

HERMAN
BAVINCK

HERMAN BAVINCK

PASTOR, CHURCHMAN,
STATESMAN,
AND THEOLOGIAN

RON GLEASON



P U B L I S H I N G
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To Dr. Roger Nicole
The man who introduced me to Herman Bavinck
and the Dutch language
A Mentor, Father, and Friend

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This book is the culmination of an odyssey that began sometime in 1974 as I read my first words from Herman Bavinck's magisterial *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*. At the time, it took me about an hour to read one page. God moved us to the Netherlands and eventually to Kampen, the city where Bavinck taught systematic theology and ethics for twenty years. From day one, I was enamored of Bavinck, and I continue to stand in awe of this man who was so powerfully used by God. It has been a true joy and delight to write this book.

Books like this require a great deal of time and attention, which means that other things do not get done and important relationships

do not receive as much attention as they should. Therefore, I want to thank my best friend, Sally Gleason, for her patience and sound advice about writing style. I definitely “married up.” Her given Christian name is Sarah. She is truly a princess. Being married to such a godly woman is joy inexpressible.

Thanks also to our children: Ron II, Geoff, Janneke, Nicoline, and Hans and to our wonderful daughters-in-law, Jennifer, Lisa, and Blanca. All of you are more precious and dear to me than you’ll ever know. To all of you I say, “I still love most of you.”

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I want to thank the congregation of Grace Presbyterian Church in Yorba Linda, California, for being such a joy for me in ministry. You have taught me a great deal about life, and I have grown substantially spiritually because of the way you love the Word of God and how we fellowship together. Thank you for giving me the privilege of being your pastor. It has been a wonderful fifteen years. I trust that our gracious Lord will grant us many more years together.

The book is dedicated to Dr. Roger R. Nicole, the man who introduced me to Bavinck “way back when.” His encyclopedic knowledge of theology never ceased to amaze me. His dear wife, Annette, has already gone home to be with the Lord, but Sally and I were privileged to know them as “Mama” and Papa” Nicole.

Finally, I must say a word about Devon Dailey, our church secretary. As I write this, she has been diagnosed with stage IV cancer and received her first chemotherapy treatment today. I cannot find the words to express what a help she has been to me, and she knows better than most that I am not always the easiest person to work for. Between us, we had a motto: “Yesterday was the easy day.” We are waiting for God’s answers to our prayers. She believes, as I do, that our sovereign Lord foreordains whatsoever comes to pass.

Ron Gleason, Ph.D.
Orange, CA
May 4, 2010

Introduction



AS AN INTRODUCTION to this biography of Herman Bavinck—a task that I am honored and pleased to perform—I want to let you know how I came to know of him and to hold him as a challenge and an inspiration.

In 1938, at the age of twenty-two, holding a Master of Arts in Classical Languages from the Sorbonne in Paris and a diploma for studies from the best francophone Bible institute, I was resolute to pursue theological studies for higher degrees in a school of faith rather than in schools of doubt. Thus I decided to go to the United States for that purpose. At that time, I had not heard of the staunch conservative movement in the Netherlands, although there was a statement in A. Lecerf's *Introduction to Reformed Dogmatics* that had mentioned two stalwart Reformed Dutch scholars who by a miracle of God's grace had managed to escape the poison of radical biblical criticism. I proceeded in my studies at Gordon Divinity School in Boston and received the degrees of bachelor in divinity and master of theology, and still I had not heard of Bavinck. When I started work for the doctorate, however, I was privileged to take a course in apologetics with Dr. Clarence Bouma, a visiting professor from Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan. There at last I was made acquainted with the vigorous and winsome integrated Calvinism that arose in the

Netherlands between 1843 and 1888. Herman Bavinck was a gifted, dedicated, and scholarly son of that movement.

In order to pursue my studies toward my doctoral thesis, I needed to secure a solid footing in the way in which dogmatics had been presented, particularly in the whole Protestant movement. I decided, therefore, to examine in the great Andover-Harvard theological library all the volumes catalogued under 629, Protestant dogmatics as a whole, found in some 162 feet of shelving, although with some duplication. These were arranged by alphabetical order of authors, and by God's mercy, Bavinck was there very early with his four-volume *Reformed Dogmatics* in Dutch.

Without knowing Dutch, it was easy to see that here was a very substantial, scholarly work, with very abundant scriptural references, a thorough investigation of the history of doctrines, and superb critical consideration up to the beginning of the twentieth century, with footnotes and bibliographies. All four volumes of this work were at last translated into English and published integrally in 2003–2008. When I saw this work in Dutch, it was immediately apparent to me that I simply had to learn this language in order to gain ready access to this magnificent accomplishment. And so I learned Dutch—by reading the Bible in Dutch, by drawing parallelisms between Dutch and German, which I previously knew passably well, and by reading Bavinck in his solid, well-organized use of words that did not demand a superlative knowledge of the language, as poetry often demands. Bavinck also had quotations in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, German, English, and French, which for me eased the reading. This opened for me access to a very substantial theological literature that has been a great asset in my studies and in my teaching.

I was and remained so enthusiastic along those lines that three students over the years requested me to coach them in learning Dutch. I could do no better than to lead them from the start to read some Bavinck. Thus they would develop some ability in the language and have something more worthwhile to think about than what you often find in primers: “*Toto a trouvé la plume de ma tante*,” etc. Two of these three have made excellent use of the Dutch, one in writing a thesis over the period between Calvin and Dort, and the other by going to

the Netherlands and carrying doctoral studies there, being for some years a pastor there and, more recently, preparing the biography that you hold in your hands.

Bavinck has been for me, as I said, an inspiration and a challenge. His grasp of theology in all its dimensions, his thoroughness and fairness in dealing with those with whom he did not agree, his soundness in accepting and reflecting the witness of Scripture, his architectural gift in perceiving each doctrine in its correlation with the Christian view as a whole; these are some of the excellencies that characterize his work throughout.

J. I. Packer, himself a master in the field, said it well: “Solid but lucid, demanding but satisfying, broad and deep and sharp and stabilizing, Bavinck’s magisterial *Reformed Dogmatics* remains after a century the supreme achievement of its kind.”

There are three Dutch biographies of Herman Bavinck:

1. J. H. Landwehr, *In Memoriam. Prof Dr. H Bavinck*, Kampen: Kok, 1921.
2. Valentine Hepp, *Dr. Herman Bavinck*. Amsterdam: Ten Have, 1921.
3. R. H. Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck en Zijn Tijdgenoten*. Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1966.

Dr. Gleason has made a wise use of all three of them.

Roger Nicole
Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando

Abbreviations



CE	F. W. Grosheide, et al., eds., <i>Christelijke encyclopaedie voor het Nederlandsche volk</i> (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1929)
CW	Herman Bavinck, <i>Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing</i>
DCMA	James Bratt, <i>Dutch Calvinism in Modern America</i> (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984)
DHB	Valentine Hepp, <i>Dr. Herman Bavinck</i> (Amsterdam: W. ten Have, 1921)
Diary	Herman Bavinck, Personal Diary
DWHG	Herman Bavinck, <i>De Wetenschap der H. Godgeleerdheid</i> (Kampen: Zalsman, 1883)
HBD	R. Bremmer, <i>Herman Bavinck als Dogmaticus</i> (Kampen: Kok, 1961)
HBZT	R. Bremmer, <i>Herman Bavinck en Zijn Tijdgenoten</i> (Kampen: Kok, 1966)
<i>In Memoriam</i>	J. H. Landwehr, <i>In Memoriam: Prof. Dr. H. Bavinck</i> (Kampen: Kok, 1921)
JBA	Jan Bavinck, <i>Autobiography</i>
RD	Herman Bavinck, <i>Reformed Dogmatics</i>

ABBREVIATIONS

- RI* Jan Veenhof, *Revelatie en Inspiratie* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1968)
- RW* Herman Bavinck, *Roeping en Wedergeboorte* (Kampen: Zalsman, 1903)
- TPPP* McKendree Langley, *The Practice of Political Spirituality* (Jordan Station, Ontario, Canada: Paideia Press, 1984)

1

Generation to Generation: The Forming of a Theologian



HOW CAN A SIMPLE SACRAMENT impact a person's life? Herman Bavinck's parents were asked three questions as his baptism in 1854: "First, do you confess that our children, though conceived and born in sin, and therefore subject to all sorts of misery, even to condemnation, are sanctified in Christ and thus as member of his Church ought to be baptized?"

