

# Summary

## *Schools are nurseries for the church: education in Zeeland and States-Flanders, 1578-1801*

The title of this thesis is taken from the explanation given by the elders and deacons of the Dutch Reformed Church at Sint Maartensdijk on the Zeeland island of Tholen when they resolved in 1683 to speak to all the parents in their parish membership and to admonish them to send their children to school. This was a call that was entirely consistent with the national government's aims: in the Dutch Republic, education was meant to be a handmaid of the temporal and spiritual community. This thesis investigates how education was arranged in the south-western Dutch coastal province of Zeeland and in the Generality of States-Flanders to the south of Zeeland; who influenced education; and what its outcomes were.

The introductory first chapter sets out the geographical, chronological and subject-matter bounds of the enquiry in this book. While Zeeland and States-Flanders did not form a single unit of administration during the period of this study, they were nevertheless closely intertwined cultural entities. The study commences in 1578, on the brink of what would prove to be the decisive separation of the Northern Netherlands (thereafter the United Provinces) from the Southern (Spanish) Netherlands. It closes in the year 1801, when the enactment of the first Dutch national legislation on education put an end to Zeeland's provincial autonomy over its schools. For States-Flanders, the study stops six years previous to that date, when the territory was subsumed directly into the French Empire. After a historiographical sketch of schooling in the region, the study provides an overview of the sources that inform this dissertation. Practically all the archives germane to the topic have been consulted for its writing. As part of the research, an inventory was put together of all known educators in the period and region in question.

The second chapter opens by exploring the educational situation obtaining in the province before the Dutch Revolt became a fully-fledged war with the Habsburgs in 1572. Antebellum Zeeland had three kinds of schools, namely chapter schools, monastery schools and parish schoolrooms, which principally taught literacy in Dutch but which also gave Latin and singing lessons, since the pupils had a role in ecclesiastical ceremonies. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, direction of the parish schools had gradually been taken over by the town councils, owing to the importance that the councillors attached to their populations having good schooling. This step reduced the degree of influence that the Roman Catholic Church was able to exert over education. Economic, social and cultural developments in the period stimulated the founding of grammar schools teaching through the medium of Dutch (then known as *Nederduits* or Low German), and of French schools, as well as primary schools for younger children. To differentiate those grammar schools which were supported by town council bursaries, the name *grote school* (high school) began to be used. At that category of school, Latin did remain a key subject, albeit as a preparation for university study rather than for church service.

Developments in civil administration during and after the Dutch Revolt brought about a situation in Zeeland whereby the only public exercise of religion permitted was that of the Dutch Reformed Church. The same situation obtained in the northernmost section of Flanders, which was obtained by

the Dutch Republic and became a Generality. There, the States-General and the Council of State of the United Provinces exercised direct rule from the Hague, excepting the cities and environs of Axel, Hulst and Biervliet (known collectively as the *Committimus*), whose government was lodged with the States of Zeeland, which also had direct rule of the fortresses of Liefkenshoek and Lillo on the Scheldt. The Reformation entailed great consequences for ecclesiastical life. The Dutch Reformed Church expanded greatly in membership during the seventeenth century, with the vast majority of Zeelanders and many of the inhabitants of States-Flanders joining the denomination. The Roman Catholics ended up as a small minority in the province of Zeeland proper, although their position was stronger in States-Flanders and they even remained the majority in the east of that territory. Zeeland's defection to the cause of Prince Willem of Orange was of great significance to schooling: schoolmasters were faced with the choice of resigning, leaving the province or professing the Reformed Faith. Another development during the Reformation was that the *grote scholen* reduced their curriculum to Latin and Greek instruction only, and having gained the monopoly on teaching the Classical languages, were renamed Latin schools. From now on, the *Nederduitse* schools concentrated upon reading, writing and sums. Growing interest in French as the international language of trade in the late sixteenth century prompted the founding of the French schools, which (like the primary schools) were primarily found in the towns. Urban and rural sources indicate the great measure of success that the Reformation was enjoying in Zeeland. It can be concluded that by around 1590, the province's educational system had been entirely recast in a Reformed mould and that this process was encountering less resistance than it was elsewhere in the Dutch Republic.

