professors.

Who was Arminius?

Arminius was born in 1560 in the little town of Oudewater. His father was a cutler (someone who makes knives). Arminius had a traumatic childhood. His father died when he was still little, and when he was only fifteen, the Spaniards invaded and massacred the people of his village. When the murderers moved on, the young boy stood crying near the mutilated bodies of his mother and his only brother, and he was left with no one to care for him. A minister from the city of Rotterdam felt sorry for the young orphan and took him to his own home, where he was well cared for. His foster father allowed him to study in Leiden. Arminius also studied in Geneva under the well-known Theodore Beza, the successor of Calvin. After completing his studies, Arminius was ordained as a minister of one of the congregations in Amsterdam.

However, it soon became apparent that Arminius was not entirely sound in his teachings. He erred on quite a few points of doctrine.

Then, in 1603, Arminius was appointed as a professor at the University of Leiden. Gomarus, another professor at the University, objected to this appointment.

### WHO WAS GOMARUS?

Gomarus was born in Brugge, a city in Belgium. He studied at various foreign universities and had served a Dutch refugee congregation in Germany. For the past nine years, he was a professor at Leiden University.



Arminius 1560-  
1609 (aged 49)

When Arminius' appointment was in discussion, the consistory of Amsterdam decided to write the University a letter in which they warned them against appointing Arminius, as they had some serious doubts about some of his

teachings. That explains why Gomarus tried to stop the appointment of Arminius. However, he did not succeed, and despite all Gomarus' protests, the appointment went ahead. That was dangerous. It soon became apparent that Arminius did not teach in line with the confessions and refused to submit to them.

### ARMINIUS' TEACHINGS

**1)** The Bible teaches that a sinner is saved by grace alone, only because God wills it!

Arminius disagreed. He taught his students that God knew beforehand who would believe, and those were the ones He would save. Arminius placed the basis for man's salvation in man instead of in God. (1st error)

**2)** The Bible teaches that everyone is *dead* in sin. The Apostle Paul writes that man is inclined to hate God and his neighbour, and there is no good in him. Every person is subject to the threefold death (spiritual, physical, eternal) if he does not believe. To save man, God changes a person from *dead* to *alive*. This regeneration is essential.

But when the students put this to him, Arminius would shake his head, smile and answer: "No, that is not true. If a person *wants* to, he can still do something good." He taught his students that a person still has '...a free will, which enables him to do good'. (2<sup>nd</sup> error)

**3)** The Bible teaches that not *all* men are saved. 'Many are called, but few are chosen'. The Lord Jesus teaches us that '...wide is the gate and broad the way, that leads to destruction. And there are many who go in by it. But narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there

are few who find it'. Mathew 7:13,14. Those are our Saviour's own words.

God's Word teaches us in many places about salvation for the believers and terrible condemnation for the ungodly. That torment for the ungodly is unchangeable and eternal! Won't the chaff be burned with *unquenchable* fire? The Lord Jesus tells us: 'And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.' Math 25: 46. I could quote many more Bible passages.

But Arminius taught that Christ's atonement is for *all* mankind, that *all* men receive the choice to be saved. With this teaching as well, Arminius attacked the infallible Word of the Lord. He just made it up! (3<sup>rd</sup> error)

**4)** The Bible teaches us that Jesus is a *complete* Saviour. Man is saved by faith alone, without the works of the law. There is no salvation outside of Christ. Only one Name is given under heaven.

Arminius did not agree with this either. He taught his students that divine grace alone is insufficient for salvation but that man must add his own good works to be saved. He taught that faith is a good work that helps to earn our salvation. He believed *faith* had value towards salvation. However, faith is 'only' an *instrument God gives us* through which we accept Christ and all His benefits.

Arminius believed that first *man* must do something, and then the Lord Jesus will complete where the believer falls short. In Arminius' thinking, Christ is only *half* a Saviour. The Roman Catholic Church teaches this as well. They also turn the Lord Jesus into half a Saviour. (4<sup>th</sup> error)

**5)** The Bible teaches us that whoever is born again will be saved. The Lord Jesus tells us: '*My sheep hear My voice, and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand.*' (John 10:28). That is clear enough.

But Arminius smiles, shakes his head and teaches his students:

'You need to believe, live a good life, and you will be saved. But you will lose your salvation if you live in sin and no longer believe.'

He taught that the elect can fall away. Isn't that terrible? How dare he! Arminius taught all those offensive errors at the university of Leiden.

You can see that things were not okay at the university of Leiden. Future ministers received the wrong teaching there.

In chapter 25, we explained that the church father Augustine had to wage a severe struggle against the doctrines of Pelagius, who taught that man has a free will. Arminius followed Pelagius in this error.

Arminius also taught that the state government has authority over the church. But Church and State must exist *next* to each other. The state may not rule over the church, nor the church over the state. They must help and support each other, but each one governs their own affairs. Arminius maintained that the state must rule over the church and that the church has to submit to the state.