"Second, do you confess that the doctrine of the Old and New Testament, summarized in the confessions and taught here in this Christian Church, is the true and complete doctrine of salvation?"

"Third, do you promise as father and mother to instruct your child in this doctrine, as soon as he is able to understand, and have him instructed therein to the utmost of your power?"

Their reply was a simple, "I do," spoken by each parent individually, beginning with the father. This answer, given by Dutch parents through the ages in the Reformed churches of the Netherlands, were

the most important words that Jan and Gesina Bavinck ever promised over two hundred years ago as they held their newborn son, Herman, in their arms and presented him for baptism. They were dedicated Christian parents who took their words very seriously. Daily they sought to establish their son's concept of truth, his sense of right and wrong, and his understanding of what the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God was.

The distinctively Christian life and worldview present in the Bavinck household deeply influenced young Herman's thinking, behavior, relationships, and spiritual perspectives. His parents molded his character and carefully guided him. In their eyes, guiding and teaching their children was a solemn duty before God. However, they did not realize at the time how much their godly training would influence their son. How could they have known as they taught their little son his earliest lessons of faith and truth that they were preparing one of the greatest theologians Holland had ever produced for service in God's kingdom. Herman grew up to become a renowned pastor, professor, churchman, politician, and preacher as well as a beloved husband, father, and man of God. How could they have known how much his humble spirit, keen intellect, and gracious wisdom would impact not only Christian leaders in his native land but also in many lands outside of Holland. Because of their huge influence, it is important to know their story. Their story will help us better understand his greatness.

Jan Bavinck: His Childhood Years

Jan Bavinck, Herman's father, grew up near the Dutch border in the little German village of Bentheim, which was part of the Neder-Graafschap. Graafschap Bentheim, as it was also called, was a part of the duchy that included the better-known city of Hannover. The villagers of Bentheim were substantially influenced by their Dutch neighbors. Because of the close ties to Holland, schoolchildren learned to speak both German and Dutch. Remarkably, in church settings and worship services, Dutch was the favored language.

By an interesting act of providence, Jan Bavinck and the father of Geerhardus Vos were both born in the county of Bentheim and

were “members of the German Old Reformed church . . . related to the Seceder church in the Netherlands.”¹ Since Herman Bavinck and Geerhardus Vos later became close friends, it is an intriguing piece of history to observe how God brought the families together at an early stage. The relationship between the Bavinck and Vos families was not tangential but rather quite close. The fathers of both Herman and Geerhardus knew each other well and even attended the same congregation.² Harinck observes that the fathers of these two great theologians—Herman and Geerhardus—“belonged to the founding families of this free church and they knew each other well. Geerhardus’ and Herman’s fathers received their theological education in the same vicarage in Hoogeveen in the Netherlands, became both ministers in the Seceded Church and started their careers in the same congregation of Uelsen (Germany).”³

Even before Herman Bavinck was born, the invisible hand of God’s providence was working in ways that were mysterious and incomprehensible. And all this divine work was occurring through the ordinary events of daily life in the small village of Bentheim.

The Bavinck family name was well established and well respected in the little village and its surrounding area, for Bavincks had lived in the region for several decades. One of the earliest Bavincks mentioned in available records was a teacher named Ludolph Bavinck who served in Münster around 1500. Later records indicate that Jan Bavinck’s great-grandfather, Dirk Bavinck (also sometimes spelled Baving) married Fenna Stoltenkamp in Bentheim on July 6, 1735. Bavinck scholar R. H. Bremmer describes the Bavinck family influence in Germany as both “widespread” (*wijdvertakt*) and avowedly intelligent.⁴

By the early 1800s, the 2,300 villagers of Bentheim were, by and large, what would be called “religious” folks today. They either attended the Roman Catholic church or one of the various Reformed churches in their area. The early history of the village reveals that originally the Protestants in Bentheim worshipped at the Lutheran church. However,

1. George Harinck, “Herman Bavinck and Geerhardus Vos,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (April 2010): 20.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, 4–5.

4. R. H. Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck en Zijn Tijdgenoten* (Kampen: Kok, 1966), 8.

in 1587 Count Arnold II established a Reformed church in Bentheim that stood firm in faith and remained committed to the tenets of the Reformation throughout the years, both in good times and in more difficult times.⁵

Bentheim was also a village with a stirring (*bewogen*) past as far as its citizens were concerned. Throughout history, the faith and lifestyle of the villagers had been forged in the crucible of challenge and persecution. Though they were known for kindheartedness and friendliness, the villagers of Bentheim had suffered for their faith.⁶ That suffering strengthened them and left its mark on the way the villagers lived. They clearly understood the meaning of words like *reverence* and *respect*.⁷ That understanding made Bentheim an almost ideal place for Christians to live.

Not only did Bentheim have spiritual beauty, it also had natural beauty. It was surrounded by stately forests and green hills that gave way to distant mountains. In the words of one visitor to Bentheim, it was “romantically beautiful.”⁸ It was into this environment that Jan Bavinck was born on February 5, 1826. He was the only son of Hermanus and Fenna (nee Niehaus) Bavinck, though he had five older sisters.⁹ Ten days after his birth, he was baptized in a little Dutch Reformed Church in the village.

Hermanus Bavinck was a successful carpenter who earned a very good income for his family.¹⁰ Both Hermanus and his wife were part of a group in Bentheim known as the “*alt-reformirten*” (old Reformed) who strongly held to the traditions and Reformed teachings of the Synod of Dordrecht (1618/1619). Their home was nothing short of remarkable in terms of theology and piety.¹¹

5. *Ibid.*, 10.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Valentine Hepp, *Dr. Herman Bavinck* (Amsterdam: W. ten Have, 1921), 7.

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*

10. I am indebted to the late Dr. R. H. Bremmer, who provided me with one of the few extant copies of Jan Bavinck’s autobiography. For this chapter, I shall be depending heavily upon that work along with a few other Dutch monographs that deal with this period in Dutch ecclesiastical history. Throughout this book Jan Bavinck’s autobiography will be abbreviated *JBA*. *JBA*, 3.

11. *Ibid.*

When Jan was only three years old, this well-ordered family suffered a dramatic and shocking setback. Hermanus Bavinck died unexpectedly at the young age of forty-nine, leaving his family behind. Fenna was only thirty-three. As a young widow, she assumed the full responsibility of caring financially for her six children, ranging in age from twelve years to only a few months. Hermanus's sudden death was a great and painful event in Fenna's life. Though she had opportunity to remarry more than once, she never did. Instead she dedicated herself to her children's needs and frugally managed her home on funds that her immediate family willingly and generously gave her.