New schoolmasters and schoolmistresses entered the service of the schools, most of whom had come to Zeeland from what had now become the Southern Netherlands. In the period 1578-1600, more than two-thirds of all educators in Zeeland were of Flemish or Brabantine origin. In States-Flanders, too, many of the new teachers had come from those regions under Spanish rule, but not the majority of them, who had in fact come the opposite way: south from Zeeland. Grants awarded by the States of Zeeland and the Council of State from the proceeds of confiscated Roman Catholic church property allowed the creation of a network of schools that covered the whole region, with a good geographical spread of schools in population terms.

The third chapter considers the powers of civil government and of the Dutch Reformed Church in schooling, and how these competences interrelated. The framework documents for these provisions were the 1583 school regulations (drawn up by the States of Zeeland) and the 1591 order of church government. Since the six cities with representation in the provincial States – Middelburg, Zierikzee, Goes, Tholen, Vlissingen (Flushing) and Veere – insisted upon their ancient rights to set their own school regulations, the provincially-set school order was in practice a largely rural and small-town affair. Councillors, manorial barons and church officers all had to consult with each other in the appointment of schoolmasters. The main reason for this was that in by far the majority of parishes, the position of schoolmaster was jointly held with that of church precentor. The degree of church involvement in these appointments was strengthened by the practice that newly-appointed schoolmasters were examined by the local presbytery of the Dutch Reformed Church, which also had an ongoing function of oversight of them. When disputes arose over schoolmasters, the officially competent body was the States of Zeeland, but in practice much was left to the discretion of local councillors.

In States-Flanders, schooling was a matter for the Council of State in the Hague, acting jointly with the local town councils and the aldermen of the Castellany of Sluis (*Vrije van Sluis*) and the Barony of Hulst (*Hulsterambacht*). The school regulations imposed by the States-General in 1655 set the key provisions for the Generality territories. Yet the church had a say in education in States-Flanders, too, because the territory was bound by the Zeeland order of church government. Once the school regulations had been put in place, the Council of State had a greater say in appointments (as it was now given a veto over schoolmasters'

salaries) at the expense of the church. As the eighteenth century progressed, the Council of State allowed greater scope for schoolmaster appointments to be decided at local level.

City councils continued to stand firm on their autonomy and accordingly drafted their own school regulations, which as far as their contents were concerned were nevertheless consistent with the provincial school order of Zeeland and the school regulations of the States-General. Only the city of Middelburg saw the establishment (in 1591) of a Guild of Schoolmasters, which was feasible there due to the large number of schoolmasters and schoolmistresses living there. One of the effects of the cities' autonomy was that they (and a few of the towns) took the step of appointing school inspectors, who were typically given the title of *scholaster*. In rural areas, the manors were obliged to co-operate with the parish church officers when schoolmasters had to be appointed, since the appointing body prescribed by the order of church government was a *collegium qualificatum*. In many local instances, the lord of the manor was content to leave schooling issues to the village aldermen.

Little by little, the Dutch Reformed Church's grip on education loosened. This process happened most prominently in States-Flanders, where the presbyteries simply lacked the means to oblige schoolmasters to report for an examination. On all the islands of Zeeland except Schouwen-Duiveland, the local presbyteries ceased exercising oversight of the schools through periodic visitations. They had come to see that this was not an effective way of wielding influence. Moreover, the church authorities were hampered by the fact that after 1638, no permission was granted for a provincial Synod of Zeeland to assemble, making it difficult to formulate a common position. More influential over schools were the elders and deacons of parishes in the countryside and the smaller towns, where they enjoyed a majority of seats on the *collegium qualificatum* and could thus in many cases use that body to write school regulations. However, although parish church officers were able to exert a more substantial oversight of the schools than were the presbyteries, there was no continuity of oversight.

