

Herman Bavinck—Reformation 21 (I)

Introduction

Since approximately 1980 it has been my desire to write a biography of Dr. Herman Bavinck (1854-1921), in my estimation quite possibly the finest and greatest theologian Holland has ever produced. Finally, the time has come to cut the Gordian knot and, since July of this year I have begun in earnest. Studying Bavinck has always been sheer delight to me ever since I was introduced to his writings in 1974. I was taking an overload course at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary under the direction of Dr. Roger Nicole. I can still recall those days when reading one page in Dutch took at least an hour. But I persevered and eventually moved my family to Holland for almost ten years where I lived, studied, and was the pastor of a Dutch-speaking congregation in Rijswijk (don't even try to pronounce it!) near The Hague.

For approximately four years I lived in the little village of Kampen in the Province of Overijssel on the IJssel River (where else?) where Bavinck lived, preached occasionally, and taught. Day after day I would walk by the house where Bavinck once lived, saw the church where he and his father preached—unfortunately, it has long since given way to the rampant liberalism in Holland—, and sit in the classrooms where Bavinck lectured. Those were truly idyllic, halcyon days. During that time I had the time and leisure as a theology student to immerse myself in the *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* and the numerous “occasional” writings of this giant of a theologian.

Someone commented to me once that when you started reading Martin Luther he gets into your head and you are hooked. Being required to read large chunks of Luther in Holland I know from experience that the saying is true. But it is also equally true that once you start reading Bavinck you just want to come back for more. His style is readable, his knowledge is beyond encyclopedic, and his persuasion is totally Reformed. What sets him apart from a number of Reformed theologians is the irenic, balanced manner in which Bavinck unfolds each of the various *loci* of theology. The following statement by Dr. A.A. van Ruler is accurately descriptive of Bavinck's theology. While delivering a guest lecture at the theological seminary in Kampen on November 24, 1966 said this: “Personally, in all this cacophony I prefer to listen to the restful voice of Herman Bavinck.”¹

In this short biographical sketch I want to introduce you to a man that in my estimation was the greatest theologian Holland ever produced. Quite often and unfortunately, Bavinck has been overshadowed by another great Dutchman: Abraham Kuyper. Having read both, however, I am fully convinced that Bavinck is far less speculative than Kuyper and saw theological matters more clearly. One example must suffice here. Kuyper is known to have taught the doctrine of “presupposed regeneration” among God's covenant children. In actuality, Kuyper was far less adamant about this doctrine than were his followers, but it is nonetheless true that this doctrine was part and parcel of Kuyper's theology. In a very calm and irenic fashion, Bavinck wrote a book with the translated title: *Calling and Regeneration* (Dutch: *Roeping en Wedergeboorte*),

¹ Cited in Drs. G. Puchinger's reissue of Bavinck's rector's speech delivered in Kampen on December 18, 1888, *De Katholiciteit van Christendom en Kerk*, (Kampen: Kok, 1968), p. xii. What van Ruler said was, “Persoonlijk luister ik in deze kakofonie het liefst naar de rustige stem van Herman Bavinck.”

which reversed the process Kuyper was espousing. The rebuttal was clear yet gentle. Bavinck held Kuyper in high esteem although he continued to “go his own way” and was not unduly swayed by his senior. As we shall see, at crucial times Bavinck stood his ground, much to the chagrin of Kuyper.

Both were graduates of the liberal Leiden University—at different times, of course—and both had many of the same professors who exposed them to liberal theological methods. Both were used mightily and powerfully by God to effectuate a church union in 1892 between the Separatists (Bavinck) and a movement within the Dutch State Church known as the Doleantie (Kuyper). Ironically, it was Kuyper’s speculative doctrine of presupposed regeneration, just mentioned, that later played a causal role in 1944 in the dissolution of that union.

In terms of Bavinck’s influence upon theology in Holland I should mention that his *GD* is still being reprinted on a regular basis in The Netherlands and he is still read even at the liberal schools, which are most of the theological seminaries in Holland presently. He is even quoted by Karl Barth in the *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, albeit with several spelling errors. Granted that Bavinck’s influence is waning somewhat, he is still a theological force to be reckoned with. Those who read him, in spite of their theological bent, are almost forced to respond to him.