Her decision to focus on her children proved to be a wise one. In adulthood her son, Jan, spoke of the memories of his mother that he cherished so deeply and his admiration for her abilities in managing her home and finances. Jan also remembered her as a woman who raised her children to love God, to exhibit a Christian character, and to possess biblical honor and integrity as she faithfully instructed her children at home and in the church. Jan and his sisters attended a Christian school (*Reformirte Schule*),¹² went to church regularly, and learned the content of the Heidelberg Catechism in German from a local pastor named van Nes.¹³ With such strong and consistent teaching, Jan became deeply religious at a young age. Later, however, though he always appreciated the great benefits his spiritual upbringing had given him, he began to recognize areas where his understanding of faith and life needed expansion.

As an adult, Jan summarized his thoughts by writing that he was raised to be a good decent, respectable (*fatsoenlijk*) citizen and Christian, but also explained that his training in his youth did not introduce him to the necessary spiritual exercises that belong to the inner life of the Christian and the experience of faith that is discovered by those who are truly children of God.¹⁴ "As far as I remember," he says, "I was never exhorted to faith and repentance and I was never awakened

12. I am using the spelling "Reformirte" that Jan Bavinck uses throughout his autobiography. It is quite possibly a rendition that was used in Bentheim rather than the more traditional German spelling "Reformierte."

13. *JBA*, 4.

14. *Ibid.*

to the need to bow my knees before Jesus and to seek and to desire him as my Savior and Redeemer.”¹⁵

Jan learned to pray at home before and after each meal, but according to his recollection, prayers were always silent and, more often than not, in rote form.¹⁶ The family also regularly read the Scriptures at mealtime, but rarely was there any conversation or discussion about what was read. Pursuing an application of God’s Word to daily life was missing.¹⁷ In short, “the internal life of Christian faith was lacking in our family.”¹⁸ He writes on, “Nevertheless, and oddly enough, in spite of this kind of ‘formal’ rearing, I felt within me [in childhood—RG] an emptiness; that something was lacking and I sought fulfillment in my own way, even though I didn’t know what it was that I was seeking and even less how I could get it. Every once in a while when I was alone I would bow my knees before God and sometimes under a deluge of tears, I would pour out my heart to him and I prayed and beseeched him for grace.”¹⁹ Words like *regeneration*, *faith*, and *repentance* remained a puzzle to him.²⁰ However, this young man, in spite of these admitted handicaps, was mindful of eternal things concerning God and deeply longed for them.²¹

Two Spiritual Mentors Influence Jan’s Life

Jan’s strong mother remained a positive influence throughout his life, but because he lacked the presence of a father in his home, he relished time with the men of his extended family, especially his uncle Harm Niehaus. Harm had an interesting background. As a younger man, Harm had walked away from the church and distanced himself from God. For several years he fully embraced a worldly lifestyle. Then for reasons that were never fully explained, Harm returned to his spiritual roots as a transformed man of God. In the absence of Jan’s

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

father, this transformed man played an important and integral role in Jan's mental and spiritual development.²²

When Jan was sixteen years old, Harm took him to hear a dynamic pastor who preached in the open air named Jan Berend Sundag. Sundag, a compelling and powerful preacher, embraced "*alt-reformirten*" principles of faith.²³ The worship services were held on a nearby farm. Jan described these events as simple yet profound. Hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ preached with such purity stirred Jan Bavinck's young soul.²⁴ All his life, Jan remembered the first captivating sermon in which he heard Sundag powerfully proclaim the truth. He even recalled the text and the name of the farm where the service was held.²⁵ That worship service was a compelling spiritual catalyst that accelerated a growing desire within Jan to become a minister of the Word of God.

Jan Sundag, who influenced Jan Bavinck tremendously, was born to pious parents in rural Germany only a few miles from Bentheim. He was thirty-six years old when Jan Bavinck first heard him preach. Sundag converted to Christianity early in his life,²⁶ and as a young man he had begun to grieve over the spiritual degeneration in the organized church in Germany and prayed fervently for the Lord to rectify the myriad of errors and doctrinal deviations that were present there.²⁷ At the urging of a Dutch Reformed pastor named Hendrick de Cock, Sundag attempted to speak to church leaders about his concerns. The church leaders were unmotivated by the young man's pleadings. After his failure to convince them, Sundag decided to study theology before he returned a second time to attempt to persuade them.

22. *Ibid.*, 9. On page 10 Jan Bavinck writes, "Under the leading of my uncle, I become ever-increasingly aware not only of my own deep depravity, but also of the deep depravity of the entire human race and the salvation that exists in Christ Jesus."

23. Eventually, because of his desire to preach the gospel, Sundag would be convicted of violating the state law against a church other than the *Hervormde Kerk* and would be imprisoned thirty-two times, at times for periods extending to eight to ten weeks. Cf. Hepp, *DHB*, 10.

24. Hepp writes that it was during this time that the Lord led Jan Bavinck in wondrous, saving ways. He came into contact with people he deemed to be bona fide children of the Lord, who spoke a spiritual language that resonated in his heart (*ibid.*, 10).

25. *Ibid.* The text was 2 Corinthians 5:17, and the service was held on the farm of "dumb and stupid" Wegkamp.

26. *JBA*, 6.

27. *Ibid.*

He traveled to Ulrum, Holland, in order to convince Pastor de Cock to mentor and teach him.²⁸ De Cock's congregation was part of a group of congregations that had separated themselves from the Dutch Reformed State Church (*De Hervormde Kerk*) and so were called the Separatists. (See appendix A.) The Separatists believed the Dutch State Church had deviated from biblical teaching into grave theological error. Many of the Dutch Reformed pastors thought that de Cock and his followers (*Die Separatist*) should be exiled from the country.²⁹ Sundag disagreed, for in the person of Hendrick de Cock he saw a man who could teach him the deep theological truths he longed to understand.

When his studies with de Cock were completed, Sundag returned to Germany and once again made an effort to speak with local church leaders. His intentions were good, and he was enthusiastic in his expectations, but his hopes for a fair hearing were dashed. The church leaders were not only unreceptive but also unashamedly hostile. In some instances he was physically mishandled.³⁰ Some church leaders publicly described Sundag as a religious fanatic, an insurrectionist, and a disturber of the peace.³¹

After being driven away from the church, Sundag courageously went forward in voicing his concerns, and he began preaching out-of-doors. Convinced that the Bible clearly explained that the Christian life and the church were to be both practical and pious, he willingly taught anyone who would listen to him. Once again, his critics accused him of fanaticism and called his followers "dumb and stupid farmers."³²

Neither Jan Bavinck nor his Uncle Harm, who regularly attended Sundag's services, were "dumb and stupid," nor were they farmers. So taken were they with Sundag's teaching and preaching that most of the time after each service, they would spend the rest of the day discussing what they had learned. Jan was *deeply* impressed.³³

28. Eventually, in November 1848, Sundag was ordained and installed as a minister of the Word of God in the congregation in Gildehaus. He died on December 8, 1893. (Cf. F. W. Grosheide, et al., eds., *Christelijke encyclopaedie voor het Nederlandsche volk* [Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1929], 5:332.)

29. *JBA*, 9.

30. *Ibid.*

31. *Ibid.*

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*, 11.

As Jan's connections to Sundag became more known in the village, his friends began to distance themselves from him. They were quite comfortable with their "formal" faith and religiosity and equally not at all interested in making any changes in their pursuit of "youthful adventures."³⁴ However, Jan continued to listen to Sundag and attend his services. He ably combined what he was learning about the authentic Christian life and what he had learned as a child from the Heidelberg Catechism about his sins and misery, his redemption in Christ, and the thankfulness toward God he was called to exhibit.³⁵ He soon became convinced that the Separatists' position in the Dutch ecclesiastical strife with the State Church was correct. He also supported their reasons for separating from the Dutch State Church.

