1. Introduction

This contribution results from dissertation research on the education of Dutch Reformed Ministers in the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth centuries. Despite his previous education, a candidate who wanted to become a minister in the Reformed Churches had to apply at his parish and the neighbouring parishes. These first wanted to examine his qualities before they admitted him to the ministry. This essay focuses on the requirements for a pastor bonus according to the then Dutch Reformed churches by examining the admittance procedures as laid down in the acts of synods and classes. What are the requirements for a pastor bonus? What instruments were at the disposal of the Dutch Reformed churches to examine the candidates? Can a development be perceived in the formulation and application of these requirements?

2. Higher assemblies

Until about fifteen years ago it was generally assumed that it was quite easy to become a minister in the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands in the sixteenth century. This idea was instigated for instance by a remark of Caspar Coolhaes about artisans seeking a lazy life and a steady income in becoming a minister. But gradually this idea of a disorderly group of preachers is changing. John Paul Elliott concludes in his dissertation about the classis of Dordrecht,
1572-1640: "The first generation of ministers from 1572 to 1599 were of a better calibre than has hitherto been assumed [...]. Despite a severe shortage of pastors the classis accepted only twelve of the twenty-nine 'proponenten' between 1578 and 1597 [...]. The classis apparently considered a bad minister worse than a vacant parish".3 Elliott mentions the classes as responsible bodies for the admittance of candidates. A classis is composed of representatives of the parishes in the same vicinity. When, for instance, two or more classes of Zuid-Holland are gathered, this assembly is called the particular synod of Zuid-Holland. The assembly of classes from Zuid-Holland and Zeeland is called a provincial synod and at a general synod representatives, ministers or elders, of all the then regions and of the refugee churches from England and Germany were expected to attend.

Regulations and requirements for the candidate ministers were discussed at each higher assembly, the provincial and the general synods, between 1570 and 1620. Article 16 of the general synod of Emden, which was held in 1571, states that the calling church should examine the ministers in doctrine and life, after this they can be inducted.4 At the provincial synod of Dordrecht in 1574 a resolution was passed about candidates who had not studied theology at a university or elsewhere and who desired to apply for the ministry: Accepted to practice in preaching are only those who are gifted with godliness and humility, eloquence, common sense and discretion.5 Before these candidates can be examined they first have to practice preaching. Three years later, the first article in the acts of the general synod of Dordrecht in 1578 is more extensive on doctrine and life; the ministers have to be pure in doctrine, righteous in living, with a talent to educate and must produce a good testimonial inside and outside of the parish.6 The fourth article has an extra paragraph on the academic student: he who is examined at Leiden University or another Reformed University does not have to be examined on doctrine by the classes.7 Three years later, at the general synod of

5 Ibid., p. 140.
6 Ibid., Cap.I.1, p. 234.
7 Ibid., Cap.I.4, p. 235.