Moreover, a large number of Reformed theologians in North America are still reading Bavinck to great benefit and seminary professors are still requiring their students to read him. This has been made all the easier on the English-speaking world by the publishing of the *GD* in English. Even though some of the material is a bit dated, there are still great theological nuggets to be mined out of the *Reformed Dogmatics*. It is my firm conviction that professors, students, pastors, and the man and woman in the pews will derive untold biblical insights from reading the *RD*.

Each volume of the *GD/RD* is packed with a balanced approach to the history of dogma, the philosophical notions prevalent in Bavinck’s day that played roles in shaping theology, and a truly dogmatic-confessional grounding of his theology. In addition, I should point out that Bavinck was an excellent exegete which means that his theology is not merely doxological pronouncement or declaration, but rather a theology that was built on solid, in depth exegesis.

Even though Bavinck never published a work on Ethics,² it was his intention to integrate Ethics and Dogmatics. When he became the professor of Dogmatics in Kampen, Bavinck confided to his lifelong liberal friend, Snouck Hurgronje that he was continually working to gather the appropriate materials for a Dogmatics and Ethics.³ Professor of Ethics (Emeritus), Jochem Douma, speaking in a different context wrote these appropriate words: Calvin knew what every dogmatician and ethicist must know, namely, that every doctrine has an ethical side and every ethical question roots deep in the soil of dogma. Dogmatics without ethics is empty; ethics without dogmatics is blind. In his own words, here is how Bavinck saw the relationship between Dogmatics and Ethics: (I am quoting this at length since it is both pertinent and indicative of the *RD*.)

² I have in my personal files handwritten documents by Bavinck that are his notes for a work on Ethics.

³ Recorded by R. Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck en Zijn Tijdgenoten*, (Kampen: Kok, 1966), p. 53.

Dogmatics describes the deeds of God done for, to, and in human beings; ethics describes what renewed human beings now do on the basis of and in the strength of those divine deeds. In dogmatics human beings are passive; they receive and believe; in ethics they are themselves active agents. In dogmatics, the articles of the faith are treated; in ethics, the precepts of the Decalogue. In the former, that which concerns faith is dealt with; in the latter, that which concerns love, obedience, and good works. Dogmatics sets forth what God is and does for human beings and causes them to know God as their Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier; ethics sets for what human beings are and do for God now; how, with everything they are and have, with intellect and will and all their strength, they devote themselves to God out of gratitude and love. Dogmatics is the system of the knowledge of God; ethics is that of the service of God. The two disciplines, far from facing each other as two independent entities, together form a single system; they are related members of a single organism.⁴

With this as background, let's now take a look at this outstanding Dutch theologian, starting with his parents.

Bavinck's Parents

Under the Batavian Republic in the post-Napoleonic era, a State Church (The Reformed Church; Dutch: *Hervormde Kerk*) was organized in Holland.⁵ The three main universities that taught the pastors for the State Church were located at that time in Leiden, Utrecht, and Groningen. In less than two decades the HK was in dire spiritual straits. Unbelief was both rampant as well as acceptable among the professors and the clergy. The Three Forms of Unity (Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession, and Canons of Dort) were no longer either taught or adhered to and the Church Order of the Synod of Dort had also fallen into disrepute. Many in the HK considered the Three Forms of Unity and the Church Order to be both archaic and irrelevant.

It was into this spiritual setting that Bavinck's parents spent their early years.⁶ Their marriage is quite remarkable in a number of ways that I'll describe in a moment.

Father Jan Bavinck was born on February 5, 1826 and was baptized ten days later in the Dutch Reformed Church. Jan's father's name was Hermanus and his mother's was Fenna (née Niehaus). Both parents were part of the "alt-reformirten" in the village, which meant that as far as their theology was concerned, they hearkened back to the traditions of the Synod of Dordrecht (1618/1619). Hermanus was a carpenter and, according to Jan's autobiography, earned a very good income for his family.⁷ But Jan's father died quite unexpectedly at the young age of forty-nine, a mere three years after Jan's baptism.

⁴ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. 1, (John Bolt [ed.] & John Vriend [trans.]), (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), p. 58.