His new position continued to create tensions with his friends, and eventually some of his good friends avoided him. Jan did not desire to be bitter or prideful about his personal theology. His ultimate and simple goal, in all the unfolding circumstances, was to hold fast to the principles of Reformed theology and to remain within the confines of the Reformed faith.³⁶ At the same time, however, he learned to be cautious about every kind of "sectarianism and separatism," a position he maintained all his life.³⁷ This was a great lesson he passed on to his son Herman.

The new understanding Jan gained under Sundag's preaching caused him to reach a turning point or defining moment in his life concerning the church. It also brought him to a personal decision that he had to make but would rather have avoided. Would he remain a member of the problem-ridden State Church (HK), or would he formally join the Separatists with whom he shared so much agreement? Jan knew if he joined the Separatists, he would be the only member of that group living in Bentheim. He knew also that his peers, already critical of him, would most likely ostracize him further.

34. On p. 5 Jan Bavinck describes in some detail what he and his friends did on Sunday in Bentheim. Comparatively, their escapades seem innocent enough, although it is true that what they did could also be described as "worldly." It seems that even during these times, however, he had a guilty conscience about participating with his friends. He writes that often upon returning to Bentheim from a Sunday afternoon of entertainment, he would pray, confess his sins, and ask God to forgive him.

35. *Ibid.*, 12.

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Ibid.*, 13.

Those thoughts distressed him and, according to his description, he was filled with doubts.³⁸ He struggled in prayer as he pondered his choice, and he spent large amounts of time reading the Scriptures for guidance and direction in his decision. Finally he accepted what he had to do. He would leave the *Hervormde Kerk* and the heresies that were so prevalent there. In his own explanation, he stated that he had to stay as far away from heresy as he could.³⁹ At the same time, he also began to come to the conclusion that the Separatists actually were not forming a *new* church, but rather they were simply *continuing* the church as it truly was meant to be according to the Word of God and were standing firm on the teachings of the Reformed church fathers throughout the ages.⁴⁰ It was the Separatists who taught the biblical doctrine, form of worship, and church discipline that Jan was seeking and that he was convinced was biblical.

Jan Bavinck: Theological Student

Once this major decision was behind him, Jan's longings to become a minister of the Word returned with a vengeance. Eventually he told his mother about it. Although his mother gave him a sympathetic ear, the state of the family finances posed an enormous obstacle.⁴¹ As a widow with a large family to support, Fenna had no monetary resources to offer to her son. The pressing desire to become a minister on the one hand and the very obvious lack of the necessary financial means to reach that goal on the other hand created a conflict and an obstacle for which Jan saw no solution. Clearly, if he were to pursue theological studies, something very unusual would need to happen to resolve the problem for him. Nothing short of divine intervention was needed.

Seeing no answer to the financial dilemma, Jan took an apprenticeship position in a nearby village to help pay the bills and feed the family. Three years would pass before God would intervene.⁴² The opportunity

38. *Ibid.*, 14.

39. *Ibid.* 14–16.

40. *Ibid.*, 16.

41. *Ibid.*, 21.

42. *Ibid.*, 19.

Jan had been patiently waiting for came very unexpectedly on January 17, 1845, and it was a monumental event in his life.⁴³

On that cold winter day, in the little, neighboring village of Brandlegt, the congregations of the Hannover region held a classis meeting (the Reformed counterpart to a Presbyterian presbytery meeting). There were twenty-two delegates present at the home of a local farmer named Mr. Oldkamp. At this particular meeting, Pastor Sundag informed the brothers that he could no longer physically bear the arduous preaching responsibilities alone and asked the classis to appoint a candidate from the churches to receive instruction in theology with a view to preparation for service in the pastoral ministry.⁴⁴ After many years of faithfully preaching to numerous congregations, Sundag was in desperate need of rest.

Though sympathetic to Sundag, the classis hesitated in granting his request. They were unsure about their ability to find a suitable candidate. They decided to vote on the matter of moving forward with Sundag's request. When the vote was tallied, there was a tie—eleven to eleven! The men then knelt in prayer and asked the Lord's guidance in casting a lot to decide the matter. They called in one of the girls who was helping to serve and prepare meals and asked her to draw the lot.⁴⁵ The slip of paper she drew read, "For." With the decision made, the men of the classis began to discuss their choice of a candidate.

Five candidates had informed the classis they were interested in theological studies.⁴⁶ Even though there was a great need for pastors, the classis decided to limit their considerations to the appointment of only one candidate. Three of the candidates were eliminated during further discussion in the meeting. Two candidates remained: Frederik Huisken and Jan Bavinck.

After more intense discussion and detailed interviews of both candidates, the classis moved to a vote concerning the choice of the candidate. Once again, the vote was a tie—eleven to eleven. The young

43. *Ibid.*, 21.

44. *Ibid.*

45. Hepp, *DHB*, 11.

46. In alphabetical order, they were Jan Bavinck, G. J. Dalink, F. Huisken, B. H. Kaptein, and J. H. Reurik.

woman from the kitchen appeared again to break the tie by lot. Our “mysterious young lady” chose the slip of paper on which was written the name “Bavinck.”

This act of God’s providence carried out by a simple, young woman from the kitchen whose name has remained unknown⁴⁷ gave Jan Bavinck the opportunity for which he had been waiting and longing. It opened the door for him to begin his theological studies. It was an event that would *profoundly* affect the course of Dutch church history.

After Jan was accepted as a candidate, the next step for him was to decide precisely where he would study. He had three distinct possibilities: to study in Arnhem with Pastor Brummelkamp, in Groningen with Pastor Tamme Foppens, or in Ruinerwold and Koekange with Pastor W. A. Kok. Since he had a natural inclination toward being indecisive, he requested that the classis decide for him. They *unanimously* chose Pastor Kok in Ruinerwold. Soon Jan Bavinck and Pastor Sundag were traveling to Ruinerwold so he could begin his training.

Jan Bavinck was a dedicated and precocious student who was very bright and quickly grasped the subject matter. He had a particular propensity for languages, and language study remained a lifelong interest. Hebrew and Latin were his favorite subjects. Since he never lost his interest in languages, his son asked him to assist him by editing and correcting the Latin texts of his compendium of Reformed theology when he was preparing the famous work for publication.⁴⁸

Early in 1848, twenty-three-year old Jan Bavinck completed the “candidate’s phase” of his theological study and was eligible for a call to the pastoral ministry. At that time Germany and Denmark were at war. Like the obstacle of finances present at the beginning of his studies, another unexpected obstacle tested the direction of Jan’s life at the completion of his studies. Germany needed men to fight the war, and many young Germans were receiving letters of conscription requiring them to report for military duty. Jan was among the young men who received just such a letter. He was told to report for a phys-

47. *JBA*, 22.

48. Herman Bavinck, *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae* (Lugduni Batavorum: Didericum Donner, 1881).

ical on Easter Sunday.⁴⁹ At that moment, it seemed that the very thing he had longed for and was convinced God had called him to do was once again slipping from his grasp. But Jan Bavinck was an honorable man, so he traveled to Lingen, near Bentheim, to take his place among the other recruits.

When he arrived, in keeping with military procedures,⁵⁰ he waited outside in a long line until it was his turn to be examined.⁵¹ When he stepped up in front of the doctor, the doctor simply looked at Jan Bavinck and said, “Put your clothes back on, we have enough men. You are free to go.”⁵² Once again an unexpected but providential happenstance opened up Jan’s opportunities to proceed with his goal of pastoral ministry. God confirmed his call.

