

**HISTORY OF THE SCHOOL OF THE  
REFORMED PROTESTANT DUTCH  
CHURCH, IN THE CITY OF NEW  
YORK, FROM 1633 TO THE  
PRESENT TIME**

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History of the School of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, in the City of New York, from 1633 to the Present Time by Henry Webb Dunshee

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# HISTORY OF THE SCHOOL

OF THE

REFORMED PROTESTANT DUTCH CHURCH,

IN THE

City of New-York,

FROM 1633 TO THE PRESENT TIME.

BY

HENRY WEBB DUNSHEE.

With an Introduction

BY

REV. THOMAS DE WITT, D.D.

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# INTRODUCTION.

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## A HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE PAROCHIAL SCHOOL SYSTEM IN HOLLAND SUBSEQUENT TO THE REFORMATION.

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BY REV. THOMAS DE WITT, D. D.

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THIS volume gives the History of the School of the Reformed Dutch Church in this city, as far as it can be ascertained from surviving documents in various sources. This school was co-eval with the first settlement by Hollanders here, and has continued, to the present time, an instrument of much good in training the children, especially of the poorer class, under a direct religious influence. It has proved, under the Divine blessing, a nursery to the Church, gathering many into her communion; and it has introduced a very large proportion as useful members of society. It was the custom, after the Reformation in Holland, to send out with emigrants going to any of its colonies, however few in number, a well-qualified schoolmaster, who was a member of the Church, and accredited by his competence and piety to take charge of the instruction of children and youth. During the absence or want of a minister, he was bound to conduct public worship, by reading a ser-



mon, offering prayers, etc., on the Sabbath, and on other occasions. With the earliest agricultural settlement of Manhattan Island and its vicinity, such a schoolmaster and *woorleser* was sent out, and from the earliest period the School has continued to this day.

The importance of the religious element in early education cannot be too highly estimated in reference to the formation of character, and the direction of the future course of life. Under the Old Testament economy, the Divine direction was: "*These words shall be in thine heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.*" In the early Christian Church, particular attention was paid to the scriptural and religious instruction of youth, and constant reference is made to the office and exercises of catechists and catechumens. The witnesses for the truth in the dark middle ages of the reign of Papal usurpation were remarkable for their faithfulness in the religious instruction and discipline of their children. The excellent and devoted Waldenses were probably indebted, under God, to their peculiar diligence in the discharge of this duty for their remarkable success in keeping their body together, under the influences and persecutions that pressed upon them; in transmitting their testimony from generation to generation, and in remaining continually a beacon-light amid the prevailing darkness, for the admiration and guidance of the Church in future times. History informs us that they bestowed constant and careful attention on the religious instruction of their children and youth, that they were in the habit of preparing excellent and appropriate catechisms and formularies, and that the pastors made the religious training of their youth a leading and unceasing object of their labors.

At the period of the Reformation, the different parts of the Protestant Church made this a prominent object of their care and efforts. Formularies of divine truth, and catechisms adapted to different ages, were early introduced. Many of them obtained ecclesiastical sanction and authority, and were directed to be explained in the pulpit and the schools. It would be interesting to trace the history of the introduction and use of catechetical instruction in the churches and schools, from the earliest time of the Reformation, by the Church of England, the Church of Scotland, the Reformed Churches of France, Switzerland, Germany, and Holland, etc. Measures were taken in Scotland, at an early period of the Reformation, leading to the institution of parochial schools, widely diffused, under the supervision of the churches, and making religious instruction a pervading and distinguishing element.

We can here only make a brief reference to the Church of Holland. No where was the struggle for the principles of the Reformation so severe and (we may say) so crushing. Charles V., who held the crown of Spain, and the patrimonial inheritance of the Netherlands, was elected Emperor of Germany. He found it his policy to treat the Protestant princes, and the professors of the Protestant faith there, with comparative indulgence; while in the Netherlands, hereditarily devolving upon him, he introduced his Spanish armies and the Inquisition. The page of history is replete with the account of the severity and extent of the religious persecutions by Spanish and Papal power. Thousands upon thousands lost their lives, while many more fled for refuge to other parts. But then the Word of the Lord took deep root. The first religious societies of the Reformed faith called themselves "*De Kerken van Christus onder het Kruys*;" "The Churches of Christ under the Cross." In 1566 the

first Synod met at Antwerp, minutes of which have not been handed down. The noted and cruel Duke of Alva succeeded to the Viceroyalty of the Netherlands in 1567. He boasted that during his seven years' regency, *eighteen thousand* had been put to death by him for heresy. The Reformed held their Synod at Wesel, now in Rhenish Prussia, on the Rhine, in 1568; and at Embden, in East Friesland, in 1571; not being able to find a place of safety in the Netherlands. They called themselves "*Believers under the Cross scattered throughout the Netherlands.*" At these Synods, particular reference was made, and provision secured, for the Christian education of the young. At subsequent Synods, held in Holland, before and after the Union of Utrecht, in 1579, the subject was carefully considered, and plans adopted. The principles thus adopted became more fully developed and matured in the action of the well-known Synod of Dort, held in 1618 and 1619. In the seventeenth session of that Synod, November 30, 1618, the subject of the instruction and education of youth, and of catechising, was under discussion. In the result, the following resolution was adopted, and minute made. The whole is inserted, as worthy of being read and well weighed:

"In order that the Christian youth may be diligently instructed in the principles of religion, and be trained in piety, three modes of catechising should be employed. I. **IN THE HOUSE, BY PARENTS.** II. **IN THE SCHOOLS, BY SCHOOLMASTERS.** III. **IN THE CHURCHES, BY MINISTERS, ELDERS, AND CATECHISTS ESPECIALLY APPOINTED FOR THE PURPOSE.** That these may diligently employ their trust, the Christian magistrates shall be requested to promote, by their authority, so sacred and necessary a work; and all who have the oversight of churches and schools shall be required to pay special attention to this matter."