From all those errors, it is evident that Arminius did not uphold the truth but the lie.

*If only he had not been appointed as a professor...*

Let us briefly repeat the errors of Arminius:

1. Election is due to a foreseen faith.
2. Christ's atonement is for all men, meaning: everyone has access to it.
3. Man has a free will to accept or not to accept faith.
4. Grace can be resisted.
5. The elect can be lost.
6. The state has the right to rule over the church.

Surely the students disagreed with *Arminius*, didn't they?

Surely no one believed *that*, did they?

Oh yes, many students believed that Arminius spoke the truth and agreed with him.

Thankfully, some students refused to follow Arminius in his teachings. They went to the God-fearing professor Gomarus and told him what Arminius was trying to make them believe.

Gomarus rejected these errors of Arminius and proved from God's Word that Arminius was wrong. The situation created division and controversy at the University of Leiden, first between Gomarus and Arminius and then among the students. However, in years to come, those students became

ordained ministers in congregations throughout The Netherlands. This was standard practice, but now the 'results' were disastrous.

One new minister preached how Arminius had taught him, while another preached how Gomarus had taught him. After the service, some churchgoers agreed with the doctrines of Arminius. They said, "Arminius is right!"

But others said: "No, Arminius is *not* right! It is the way Gomarus teaches because that is what the Bible says. Arminius denies the teachings of Scripture." This caused quarrels and divisions among brothers and sisters of the same congregation. Soon it became the topic of the day throughout the entire country; hatred and anger developed. In many families, in households, people argued about it. A husband would become angry with his wife because she would no longer listen to an Arminian minister. Families were torn apart when

### Arminianism

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Gomarus, 1563-1641



Dad went one way and Mum the other way. Brothers and sisters ignored each other or called each other horrible names. The daughter turned against her mother and the son against his father. What misery! Strife and confusion were everywhere. The devil tried to destroy the Church of the Lord in The Netherlands. He had attempted that so often already with bloody persecution but never succeeded. The church always emerged refined and purified. Now Satan was trying a different tactic. Oh, how he would rejoice if he could tempt the church away from the pure doctrine!

## STATE AND CHURCH

Do you know what else was so bad? Many prominent people, including government officials, agreed with Arminius and firmly chose his side. But the ordinary people, the true believers, agreed with Gomarus. The entire country became unsettled. Even the Grand Pensionary<sup>2</sup>, Oldenbarnevelt, sided with Arminius. That this could not continue was something the government officials understood well.

In 1608 the High Court summoned Arminius and Gomarus to appear before them. That court was made up of important officials. Gomarus pointed out that they had no right to judge in ecclesiastical matters. The church must discuss and resolve her own disputes and disagreements. Therefore, he advised them:

"Call a National Synod. Let ministers and elders of the entire nation come together and let *them* decide who is right based on God's Word."

That was good advice, but the officials rejected it because they feared the outcome would not go their way. So the struggle continued with all its devastating consequences.

A year later, both professors stand before the provincial governors of Holland. These governors are friendly and obliging to Arminius but are offensive and rude to Gomarus. That is not surprising because most of them are Arminian. Again, Gomarus insists:



*A meeting of the States of Holland in 1625*

"Call a National Synod."

The governors shake their heads vehemently.

"No," they snap at him, "we are *not* doing that.

We will call a *provincial* synod." This would mean a synod consisting only of ministers and elders of the province of Holland.

But why do they prefer a *provincial* synod to a national one...? Well, that is obvious, for most of the ministers in the province of Holland are Arminians! So, in that province, they have the majority, but nationally they are in the minority.

They think: "If we call a provincial synod (have only the delegates from the province of Holland), then we will win. But if we call a National Synod, we will lose." Therefore, they do not allow a National Synod to convene. Yet Gomarus is entirely correct. The well-being of the entire Dutch Reformed Church was at stake; therefore, the Dutch Reformed Church (as a whole) should discuss and resolve the issues.

Just remember that the church at that time was a State Church, and government officials had far too much influence in the church. To get a government position, one had to be a member of the State Church. Many had joined the church so they could apply for a government position, not because they were sincere believers. Although The Netherlands enjoyed freedom of religion, the government meddled far too much in church matters. The state must protect the church but

<sup>2</sup> A pensionary was a name given to the leading functionary and legal adviser of the principal town corporations in the Low Countries because they received a salary or pension.

may never rule over her. The church opposed state interference, but it didn't help much. The government officials refused to concede any of their power and influence in church matters.

On the contrary, they wanted to maintain and even increase their authority over the church. Remember, the Arminians taught that the state had the power to control the church, which was *precisely* what the government officials wanted. They wished to assert their authority in the church more and more. This explains why the officials supported the Arminians.