Pastor Jan Bavinck

The summer of that same year, on August 9, 1848, Jan Bavinck officially became a minister of God’s Word. He had been called to serve four small congregations, all of them located within fifty kilometers from Bentheim. That one young, inexperienced pastor was called to serve the congregations of Weldhausen, Uelsen, Wilsum, and Emlichheim revealed the great need in the Separatist movement for pastors. Pastor Kok officiated at the open-air installation service and preached on 2 Timothy 4:5.⁵³ Newly installed Pastor Jan Bavinck preached his inaugural sermon on Colossians 1:28.⁵⁴

Unlike the pastors serving in the *Hervormde Kerk* and/or the German pastors nearby who met in stylish older churches, Pastor Bavinck and his congregations gathered in local barns belonging to farmers who made them available for Sunday worship services. The pastor’s beginning salary was

49. JBA, 29.

50. Better known as the “hurry up and wait” military syndrome.

51. Some things in the military do not change. Fortunately, he wasn’t living in Iceland.

52. JBA, 31. “Ziehen Sie euch wieder an, wir haben schon Mannschaften genug. Sie sind frei. Sie können gehen.”

53. Ibid., 33. “As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”

54. “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ” (ESV).

Hfl. 300 (Dutch guilders) per year.⁵⁵ In addition, the congregations provided him with a house. Eventually the four churches combined, forming two separate congregations, using the names Uelsen and Wilsum.

When there were only two congregations to serve rather than the original four, Jan Bavinck found that he had some additional time for other responsibilities and personal pursuits. However, Jan's consistory⁵⁶ had some definite ideas about how Jan might use this extra time. They suggested to Jan that he should share all that time and wealth with a wife!⁵⁷ In his enjoyable biography of Herman Bavinck, R. H. Bremmer tells us that one of Jan Bavinck's elders was H. H. Schoemaker, a man who had been incarcerated six times because of his unwavering allegiance to Reformed principles, and he was especially adamant⁵⁸ about Jan finding a suitable Christian wife.

Jan answered his session by saying that indeed he was open to marrying, but that the matter was more easily said than done.⁵⁹ But done it would become! Not long after this "suggestion," Jan wrote that under the leading of the Lord and, most likely, with the help of H. H. Schoemaker, he met the oldest daughter of Mr. Coenraad Bernadus Holland from the Dutch town of Vriezenveen, located near the German border.

Gesina Magdalena Bavinck (née Holland)

Substantially less is known about Gesina Magdalena Bavinck's family history than the family history of her husband, Jan, but a few available valuable resources give us some pertinent information about her as well as some important insights into her character. Town records note that in 1819, the homes in the little village of Vriezenveen, where Gesina grew up, lacked two important elements: there were no chimneys, and there was no comfort. Another interesting aspect of the village history was that some of the citizens of Vriezenveen, called "*Vjenneluie*,"

55. In today's currency that's about \$130.00 U.S. or \$200.00 Canadian plus Goods and Services Tax.

56. This is equivalent to a Presbyterian session or board of elders.

57. The reader should understand that when Dutch consistories *suggest* something, it is to be taken as having the power of a command.

58. Read: pushy.

59. Bremmer, *HBZT*, 12.

immigrated to Petrograd (St. Petersburg), Russia, and lived there for approximately two hundred years (1717–1917). Gesina came from that lineage of adventurous Dutch citizens. Her father, Coenraad Bernardus Holland, was an agriculturalist and a seller of garden seeds.⁶⁰ Gesina's mother's name was Berendina Johanna Holland (née Jonkman). The Holland family belonged to the State Church, so it is rather surprising that Jan found Gesina, given his antipathy to the HK, and even more surprising that he considered her as a possible spouse for him. What attracted such a devoted Separatist to a young HK woman? In point of fact, the Holland family was not the average State Church family, neither was their local congregation the average HK church. Gesina's parents, along with other members of their local church, comprised a faithful "remnant" of Reformed believers who chose to remain in the State Church in order to fight the growing liberalism there. Even though the congregation in Vriezenveen was HK, it maintained very close contact with the Separatists, but precisely why remains somewhat of an enigma.⁶¹

Although we cannot describe in detail how Jan and Gesina met, church records may give us a clue in that direction. In 1847, while Jan Bavinck was serving the two congregations in Uelsen and Wilsum, the Separatists took up a collection to aid the small, struggling, but faithful congregation in Vriezenveen. Further, in the minutes of the Vriezenveen consistory, we find that Pastor Jan Bavinck preached there from time to time. A final clue comes when we discover that a man named Mr. G. Holland spoke very favorably about the members in Vriezenveen at a church meeting (*gemeentevergadering*). Though we cannot say this with certainty, it is possible that this man introduced Jan to Gesina's family. However, we can say with certainty that after a proper period of courtship, Jan Bavinck and Gesina Magdalena Holland were engaged.⁶²

As we might expect by now, since it seems that even simple things in Jan's life did not occur without some kind of drama, his impending marriage to Gesina was no exception. The complication this time was

60. *Ibid.*, 13

61. *Ibid.* Bremmer writes that even though there is no certainty as to precisely how the denominations got into contact with each other, there is certainty that the contact existed between the Separatists and the small congregation in Vriezeveen.

62. *Ibid.*, 13.

an ancient regulation in Wilsum specifying that no new dwelling could be built in this rural community.⁶³ Since Jan lived in Wilsum, in order to marry Gesina he would be required to leave that community. Jan decided to move to Uelsen after his marriage, and the congregation there immediately began building a new manse and church for their pastor and his bride. Jan moved to Uelsen before the wedding for a short time and resided in the home of a deacon named Lenderink.⁶⁴

Jan and Gesina were married on April 28, 1850, in Vriezenveen. He was twenty-four years old; she was twenty-three. Directly after a civil ceremony at the city hall, their marriage was solemnized in the Separatist church by Pastor T. Westrik, who performed the ecclesiastical confirmation of their marriage (*kerkelijke bevestiging*).⁶⁵

Father Holland transported the couple in his wagon to the newly completed manse in Uelsen. When they arrived, Bavinck's mother was already there along with the members of the congregation to greet them with a warm reception in their new home. In addition to ministering in the two congregations, Pastor Kok asked the newly married Jan to help with the instruction of the theology students residing in the province of Drente by teaching literary subjects.⁶⁶

Serving in Their First Congregations

Jan Bavinck described his time serving the congregation in Uelsen as one of the most fruitful times of his life in which a growing mutual love between the pastor, his wife, and the congregation developed. Besides preaching twice every Sunday, Bavinck records in his autobiography that he visited the members of the congregation, comforted the infirm, and catechized the youth. Because he served rural congregations, he had great distances to cover at times, and, because of the means of transportation he had available, these visits typically took a great deal

63. *JBA*, 41.

64. *Ibid.*

65. In Holland this is the standard procedure. It is required by law that each couple gets married at City Hall. Then, if they are Christians, they proceed to their local church where the pastor performs a full worship service.