⁵ In 1816, by order of the king, a Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church was held at The Hague, which later was known—quite originally—as "The Hague Synod." What was remarkable about this Synod was not the name given to it but the decisions that flowed forth out of it. Apart from the reality that this Synod was not one based upon a Reformed foundation, what was set in motion was a decision regarding freedom in doctrine that, in essence, led to some of the crassest forms of licentiousness and antinomianism. Due to its close affinities with the edict of the king, the Synod really became a puppet of the State or as Jan Bavinck calls it a "creature of the State" (*Staatscreatuur*).

⁶ 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 section, I shall be depending heavily upon that work along with a few other Dutch monographs that deal with this period in Dutch ecclesiastical history. Jan Bavinck's autobiography will be abbreviated *JBA*.

⁷ *JBA*, 3.

He was survived by a young widow with six children: five girls and a son.⁸ This naturally posed particular problems in many areas of life, not least of which was providing financially for six children without a husband, the oldest of whom was twelve and the youngest of whom was just a few months old. Jan was the fifth of the six children.

Father Bavinck's childhood was nothing short of remarkable in terms of German and Dutch spirituality and piety. There was what can rightly be called a strong "experiential side" to Jan Bavinck's character and Christian faith that he inculcated in to his son, thereby creating an extra dimension to Herman's effectiveness as a professor, pastor, husband, father, and friend. Jan Bavinck's profound influence on his son provided for him a necessary balance between objectivity and existentiality.⁹ Keep in mind that Jan came from a household that repudiated the State Church and its theological liberalism. Rather early in his youth Jan was enthralled with spiritual matters and desired to become a minister of the Word of God. The little village of Bentheim where he grew up spoke both German and Dutch making him thoroughly conversant with both languages.

Since Bentheim was close to the Dutch border, the villagers were kept closely apprised of the church situation in Holland. In 1834 the unthinkable happened in the Netherlands: a number of orthodox pastors broke the law and began holding worship services in barns and in the open air in blatant opposition to state law. These were tumultuous times and many—most—of the intrepid pastors were incarcerated, some multiple times. This only served to fan the flames of orthodoxy among many of the "grass roots" citizens in Holland—and in the area surrounding Bentheim in Germany.

As Jan Bavinck grew and was able to grasp the import of the theological situation a burning desire on his part to become a minister of the Word of God began to consume him. He received a great deal of encouragement from an uncle, Harm Niehaus, who both bolstered and balanced Jan's knowledge of the Three Forms of Unity by personal discussions as well as introducing Jan to the preaching of a certain Jan Berend Sundag, who was a preacher of the "alt-reformierte" stripe. Listening to Sundag's sermons only intensified Jan's desire to enter the ministry. The main obstacle was, however, financial. His mother simply did not have the financial wherewithal to put him through seminary.

Providentially, there came a time, however, when Sundag was quite simply burned out. As an itinerate preacher the lion's share of his time was spent in preaching and caring for those who desired to hear the true Word of God and not the watered down version preached from the HK pulpits. In addition, Sundag had to travel great distances in order to be able to preach and minister. Finally, Sundag had to admit the obvious: he simply could not continue under the current exigencies.

To that end, a classis meeting was called (a classis is similar to a Presbyterian Presbytery) to provide some respite for Sundag. At least, the classis allowed Sundag to lay out his case and finally voted to consider *a* candidate to aid Sundag. To our way of thinking, Sundag needed substantially more than *a* candidate to help him, but in those days and times suspicions ran high. It is at this point that the story becomes anecdotal. The classis meeting was comprised of twenty-two delegates and finally two candidates were decided upon and Jan Bavinck was one of them. The meeting voted and the vote

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Dr. S. Meijers wrote a dissertation in 1979 with the translated title *Objectivity and Existentiality*. In the dissertation one of Meijers' theses was that in his approach to Reformed theology Bavinck maintained the precious balance between objectivity and subjectivity. His approach was not a cold, sterile analysis, but breathed the truth of Scripture and the illumination and enlightenment of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life.

was an 11-11 tie. They decided to leave the matter to God and cast lots. To that end, they called a young woman from the kitchen to resolve the issue for them. She chose Jan Bavinck's name and the rest is history—sort of.

