

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 as if he was 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 elder were banned from the town. When five elders and a deacon sided with their expelled minister, they lost their town-citizenship and were not allowed to trade or work within Schoonhoven anymore. 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 even that was denied them, and they had to pay a hefty fine for trying!

Yet the congregation did not give up. The next 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 within the gates, they will follow their minister and meet outside the town. 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 chief 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 decide to travel to the Hague and complain to the governor.

However, when they finally arrive, they are bullied by Oldenbarnevelt and sent away. Shameful, don't you think?...

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



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.

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 be taught by the ministers. In other words: the Remonstrants are given the freedom to preach as they wished but the Counter-Remonstrants have

to 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, *they* were intolerant. Some towns in the province of Holland refused to sign that 'Tolerance Act' but the majority agreed with it.

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, who knows very well that they want to get rid of him, is extremely careful. He wants to continue to serve 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 that they are trying to catch him out, hoping that he will say something wrong, something against the Remonstrant ministers, so they can accuse 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: *'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 has said that they should resist! He has not preached tolerance, but resistance!



Reverend Geselius.

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 the homes. The Remonstrants do not tolerate that either, so they expel Rev. Geselius from Rotterdam.

On top of that, an announcement comes into force, a law, that the Contra-Remonstrants are no longer permitted to have church services, not even outside the city! If they do, they have to pay



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

a fine of 300 guilders (a large sum of money in those days) and the place where 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 so offends a lot of people.

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. Rev. Venator, together with four other Remonstrant ministers, is dismissed by classis Alkmaar. They are no longer allowed to preach. That decision is correct; the Contra-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 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 dismiss this newly appointed council as well and this time chooses a *third* city council themselves! Guess what...this third set of councillors consists exclusively 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.



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

Of course, that third city council, the Remonstrant council, makes sure that the godless Rev. Venator could get in the pulpit again! Terrible, don't you think?

It gets so bad that the Contra-Remonstrants are no longer allowed to come together to read the Bible! It looks like the days of the Spanish Inquisition from the time of the Great Reformation have indeed returned.

REVEREND ROSAEUS IN THE HAGUE

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

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

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. Uytenbogaert 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. Uytenbogaert. Inevitably it comes to a head between those two ministers. Governor Oldenbarnevelt gets involved in that dispute. He demands that Rev. Rosaeus should live in peace with Rev. Uytenbogaert. Yes, he *even* says they must celebrate Holy Supper together! Rev Rosaeus cannot 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 said:

"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

there are still thousands of true believers who 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 from The Hague walk to Rijswijk every Sunday to listen to their deposed minister. They would rather walk for hours to Rijswijk than to 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 rained, they came home wet and mud stained. At times they are even pelted with stones. These 'stubborn' actions of the 'Mudbeggars' is not to the liking of Governor Oldenbarnevelt. 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. Up till 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



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

Some Counter-Remonstrant ministers, including the well-known Rev Trigland, now come to visit him. Respectfully they request the Prince to arrange for the Counter-Remonstrants to be able to go to church in The Hague itself, 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.”



*Prince Maurice van Oranje
(1567-1625)*

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 hear of 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 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 takes care of his day to day affairs. Maurice wants him to arrange for the oppressed congregation of Rev. Rosaeus to meet in his palace and Mr Musch organises this. So a church service is held there for the Counter-Remonstrants.

Oldenbarnevelt is furious. He shall have that impertinent Mr. Musch killed because he openly dared to defy the commands of the local government! 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?



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

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 been encouraging Maurice for some time that he should 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 mistreat 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, 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, isn't it? It is not a regular workday.

But those people are not there to work. The city council of The Hague has promised that they will have that gun factory refitted as a church, which



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

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, months went by, but nothing happens, 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 all over the place, 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 and 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, from early morning till late evening, they work hard. They build a pulpit; new pews are installed, and when it is Saturday evening, that big project is finished. Hundreds of people worked on it.

On Sunday, the doors open and the old gun factory was transformed into a beautiful church. By everyone putting their shoulder to the wheel in good harmony, the impossible may be accomplished. 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 retinue leave the palace. He is going to church. Nothing unusual, is it? However, they do not go to 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 can understand that these people are very glad to receive such a powerful ally. Since then that church is called 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.

In the 1st 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 2nd place, the law also stipulates that the cities are authorised to enlist soldiers, a 'local militia'. Prince Maurice is 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, through this *Sharp Resolution*, the cities recruit their own army over which *Prince Maurice* has no say! Now the city council can use their

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

local militia to compel the Counter-Remonstrants to stay home and Prince Maurice can't do anything about it!

In the 3rd place, the *Sharp Resolution* stipulates that the civil justice system is no longer permitted to handle complaints about *ecclesiastical* matters. 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! The one province of Holland 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* will need to be approved by the Remonstrant councillors and they will never do that!

Do you see how cleverly the devil works? The acceptance of the *Sharp Resolution*, this law of high treason, makes the situation extremely dangerous. It brings the entire nation into crisis; immediate intervention is not only essential, but critical! Thankfully, the Federal Government realises that too. The Federal Government consists of representatives from all the Dutch provinces, and these representatives are primarily 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 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



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

on what to do... and look, suddenly Prince Maurice enters the room. This does not please those 'gentleman' at all! They get a terrible shock!

Maurice tells them in no uncertain terms 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 that he is deadly serious and will not be messed with! They refuse to discharge the local militia. OK, then *he* will do it. Early the next morning, at about 3.30 am, he orders his troops to surround the marketplace of the city 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, among whom are Oldenbarnevelt and Hugo Grotius are taken prisoner. At the age of 71, Oldenbarnevelt is condemned to death by a court in The Hague, which consists of twenty-four judges. It is a heavy punishment but. . . *just!* By his stubborn attitude, he has brought the church into great danger and the country to the brink of civil war. He has committed *high treason*.

It is true, for many years he rendered invaluable service to The Netherlands, and that 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



Johan van Oldenbarnevelt beheaded 13 05 1619

innocence. He says: “O God, what is the end of man.” Indeed, what is the end of a person who despite all evidence against him, continues to maintain that he is right. How blinded he was!

On his gravestone is written: '*Let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall!*'

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 stipulations 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.