66. *JBA*, 42.

of time.⁶⁷ In his own words, he was “busy, *very* busy.”⁶⁸ Gesina carried on with her daily tasks in her home and the church, too. Jan described her as a woman who “made a conscious decision to serve the Lord early in her life and chose to walk the narrow path to heaven.”⁶⁹

Gesina’s character not only made her an excellent pastor’s wife, but also a good mother. Her Reformed persuasion served her well in good days and in bad. She trusted in God for all things, and according to reputable sources her belief and trust were not merely theoretical but also translated into a practical walk of faith. Jan’s wife would not compromise biblical principles no matter what the situation was. She was, to use a Dutch idiom, one who sailed a straight line through the sea. Her uncompromising ways when it came to Scripture became a characteristic that her son, Herman, learned very well from his mother. In short, Gesina was a spiritual asset to the entire Bavinck family.

She was a realist—a “no nonsense” woman—and a sworn enemy of all pretension.⁷⁰ There were two contrasting sides to her personality. In some ways, she was quite broad in her perspectives and could rightly be called “progressive”; in other ways, however, she was quite traditional. For example, in the mid-nineteenth century in Holland, some Dutch women were abandoning the practice of wearing head coverings. The majority of women from the more rural areas of the country still wore the traditional clothing every day that identified them as coming from a particular city or province as well as a head covering. In spite of the newer trend, Gesina Bavinck chose to wear an Overijssel provincial head covering her entire life.⁷¹

We discover from another example of her life that she also possessed a breadth of thinking that was progressive for her time. For example, when her son Herman decided to attend Leiden University for theological studies instead of the school in Kampen, she was the one who encouraged him to go forward with his plans to study in Leiden knowing full well what this would mean for both Herman and his family in terms of criticism.

67. *Ibid.*

68. *Ibid.*

69. *Ibid.*, 72.

70. *Ibid.*

71. *Ibid.*

Jan and Gesina Bavinck were married during an unusual time in the history of the Dutch Church—a time of unrest and animosity between their respective church denominations. The Separatists and the HK differed drastically theologically, confessionally, with regard to church polity, and with regard to Christian lifestyle and worldview. There was little hope that the two churches would ever reunite; in fact, they never did. The Separatist movement had struggled for years against the State Church as well as against oppressive government authorities, many of whom were members of the HK. They attempted to hold back the movement by making it illegal for anyone to hold worship services led by pastors not authorized by the State. Separatist pastors were repeatedly arrested and incarcerated, but the more the State ratcheted up its persecution of the pastors, the more rapidly the new movement gained adherents. The respective character and intellectual strengths Jan and Gesina Bavinck brought to their marriage, along with their strong biblical faith, gave them the courage to meet their difficulties because of Jan's position as a Separatist pastor as well as their differences because of their ecclesiastical backgrounds.

They certainly shared many concerns about the situation in the State Church—they both recognized that it had devolved theologically and pastorally. Non-believers regularly occupied the State Church pulpits on Sunday, and some pastors who were ministers in good standing in the church embraced non-Christian religions such as Buddhism. The theological seminaries of the HK also were teaching aberrant theology. In another context, in his work *Crisis in the Church*, the late John Leith warns about this very problem when he writes about how drastically a corrupt, non-believing faculty at a theological seminary can undermine and infect an entire denomination.⁷² That was precisely what happened in the State Church in many places. Jan Bavinck's decision to leave the State Church led him into many theological and confessional battles concerning the Church and brought personal and pastoral challenges to his ministry.

From the early years as husband and wife to their fifty-plus years together onward, there were huge losses, difficulties, misunderstand-

72. John Leith, *Crisis in the Church: The Plight of Theological Education* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997).

ings, and setbacks as well as great joys, blessings, and true cause for thanksgiving for Jan and Gesina to experience. Not only were there sad cases of church discipline,⁷³ but also grievous, painful losses through the deaths of several of their children. Two young daughters died when they lived in Almkerk. A thirteen-day-old son, Karel Bernard, died in 1863, as well as another daughter, Femia, who was eight years old. Berendina (Dina), their first daughter, born in 1851 in Uelsen, passed away in 1864 at the age of thirteen. Their son, Johannes Gerrit, a man of outstanding integrity,⁷⁴ died at the age of twenty-four. He was exceptionally bright and pleasant and completed studies at the Free University and the University of Amsterdam. Following his oral exams, he returned home to write his doctoral dissertation on the Calvinistic foundations of the doctrine of the state (*De Calvinistische Grondbeginselen der Staatsleer*).⁷⁵ One evening he coughed up some blood, quickly succumbed to his ailment, and died on the day after Christmas (*Tweede Kerstdag*) in 1896.

Throughout the trials and challenges in both church and home, the Bavincks did not waver in their abiding trust in the Lord God Almighty, his infallible Word, and the power and empowering of the Holy Spirit. God used these intense times to mold and shape their faith and commitment. The words of Scripture as well as Lord's Day 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism brought them immeasurable comfort: "My only comfort in life and death is that I am not my own, but belong, both body and soul, both in life and in death to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ."⁷⁶ (As a clear example of Jan's preaching and exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism, I have included an analysis of his sermons on Lord's Days 1 and 7 in appendixes B and C respectively.)

73. Bremmer, *HBZT*, 18.

74. *JBA*, 72.

75. *Ibid.*

76. Q. *What is your only comfort in life and death?* A. That I am not my own, but belong with body and soul, both in life and in death, to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from all the power of the devil. He also preserves me in such a way that without the will of my heavenly Father not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, all things must work together for my salvation. Therefore, by his Holy Spirit he also assures me of eternal life and makes me heartily willing and ready from now on to live for him.

While he was the pastor of the congregation in Uelsen, Jan Bavinck described the members of that church community as “possessing a healthy faith, somewhat mystical but ‘without excessive exaggeration,’ and pious.”⁷⁷ Jan and Gesina loved the congregation, and the congregation loved them. It was a joyous, blessed time of ministry. He explained that he would have happily remained in Uelsen for the duration of his ministry. That was not to be the case, however. God had other plans for him. Other congregations in the surrounding area as well as in the Separatist church at large quickly recognized Jan’s exceptional pastoral, preaching, and teaching abilities.⁷⁸ After a relatively short time in Uelsen, the congregation in Smilde, a city in the province of Drente, issued him a call. After prayerfully considering the honor, he respectfully declined. He loved where he was and what he was doing for the Lord there.

No long after the call to the church at Smilde, Pastor Kok asked Jan if he would be interested in coming to Hoogeveen to serve alongside him as the second pastor of that congregation. Jan made a trip to Hoogeveen to discuss the needs of the congregation there with Kok.⁷⁹ Making the decision about this call was painful for Jan. He sought guidance from many others, including the members of his classis, but even then he continued to struggle with the decision. He knew that he had every *right* to accept the call to Hoogeveen, but he wondered if it was the *ethical* thing to do.⁸⁰ The call to Hoogeveen was a very prestigious one, but his heart was still devoted to the brothers and sisters in Uelsen.

Finally, after much prayer, consideration, and agonizing, Jan accepted the call to Hoogeveen. He preached his farewell sermon in the congregation in Uelsen on May 16, 1853, using Acts 20:32 as his text.⁸¹ Hepp describes Jan as very emotional as he took leave of his first flock.⁸² The Bavincks and their two-year-old daughter, Berendina,

77. *JBA*, 43.

78. Hepp, *DHB*, 16.

79. *Ibid.*

80. *Ibid.*, 44.

81. “And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”

82. *JBA*, 44.

departed for Hoogeveen using two donated wagons, one for the furniture and the other for the family. They began their trip in the morning and arrived in the evening of the same day.

In Hoogeveen

Though they were warmly welcomed by their new congregation, initially Jan and Gesina felt unfamiliar and “strange” (*vreemd*).⁸³ Because Jan had completed a portion of his theological studies there, he knew a few people, but Gesina knew no one. It is no wonder that in their first few months, they deeply missed the congregation in Uelsen.