As regards church-state relations in schooling matters, there was no lack of clarity by either party that primary responsibility lay with the government. The degree of influence enjoyed by the church officers varied from town to town but the church always played second fiddle to the civil authorities. To maintain their influence, church officers were prepared to make extensive concessions, even ones that were in breach of the order of church government. Like the town councillors, the lords of the manor also sought to hold their own against church influence. The States of Zeeland provided a degree of protection against church officers overstepping their authority, and the church officers themselves engaged in tactical manoeuvring to bring recalcitrant lords of the manor to heel and make them conform to the order of church government. The government supported the Dutch Reformed Church by unyieldingly enforcing the prohibition on non-Reformed educators. Everything that smacked of Roman Catholicism was forbidden from schooling, although schoolmasters were mindful of the feelings of those of other confessions. The only exceptions made were in Middelburg, where the Lutherans were granted permission to start their own school, and in States-Flanders, where Lutheran emigrants from Salzburg had settled.

The second half of the eighteenth century saw increasing governmental encroachments in the schools, even in the countryside, at the expense of the churchmen. This was the pretext for the state's monopolisation of education. The other tendency of the age was the growing ecumenism of approach towards non-Reformed confessions in schools. One of the results of this trend was the founding of a Lutheran and a small Jewish school in Middelburg. The Reformed Church itself also embraced confessional pluralism in schooling, principally because it was keen to retain what influence it still possessed. The French-driven 'velvet revolution' of 1795 swept away a limited number of schoolmasters who insisted on loyalty to the defeated House of Orange. As a result of the removal of the Reformed Church's privileges with the declaration of equality among religions and the separation of church and state, church involvement in education was prohibited, but so too was the involvement of those barons whose manorial

rights were declared to have been abolished. The result fell short of a complete church-state divorce in schools, however, for in the countryside they remained dependent on each other to appoint the joint schoolmaster-precentors of parishes. The new architecture of Dutch government also brought about an end to cities' ancient rights to schooling autonomy, when universal statutes on education were passed in 1801, 1803 and 1806. The banning of the Heidelberg Catechism from schools was a logical consequence of the harmonisation of schools nationwide.

The fourth chapter is devoted to the educators of Zeeland and States-Flanders. It is particularly in this chapter that the results of prosopographic research are harnessed, above all to document the professionalisation of schooling. The total number of schoolmasters, schoolmistresses, school rectors, co-rectors and preceptors in the region was approximately 3,500. The usual career path in the period was that one began as an assistant master (*ondermeester*) and worked one's way up to schoolmaster by one's own study. From the seventeenth century onwards, a university degree was typically required to teach at a grammar (Latin) school. Admission requirements included professional competence, membership of the Dutch Reformed Church, and an impeccable history of conduct. Teachers entered the profession through two main routes: appointment (*benoeming*) and admission (*toelating*). Where appointment was the route, it was preceded by a selection made by the competent body, which chose the candidate from its own shortlist. Both appointments and admissions could include the sitting of a teaching examination, although that was not always the case. What was usual, however, was that schoolmaster-precentors were examined by the local presbytery. In Middelburg, the examinations were arranged by the Guild of Schoolmasters, which in addition to this gatekeeper role championed the common interest of teachers.

Most schoolmasters at *Nederduitsch* schools and French schools were originally from the province in which they were appointed or admitted; this applied equally in States-Flanders. There was not usually a strong desire to appoint teachers who had grown up in the village or town where the school was situated, but there was a preference for locals who at least came from the same or a neighbouring island of Zeeland. The greatest degree of out-of-province appointments was on Schouwen-Duiveland, where it was common for teachers to come from Holland (north of Zeeland). In States-Flanders, we see an increase in external influences, including foreign influences, upon schools during the eighteenth century. From the second half of the seventeenth century onwards, the Latin schools witnessed a sharp drop in the number of teachers who came from Zeeland and States-Flanders themselves. Ultimately, the situation was that only a quarter of the Latin school teachers had grown up within the region. As part of the research into the social origins of teachers, the study also considers their previous trades and professions. It finds that while there were instances of schoolmasters' sons choosing the profession, this was not commonplace, so that teaching could hardly be said to run in families in the period.

Teachers' success in the profession was largely a matter of their personal performance. Schoolmasters had an example to set in society and accordingly were expected to lead exemplary lives within the local community. It was above all with the clergy that they had the most to do. It was impressed upon schoolmasters that they were not as powerful as the local church ministers, but on the other hand, they were able to accumulate considerable authority over the general population, from which authority they derived their status. This standing would be put at risk if they indulged in any misconduct. Research into a representative selection indicates that the vast majority of schoolteachers conducted themselves well. Dismissals were rare, amounting to only two per cent in the sample. One of the ways in which educators were kept on the straight and narrow was through disciplinary provisions imposed by the local church officers.