In The Netherlands, there was a Reformed State Church. The government officials wanted an Arminian State Church. Then they wouldn't have to worry about resistance from within the church. Especially Oldenbarnevelt, the main leader of the Dutch Republic, strongly opposed the autonomy of the church.



*Johannes Uitenbogaert was a Dutch Protestant minister and leader of the Remonstrants after Arminius died. He lived from 1557-1664*

In the year 1609, Arminius died of tuberculosis, but the unrest in the churches continued. Rev Uitenbogaert, the court chaplain of Prins Maurice, became the new leader of the Arminians.

## REMONSTRANCE

In 1610 the Arminians sent a '*remonstrance*' to the government of the province of Holland. A '*Remonstrance*'?

What is that?

Let me briefly explain. A Remonstrance is a written statement of objections or a confession of faith.

The Arminians sent a document to the government outlining what they believed and taught. That document was drawn up in Gouda by Rev. Uitenbogaert with the help of forty other

Arminians. Because of that '*Remonstrance*,' the Arminians were called *Remonstrants*. Remember that name! In that *Remonstrance*, they asked for the government's approval and protection, something the officials had advised them to do.

The Gomarists, those who followed Gomarus, heard what their opponents, the Arminians, had done. Therefore, a year later, in 1611, they sent a '*Counter-Remonstrance*' to the government of the province of Holland. In this '*Counter Remonstrance*,' they wrote what *they* professed and believed. That is why the Gomarists were called *Counter-Remonstrants*.

According to the Remonstrants, the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism needed revision, meaning change, as they were not acceptable anymore! Obviously, the Counter-Remonstrants opposed that. They wanted proof - based on God's Word - of what was wrong with these Doctrinal Standards, and then they could correct this.

But the Remonstrants vehemently refused. Not surprising because they knew that they would lose if that happened. The officials tried hard to reconcile both parties. They thought that all that wrangling and quarrelling must stop. Indeed, it should, but not at the expense of the truth. But the Remonstrants and the officials did not mean it that way. What *did* they mean?

## TOLERANCE OR TRUTH

When the Counter-Remonstrant ministers warned against the dangerous and misleading errors of the Remonstrants in their sermons, the officials became angry. Those ministers were not to do that but had to show tolerance. They were to treat the Remonstrant ministers as brothers. But they believed it was okay when the *Remonstrant* ministers openly proclaimed their abominable errors from the pulpit! The Counter-Remonstrants had to be silent, and the Remonstrants could freely poison the people with their false doctrines!

You understand that the Counter-Remonstrants were not *allowed* to stay silent. It was their *duty*

to warn the congregations. God required that from them because God's honour was at stake. The Reformation would be undone if the Remonstrants were not opposed but received free rein to advance their ideas. Then that fierce, bitter struggle against Rome would have been futile, and all those martyrs would have shed their blood in vain.

Oh, Satan is so cunning! He could not prevent the Reformation, but now, with this devilish attack, he tried to make the Reformation worthless. The struggle was fierce and intense. The ministers who proclaimed the scriptural truth did not keep silent, and the government officials, including Oldenbarnevelt, didn't like that one bit! Why not? Because *they* wished to decide what was to be believed and taught in the church. Those Counter-Remonstrants *must* keep silent. If not willingly, then forcefully! The government officials will show *them* who had authority in the church! They wanted to be in charge at all costs. If the Counter-Remonstrants continued to be obstructive, then their resistance had to be broken. They had to **obey**, end of story!

We hope to tell you more about that in the next chapter.



*Johan van  
Oldenbarnevelt.  
1547-1619.*

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

## QUESTIONS

- Who were the 'Mud-beggars'?
- What was the basis for all instruction at the University of Leiden?
- Describe the background of Arminius.
- Describe the background of Gomarus.
- Why did Gomarus oppose the appointment of Arminius as a professor?
- Describe Arminius' doctrine regarding the following points:
  - cause of salvation.
  - the necessity of regeneration.
  - election.
  - punishment (eternal)
  - cooperation of man in salvation
  - perseverance of saints.
  - Church-state relationship.
- How may Arminius be called a Pelagian? A Semi-Pelagian?
- How did the dispute between the professors affect the students? The community? The entire church?
- Why did Gomarus oppose a hearing in the High Court?
- Why did he beg for a national synod?
- Why did the government officials prefer a 'provincial synod'?
- Who was Oldenbarnevelt?
- What is a 'remonstrance'?
- Why were the Arminians called Remonstrants?
- Who were the Counter-Remonstrants?
- Why couldn't the Counter-Remonstrants keep silent regarding Remonstrant doctrine?
- Explain how Satan was at work in The Netherlands to nullify the Reformation.

## FOR FURTHER STUDY

- Read Arminius' list of errors in this chapter, then find one Bible text refuting the first five errors in question six. Write out the text.
- What do you think is worse:
  - The Roman Catholic persecution during the Spanish occupation of The Netherlands or
  - The period of the struggle against the Remonstrant doctrine. Explain your answer.