At Jan’s installation, Pastor Kok preached from 1 Corinthians 3:9: “For we are God’s fellow workers. You are God’s field, God’s building.” In the evening service, the newly installed pastor preached on 2 Corinthians 10:14–16.⁸⁴ That day was the beginning of Jan’s ministry as the second pastor of the Christian Separated Reformed Church in Hoogeveen.

Only a few months later, in the fall of 1853, Pastor Kok, his wife, and their daughter contracted an extremely debilitating illness.⁸⁵ Once more God was providentially directing the life of Jan Bavinck. At just the right time, he was there to ensure that the important pastoral duties were carried out, while Pastor Kok and his family went through the long and arduous healing process.

In 1854, a year after Bavinck arrived in Hoogeveen, the Separated Reformed Churches held a general assembly (synod) in Zwolle, a picturesque city in the province of Overijssel. Even though all the Separated Reformed congregations shared very much in common, there remained some differences among them that caused suspicions among some of the leaders and pastors. A handful of the issues were definitely not theological in nature, but rather revolved around preferences concerning

83. *Ibid.*, 45.

84. “For we are not overextending ourselves, as though we did not reach you. For we were the first to come all the way to you with the gospel of Christ. We do not boast beyond limit in the labors of others. But our hope is that as your faith increases, our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged, so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another’s area of influence.”

85. *JBA*, 45.

“favorite son” pastors and their personalities. Other suspicions concerned allegiances to certain “favorite” pastors. There were indeed a few theological differences on matters, some issues being substantially more significant than others.⁸⁶ Although the delegates made every effort to settle these issues in a brotherly and decent manner, the delegates from South-Holland chose to leave the meeting.⁸⁷ This is somewhat typical of the manner in which some differences were decided and how some delegates conducted themselves in the local churches, in consistories, and at larger meetings during this time—and thereafter—in Dutch church history.

On June 15 the synod voted to establish a theological seminary in the little city of Kampen, a village approximately twelve miles from Zwolle. It was decided that the schools in Groningen, Arnhem, and Hoogeveen that had served the Separatist churches so well would close and the students would attend the new theological seminary.⁸⁸ With the seminary’s formation, the Separatist churches hoped to provide a place that trained men for the pastoral ministry and a theological seminary that would become a bastion of orthodoxy in a land that certainly had its share of heterodoxy. The delegates decided that they would need to select four teachers for the school who would bear the title “Docent.”

Each docent would earn an annual salary of Hfl. 1,200—four times what Bavinck had made in Uelsen. The delegates compiled a list of qualified men. The delegates all agreed that Jan Bavinck’s name should be on that list along with the names of four other men. The other nominees were Pastors Simon van Velzen,⁸⁹ Anthony Brummelkamp,⁹⁰

86. *Ibid.*, 47.

87. *Ibid.*

88. Hepp, *DHB*, 16.

89. Simon van Velzen was born in Amsterdam on December 14, 1819, and died in Kampen on April 3, 1896. Brummelkamp was his brother-in-law. He accepted a call to the Separatist congregation in Amsterdam. According to reports, he was a greatly loved and highly accomplished preacher. In ecclesiastical matters, van Velzen was a man with a great deal of influence. It is also said that he was born with a desire for polemics, but not in a mean-spirited manner. He stood head and shoulders above all the others in the Separatist movement to insure that the church returned to its old Reformed roots. (Cf. Grosheide, et al., eds., *Christelijke encyclopaedie*, 5:544–45.)

90. Anthony Brummelkamp was born October 14, 1811, in Amsterdam. His parents were wealthy merchants in tobacco products. In his earlier years he came under the influence of Isaac da Costa and the Remonstrant pastor ter Borg. Later he became a complete follower

Helenius de Cock,⁹¹ and Tamme Foppens de Haan.⁹² The first three, “founding fathers” of the Separatist movement, were nominated unanimously, and Jan received thirty-three out of forty votes.⁹³ Valentine Hepp describes Jan Bavinck as a “born teacher” who would be a perfect fit for the school.⁹⁴ His gifts were easily recognized, and though he did not receive as many votes as the others, Hepp points out that Jan received his nomination *first*.⁹⁵

After the synod, Jan went to Vriezeveen to the home of Gesina’s parents where his wife and daughter had stayed in his absence. Once again Jan’s indecision gripped him concerning his acceptance or rejection of his appointment as a docent. He expected his wife to understand his indecision as she always had in the past. However, Gesina’s response was different than he expected.⁹⁶ Believing that the decision should be

of Reformed theology. Of note is that Brummelkamp was more of a Separatist than the remainder of the Separatists. His name is associated in his circle with the “Gelderland” and “Overijssel” directions, which tended toward isolationism. For a while he was the editor of *The Trumpet* (*De Bazuin*). We have no academic writings from his pen, although he was rather prolific when it came to shorter articles and giving speeches. (Cf. *CE*, 1:389–90.)

91. Helenius de Cock was born on November 1, 1824, in Eppenhuizen in the province of Groningen. He was the son of Hendrik de Cock of the renowned “Act of Separation or Return (to Reformed theology and church polity),” signed on October 13, 1834, in Ulrum. Helenius de Cock was a very logical thinker with outstanding organizational and administrative gifts. His contribution as professor at the Theological Seminary in Kampen was that he kept the Separatist Church in the orthodox direction. When Herman Bavinck was named as professor, however, the younger theologian took over the duties of teaching systematic theology, and de Cock faded more into the background. (Cf. *CE*, 1:476.)

92. Tamme Foppens (I know, but I’m not making his name up) de Haan was born on January 28, 1791, in Duurswoude to Christian parents who were well-connected in civil matters. From his early years, de Haan desired to be a minister of the Word of God. He attended Leiden University for his theological education. In approximately 1820 or 1821 de Haan sent a letter to the King of Holland about the deplorable condition in the church. He was roundly rebuked and found himself in the midst of a virulent dispute with the King. The attack from the King’s side was so intense that de Haan moved to Gorredijk and withdrew from the ministry for almost six years. By 1826, however, after a long recovery, de Haan reentered the pastoral ministry. While serving as a professor in Kampen, de Haan taught Greek, Hebrew, Syriac, Aramaic, logic, metaphysics, and dogmatics. In 1860 the Synod of Hoogeveen gave him his emeritus status. De Haan passed into glory on March 28, 1868, in Kampen at the age of seventy-seven. One of his former students, Anthony Brummelkamp Jr., remarked at his funeral that for his students de Haan was everything. All of them would reflect upon their time under his teaching with a great deal of love. He was, Brummelkamp opined, the type of man you meet but once in a lifetime. (Cf. *CE*, 2:427.)

93. *JBA.*, 49.

94. Hepp, *DHB*, 14.

95. *Ibid.*, 16.

96. *JBA.*, 50.

clear to her husband and that he was eminently qualified for the position, Gesina suggested prayer as an answer and left the entire matter to God. If the Lord called Jan to Kampen, she would gladly follow him.⁹⁷ Gesina's parents agreed wholeheartedly with their daughter.

Though many might jump at such an opportunity to teach, Jan did not. He found it substantially more difficult to make such a serious, far-reaching decision. As was habitually the case, Jan was filled with questions. Should he remain in the pastoral ministry, or should he accept the appointment? Would he be a worthy addition to the new school? Could he teach at the level that would be required of him? The task that awaited him appeared to be too weighty.⁹⁸ Jan assessed his options, waffled a great deal, and simply could not receive any peace about the matter.⁹⁹ After considering all the positives and negatives and exhausting all possible avenues as well as his good wife and many of his friends, Bavinck decided to cast lots for his answer. It was a method that had served him well in the past, and he was confident it would serve him well again.