If they wished to gain promotion, schoolmasters had to be prepared to be highly mobile. The key factor that lured them to pastures new was a higher salary. Consequently, the norm was for schoolmasters to progress from smaller to larger population centres during their careers. Yet there were also cases of

schoolmasters forsaking the city for the countryside for a pay rise. Increasing a talented schoolmaster's or rector's salary was a tried and tested method of retaining him in this period. There was not a great deal of movement out of teaching into other professions. However, employers left considerable latitude for schoolmasters to engage in other activities besides teaching, largely to boost their income. Most of these extra-curricular earners had to do directly with their educational skills and their status as educators. These secondary occupations helped increase their involvement in the local community.

Rectors and regular teachers at the Latin schools had their salaries paid by the town councils. This was also true of some of the schoolmasters at *Nederduitsch* and French schools, and for some of the schoolmistresses at the French schools. Nevertheless, they derived a major part of their income from school fees and boarding fees. For the schoolmaster-precentors, the grants from confiscated church goods formed a basic income and this was supplemented by school fees and by their own earnings from secondary activities. The educators who were most reliant of all upon school fees were the remaining schoolmasters and schoolmistresses at *Nederduitsch* schools. Most town councils raised the level of their financial contributions to schooling during the eighteenth century to safeguard the quality of education provided. School fees remained unaltered, or were raised only very slightly, during the two centuries of the research period. Supplementary incomes could be had from the sale of school supplies, and some schoolmasters (especially the rural ones) were also given emoluments such as free accommodation. In the eighteenth century, a key duty of the rural schoolmaster was to serve as the local tax collector. In the smallest villages, a schoolmaster's pay was hardly better than a farmhand's. They were better off, however, in larger settlements.

To be a married man was not merely a desirable characteristic in any schoolmaster but actually essential. The schoolmaster's wife was his support and mainstay behind the scenes. They tended to marry within their own social milieu, and this was true too of the rectors of Latin schools. There was not a great deal of support provided to schoolmasters' widows and orphans, and what there was tended to be limited to immediate aid after the death. Owing to the lack of pension provision, the great majority of educators stayed in post until their deaths. It was rare for them to retire due to old age, chronic illness or invalidity. Even rarer were cases of dismissal for incompetence or misconduct. The harshest criticism of education in the late eighteenth-century Netherlands was directed at the figure of the schoolmarm, who was typically derided as a silly, arrogant and incompetent woman. Numerous proposals to improve education in this age came to naught. This chapter is also furnished with conclusions.

The education itself that was provided in the period is the theme of the fifth chapter. After a description of the Latin, *Nederduitsch* and French schools, we turn to the primary schools and the *Nederduitsch* and French girls' schools, followed by the needlework and knitting schools, the orphanages, the poorhouse schools, and the English and German schools in the province. Home schooling is also described. The government increasingly involved itself in providing accommodation for teachers during the period. Some of the schoolmasters and schoolmistresses in the region had to buy or rent their homes for themselves. In States-Flanders in particular, more than half of the schoolmasters had to arrange their own accommodation. School hours and holidays were fairly uniformly set: the school day typically lasted five to six hours, six days a week, and two free afternoons were the norm. Lessons began and ended in prayer. In the summer months, the rural schools emptied out as the pupils joined in the farming, returning to school in the autumn. The older youth availed themselves of evening classes in winter to better themselves.

Schoolwork was done individually. At the *Nederduitsch* and French schools, the master gave the pupils a task to carry out which he then tested them on orally or checked their written work. The sequence of learning was first spelling, next reading, then writing and finally sums. In the classroom, the younger pupils learning spelling and reading sat on benches; those who had progressed to writing and sums were at desks. Wherever possible, boys and girls were seated separately. Class composition was determined by

subject. The Latin schools were streamed by ability, often with four, five or six sets. As at the *Nederduitsch* and French schools, pupils at these schools were seated in their order of achievement, with the best pupils at the front. There was a great deal of historical continuity in the schoolbooks used. It is in the latter half of the eighteenth century that we discern the first signs of a new teaching method coming in: now and again, a schoolmaster would walk away from his board to look over his pupils' shoulders. There was also a move towards more profound subject matter coverage, such as by paying more attention to grammar. The subjects increasingly began bleeding together; some of the schoolbooks used were replaced; and the school board began to be seen. The transition in classroom arrangement to face-to-face, lecture-style teaching was begun at this time.