There is yet another interesting detail in Jan's life that needs to be discussed. Almost as soon as he was admitted by the classis to study theology, a war broke out and his area of Germany began to conscript soldiers. Jan obediently complied and reported to the town of Lingen, which lay relatively close to the German border, a short distance from Bentheim and even closer to where he would first serve as a minister of the Word. Clearly, Jan Bavinck understood something about duty and honor. In keeping with military procedures,¹⁰ when he arrived he had to wait in line for his physical, which was conducted out of doors.¹¹ At this juncture of his life the hand of God was once again noticeably visible. Jan Bavinck's place in the line was quite providential, to put it mildly. When it was his turn to be examined, the doctor looked at him and said, "Put your clothes back on, we have enough men. You are free. You can go."¹² We can talk about providence pretty glibly, but try to imagine all the diverse occurrences that went into the Lord's positioning Jan Bavinck in his particular place in line so he could be dismissed without having to serve! It boggles the mind!

Jan went to Holland to study theology at the home of one of the dissenting pastors. By this time, the name of the church group was the "Separatists" (Dutch: *Afgescheidenen*) for obvious reasons. Jan proved to be a precocious student and eventually served Separatist congregations in Veldhausen, Uelsen, Wilsum, and Emlichheim. He was a single pastor and his consistory (similar to a Presbyterian Session) urged (read: insisted) that he get married. He was eventually introduced to Gesina Holland from Vriezeveen, whose parents were solid, orthodox Christians.

Shortly after their marriage, Jan accepted a call to Hoogeveen (May 16, 1853). A year later, the synod of the now official Separatist church established the Theological Seminary in the little village of Kampen. Jan was asked to be a professor in the new school. The decision weighed heavily on him and in the final analysis, he just couldn't make up his mind. Recalling how the Lord had providentially worked in his life in the past (being chosen as a theological student and being released from military service), Jan thought it best to have the Lord decide this for him as well. He wrote two letters—an acceptance and a refusal—and had a student named Moolhuizen come, choose one of the sealed letters, and drop it in the mailbox. Moolhuizen chose the refusal! Gesina replied—well, let's just say that she wasn't pleased! Jan wrote in his autobiography later that he regretted his indecision for quite a long time. What assuaged it somewhat was that his son, Herman, was later appointed to the same position and accepted it.

Whereas Jan could be indecisive, Gesina was the opposite. She was decisive and resolute. She was an excellent pastor's wife who was both an encouragement and support to her husband throughout his time in the pastoral ministry. It goes without saying that Herman possessed characteristics of both parents and that these served him well in his life.

Now we'll take a brief look at Herman Bavinck's youth and study at Leiden.

¹⁰ Better known as the "hurry up and wait" military syndrome.

¹¹ Some things in the military do not change. Fortunately, he wasn't living in Iceland or Alaska!

¹² *JBA*, 31. "Ziehen Sie euch wieder an, wir haben schon Mannschaften genug. Sie sind frei, Sie können gehen."

Bavinck's Youth

On the 14th of December 1854, Jan Bavinck registered his son's birth at the city hall in Hoozeveen. Four days later on December 17th, he baptized Herman in the church. Bremmer records that after the birth of Herman the Bavinck family did not remain in Hoozeveen much longer. There were a few pertinent reasons for that. First, with the advent of the theological seminary in Kampen all of the students in Hoozeveen moved to Kampen. Jan had been teaching the students there—including Moolhuizen—and there was no more need for him, since he was the second pastor.

Jan Bavinck was a great demand as a pastor and he received and accepted a call to Bunschoten. Five years later, Jan took a call to Almkerk. Herman was now approximately seven years old. His parents enrolled him in the Hasselman Institute under the leadership of L.W. Hasselman, his sister, P. Hasselman, and Mr. J. de Boer. It was a boarding school with an outstanding academic reputation. The teachers were called "Monsieur" by the students and the students were called "Young Gentlemen" by the teachers. It sounds quite a bit like public school today in the United States, doesn't it?