He sat down and wrote two letters, one accepting the position and another declining it. He sealed the letters in plain envelopes and called in a student named J. Moolhuizen to choose one of the letters from his desk and drop it in the mailbox.¹⁰⁰ Moolhuizen chose the rejection. Years later in his autobiography, Jan revealed his response to that choice. "I shall not mention what I felt and what transpired within me the moment when I found out what the outcome was," he wrote. "I will just say this: I did not have any peace with what happened both at that time and later."¹⁰¹ To be sure, strong-minded Gesina had her own response to the outcome, for she had been convinced that her husband was qualified for the position at the theological seminary and should have accepted it.¹⁰²

97. *Ibid.*

98. Hepp, *DHB*, 16.

99. *Ibid.*

100. J. Moolhuizen was just one year younger than Jan Bavinck and was one of Jan's students in Uelsen and Hoogeveen. Later he became the pastor at the church in Emlichheim in 1855 and at Beilen in 1874 and retired in 1900. He died that same year.

101. *JBA*, 18.

102. *Ibid.*, 49.

The Birth of Herman Bavinck

On December 13, 1854, only one week after the opening of the theological school in Kampen, while Jan was a pastor in Hoo-geveen, the man who would be one of Holland's preeminent theologians, teachers, pastors, and politicians was born. They named him Herman. Only six years earlier, the long and arduous struggle for religious freedom for the Separatist congregations had ended,¹⁰³ and the Dutch government had granted them the legal right to meet and worship. Jan and Gesina had already lived through several struggles and important decisions, and they had learned to support one another in them. Their understanding of differences and their ability to integrate different perspectives into family life supplied valuable life lessons for their son, Herman. What this produced in him was a combination of objectivity and subjectivity,¹⁰⁴ an irenic nature,¹⁰⁵ and a thorough, compendious, and comprehensive knowledge of theology.¹⁰⁶

His father, a positive influence and a good example for Herman his entire life, was a much-beloved and well-respected pastor and teacher.¹⁰⁷ Because of his early piety, he had developed a strong "experiential side" to his character, and expressions of his Christian faith, his manner of living out and applying his biblical faith, added a rich dimension to his son's understanding of Christianity. The opening words of Jan Bavinck's autobiography exemplified and characterized his entire life:

103.

104. Cf. S. Meijers, *Objectiviteit en Existentialiteit: Een onderzoek naar hun verhouding in de theologie van Herman Bavinck en in door hem beïnvloede concepties* (doctoral dissertation at the Rijksuniversiteit in Utrecht) (Kampen: Kok, 1979).

105. In his introduction to the reprinting of Bavinck's first speech as rector of the Theological Seminary in Kampen, Dr. G. Puchinger cites the remark that A. A. van Ruler made in Kampen on November 24, 1966, when he said, "Personally, in the midst of all of this cacophony I prefer to listen to the restful voice of Herman Bavinck." Cited in Herman Bavinck, *De Katholiceit van Christendom en Kerk*, ed. Dr. G. Puchinger (Kampen: Kok, 1968).

106. For example, his editorial work on the *Synopsis Purioris Theologiæ*, where he gave a compendium of the theologies of Johannem Polyanddrum, Andream Rivetum, Antonium Walaecum, and Antonium Thysium is a clear manifestation of this point. Of course, the *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, as well as his numerous occasional writings on a wide variety of topics, makes the same point.

107. See appendixes B and C where I give a summary of two of Jan Bavinck's Heidelberg Catechism expositions.

“I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know, in paths that they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I do, and I do not forsake them” (Isa. 42:16).

Although father Bavinck was hampered by hesitations at certain key, life-defining moments, he was also an *extremely* gifted and intelligent person.¹⁰⁸ It is quite possible that his hesitations were not the product of a character flaw but rather of true biblical humility.

After Jan’s death, H. H. Kuyper, Abraham Kuyper’s son, called his preaching profound and yet simple.¹⁰⁹ Jan regularly stressed the practical application of the text in the lives of the members of the congregation, gave an admonition to self-examination, and issued a warning of the impending last judgment. All this was not commonplace among many of his colleagues during that time in Dutch ecclesiastical history. Such was the character of Herman Bavinck’s father.

Perhaps the greatest strength Herman’s mother, Gesina, brought him was her decisiveness and determination. Unlike Jan, who often hesitated, sometimes to the point of “decisional paralysis,” she was perceptive and able to make decisions quickly. Gesina was energetic and willing to take the initiative and the proverbial bull by the horns in important matters. She was simple, truthful, and sober-minded.¹¹⁰ Through the years she provided both courage and resolution in the face of the unknown, which Jan needed. Herman certainly incorporated many of her strong character traits into his life. She was a driving force as well as a force to be reckoned with. Her strong spirit and deep faith benefited both her husband and her children. Without a doubt, she had a profound influence upon Herman’s development and growth.¹¹¹ Such was the character of Herman Bavinck’s mother.

According to Hepp, the Bavinck household was described as containing an element of *Kulturfeindlichkeit* because of the manner in which the family discussed and communicated about a variety of ideas and

108. Bremmer, *HBZT*, 14.

109. Quoted in *ibid.*, 15.

110. *Ibid.*. Not necessarily in that order. How she remained “sober” is beyond me. It’s a wonder her husband didn’t drive her to drinking!

111. After what I have written above it should be clear that she would not be neglected.

perspectives—both religious and secular.¹¹² Another of Herman Bavinck's friends, Henry Dosker, stated something similar when he asserted that the Bavinck household "cherished all the Puritanical and often provincial ideas and ideals of the early Church of the Separation. Simple, almost austere in their mode of life, exhibiting something of what the Germans call *Kulturfeindlichkeit*, pious to the core, teaching their children more by example than by precept."¹¹³ However, a former student of Herman Bavinck, J. H. Landwehr, who was a regular visitor in the Bavinck home, said this: "A truly Christian spirit dominated in the house of the old pastor. One did not find there command upon command and rule upon rule; but, being bound to the Word of the Lord, there was Christian freedom, which had a benevolent outworking."¹¹⁴ Bavinck biographer R. H. Bremmer agrees more with the student than with the skeptics.¹¹⁵ There is good reason to believe that Hepp's assessment is an exaggeration.

It is quite likely that a simplicity dominated the Bavinck household that was at times at loggerheads with the ways of the world. The Bavinck family understood that Christians can make good use of the culture, but at the same time there was a definite need for an antithetical posture over against culture. Perhaps this "homegrown" attitude about culture and faith was what led Bavinck to spend many of his years as a professor of theology wrestling with the whole question of the relationship of Christianity to culture.

Many of the qualities of character found in each of Herman Bavinck's parents would be manifested in this brilliant theologian. Each one would contribute significantly to the son's character and worldview. Moreover, the spiritual development of his father and mother would play a key role in the spiritual life of their son, and, most of all, he would inherit a deep love for and appreciation of the church of Jesus Christ from both of them. That strong foundation laid through their consistent and godly parenting bore fruit quite early in the life of young Herman.

112. This is German for "a hostility toward or animosity against cultural things." Hepp, *DHB*, 14.

113. Harinck, "Herman Bavinck and Geerhardus Vos," 5.

114. J. H. Landwehr, *In Memoriam: Prof. Dr. H. Bavinck. Herdacht door een zijner oud-leerlingen* (Kampen: Kok, 1921), 7.

115. Bremmer, *HBZT*, 15.