Competitive spirit among pupils was a vital part of the teaching methodology of the age. It was fostered by the award of prizes. These were initially offered by schoolmasters and schoolmistresses, and later, from the second quarter of the seventeenth century onwards, the town councils took up the practice of making prizes available to pupils at the *Nederduitsch* and French schools. In imitation of the Latin schools, the prizes took the form of little books. This practice was also imitated in some of the villages. Prizegiving was the apogee of the school year.

Religious instruction was a core element of schooling in the period. The close relations that schools had with the Dutch Reformed Church were reflected in the fact that pupils learned the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed and the Ten Commandments by heart and rehearsed the metric psalms that were sung in church. The questions and answers of the Heidelberg Catechism were also drilled at school, and the ablest pupils were allowed to recite them during church services. This was a means of preparation for the pupils' future standing as members of the Reformed Church. The province of Zeeland made important contributions to the national stock of catechism pamphlets, especially *Kort Begrip* (A brief summary of the Christian religion, 1608 [still in use]) and *Den wegh der zalicheyt* (The way of salvation, 1620). In the latter half of the eighteenth century, more emphasis began to be laid on pious manners and on Bible reading aloud. Simultaneously, the attention given to catechism lessened. This led to the catechism pamphlets vanishing from the school curriculum, part of the wider abolition of dogmatism in education. This did not signal the end of religion in school, which continued to be regarded as a substantial part of children's upbringing.

Arithmetic was taught only to those pupils who were deemed to have need of it in later life. Zeeland schoolmasters wrote several arithmetic books of their own, although this did not prevent the nationally-popular primer of Willem Bartjens from being widely used in Zeeland and States-Flanders too. Singing was a regular component of school life, but only at the *Nederduitsch* schools where instruction was in the national language. History, especially the nation's story (referred to as 'History of the Fatherland' in the Netherlands of the period), was given increasing prominence in schools as the eighteenth century wore on. The degree of attention paid to the natural sciences and geography remained modest. Handicraft was one of the subjects taught to girls: needlework and knitting were skills that would stand them in good stead in womanhood.

In the eighteenth century, the French schools evolved into educational institutions offering a broad curriculum, including elegant manners and cultivated habits. This made them the obvious choice as finishing-schools for those young people who were not destined to go up to university. For those whose fathers did intend to send them on to higher education, the Latin schools retained their market share, able as they were to teach Latin and Greek. Schooling in the Classical languages had a great propensity for character formation. Both the Latin schools and the French schools conducted their classes through the medium of those languages, as this was the best way of mastering the languages well. Putting on plays in the target languages was another of the ways in which those schools' pupils gained fluency, but this began to be frowned upon in the early seventeenth century as the Dutch Reformed Church was opposed

to theatre. In the eighteenth century, the Latin schools, too, saw their curricula broaden, with more time now spent on history and geography. The Latin schools also had a public profile, as their rectors started delivering orations. Middelburg was the first to see this development, in 1691. Along the same lines, there were prizegiving solemnities and orations delivered by star pupils.

Discipline was an essential aspect of school life in the period. The purpose of values instruction was the inculcation of obedience towards God, parents and all authority figures. Punishment, where called for, was part of this discipline. In the latter half of the eighteenth century, corporal punishment came increasingly to be replaced by religiously-worded remonstrations and by other kinds of sanction, such as detention after school. Private education was largely confined to the elite and never grew to be a substantial business. There was, however, specialism in school type, with institutions teaching seamanship, land surveying, arithmetic, algebra, bookkeeping, draughtsmanship, music, lacemaking, sewing, knitting and spinning.

In the provincial capital of Middelburg, the Zeelanders also made a foray into providing their own higher education. The foundation of the city's *Illustre School* in 1611 was an act of defiance against the University of Leiden, which had come to be associated in the Zeeland mind with highly objectionable Arminianism. The chief Calvinist who led the counter-offensive against Arminius' doctrine, Gomarus, was actually persuaded to resign his tenure at Leiden and go and lecture in Middelburg. After the theological points of contention had been settled nationally by the Synod of Dort (1618-1619), there was no further need for Calvinists to arrange in-house academic study and the Middelburg university programme was abandoned. Attempts to revive the institution in 1650 and again in 1676 petered out. From 1706 onwards, new lecturers and professors were again given appointments at the *Illustre School*, but these were sinecures to reward worthy preachers and teachers. Their appointment to the institution was a means of paying them a top-up salary to lessen the likelihood of them leaving Middelburg. Although the *Illustre School* did not amount to a great deal in practice, it was a cherished asset of the city council to burnish the reputation of Middelburg as a scholarly city. The next largest cities in the province, Zierikzee, Goes and Flushing, set up lectureships to the same end: to provide an extra reward to the Latin school rector to retain them for the city or in order to allow for medicine to be taught locally. Upon his decease in 1757, a wealthy city father of Zierikzee, Master Pieter Mogge, bequeathed monies to found a university. The hope was that this would finally give the Zeelanders the pride of having their own provincial university. However, the plans were frustrated by the University of Leiden working to undermine the scheme and by the island location of Zierikzee, hardly conducive to its being a seat of learning.

The Zeeland Scientific Society (*Zeeuws Genootschap der Wetenschappen*) also involved itself in the matters of education and upbringing in 1778, soliciting submissions for an essay prize on the improvement of the schools. The winning entries, by preachers H.J. Krom and D.C. van Voorst and by schoolmaster Kornelis van der Palm, were widely celebrated but led to precious little in the way of practical initiatives. Ultimately, it was the Association for the General Good (*Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen*), founded in 1784, which took the lead in this regard. Geographically, it was the cities across Zeeland and the villages of the province's northernmost island of Schouwen-Duiveland which were the most amenable to modernisation in education. The greatest resistance was encountered in the countryside of the southernmost islands, Walcheren and Zuid-Beveland.

The sixth chapter is devoted to the pupils and to the outcomes of education in the region and period of the study. Considered first is participation in schooling, then the size of the school population. Pupils took three years to learn to read and write. Ten years or a little older was the customary age to leave school at the *Nederduitsch* schools. In the late eighteenth century, the average school leaving age went up to twelve because pupils who were keen to become thoroughly accomplished at reading, writing and sums were now spending five years on their schooling. At the French schools, five years was a customary length of schooling for boys; for girls, it was often three years. Studying at a Latin school tended to take five or six

years. There was no legal educational requirement in this period: Parents decided for themselves whether or not their children would be educated outside the home. The great majority of them did send their children to school. Throughout the period, they displayed a great concern for keeping track of what their children were learning. Parents made their own decisions on which school to send their children to, with quality playing a key role in their choices. Quality therefore served as the most important market mechanism, particularly for the boarding schools.

Dutch society of the period required everyone to be at least able to read, so efforts were made to provide schooling free of charge to the children of the destitute as well as of those who were simply not well able to afford school fees. All the effort made for good education paid off in the results that the region produced. Around 1800, 69 per cent of the population of the province of Zeeland was able to both read and write; literacy was lower in what had just ceased being known as States-Flanders, the main reason for this being that the Roman Catholics less often sent their children to school. If we take our data only from the islands of Zeeland proper, then the literacy rate was 82 per cent. This made the province (which had actually just been abolished as a unit of government after the French invasion) the most literate in the Netherlands.

The seventh and last chapter draws together a number of threads from the study to trace and summarise the developments occurring in over two centuries of education in Zeeland and States-Flanders. As a chapter, it addresses the issues of ideological motivation and the success of the Dutch Reformed Church in confessionalising education. Attention is also paid to the religious and economic factors that influenced the penetration of literacy. The key actors in education in the period were the government, the church and parents, and the key mechanism at play was educational quality. The good results achieved by pupils were the result of the efforts of educators. The population of Zeeland enjoyed excellent career opportunities due to the plethora of types of school available. Many were well equipped for the rest of their lives by the education they received.

(Vertaling: Alexander Thomson)