The Bavinck family subsidized its income and the tuition to the Hasselman Institute by having Jan teach catechism as well as Latin and Greek at Hasselman's school. Herman Bavinck was not what his father would call a particularly precocious child. Father Bavinck was more than a little concerned about his son academically. At the early stages of his life—remember, he was seven years old!—Herman did not seem to show too much promise as a thinker, according to Jan, and he wondered if Herman even qualified for further study. After a few weeks, de Boer told Jan that Herman was truly "a diamond in the rough."

Studying for the next two years in Zwolle was somewhat idyllic for Herman. The city itself was relatively small and intimate—approximately 21,000 people—and the academics were outstanding. It was during this time that the "diamond in the rough" began to get some of his rough edges smoothed off. Bavinck finished the second and third years of his study in one year and won first place prizes in the areas of English, Dutch, and Math.

In 1873, Jan Bavinck passed through Zwolle on his way to Kampen where he had received a call. Jan stopped by and visited with his son and discussed the possibility that he would take the call to Kampen. Herman made the laconic notation in his diary, "Father has returned home. What will be the result of this call?" Historically, the answer is that Jan accepted the call and remained in Kampen until he retired in 1903. Soon there would be another Bavinck in Kampen, but Herman still had to finish his Gymnasium studies. He took first place honors in writing, Latin, French, and Dutch on July 15th. His father preached his farewell sermon in Almkerk on July 27th and was installed in Kampen on August 3rd. It had been almost twenty years since Jan, God, and Moolhuizen had decided against going to Kampen.

The year 1873/1874 was a bit of a rest or intermezzo period for Herman. After his rigorous studies in Zwolle we find him returning to Kampen and to the parental home. It was during this time that Herman decided to study theology and, as a young man, enrolled in the Theological Seminary in Kampen. It was a situation that can best be described this way: He enrolled at Kampen, but his heart wasn't in it. Where did he truly want to study? He confided to his parents that he wanted to learn about liberal theology

first hand and that the best place for that was where Abraham Kuyper had studied: Leiden University.

On June 5, 1874 the decision was made to go to Leiden and begin studying Theology that September. To say that the reactions were severe is understatement. Jan represented all that the theological seminary stood for, was a pastor in the congregation where the seminary was located, had been nominated to serve as a “docent” in the school, and *his* son wanted to study in Leiden!

In a certain sense, I know how Jan, Gesina, and Herman Bavinck felt. In 1977 I transferred from the Free University of Amsterdam to the seminary where Bavinck taught for many years in Kampen. Unfortunately, in the meantime the school had become quite liberal. My family and I attended a conservative Reformed church in Kampen while I attended the liberal school. The members of the conservative church were warm and generous, but it simply did not fit into their mode of thinking that I would ever consider studying at “the other school.” I tried to explain that I had received a very solid, conservative, and Reformed education in America and wanted to study the liberals first hand. Some understood, but most did not. In a substantially more concentrated manner—the church members in Kampen could always refer to me as “the crazy American”—Jan, Gesina, and Herman had to live through the ridicule, accusations, and misunderstandings.

In spite of an upheaval among the Separatist church stalwarts, on September 23, 1874 Bavinck bade farewell to his parents and the village of Kampen. His notation in his diary was, at best, pithy: “Shall I remain in the faith. God grant it.” What was that time in Leiden like for the young Bavinck?

Study at Leiden

On September 24, 1874 Bavinck enrolled in the Introductory phase of his theological study. There was—and in some circles still remains—a kind of “hell week” for incoming theological students. As with any type of system involving fallen human beings, some are “over the top” with their hazing and harassing of the new students. The day that Bavinck began his “Green” week as it is called, at the advice of Pastor J.H. Donner he withdrew from that part of his introduction to Leiden. Hepp records a poem that typified the attitude of the theological students from the HK that were attending Leiden. It includes juvenile, immature rhymes involving not studying, drinking a lot of beer, imitating “great men,” neglecting assignments, partying, and swearing like a sailor. It was primarily for these reasons that Bavinck chose not to participate in Green week.

By and large, all of his professors were liberal, but one of Bavinck’s biographers, Valentine Hepp, contends that some were past their “heyday” in terms of theological influence. It is correct to conclude that his professors were different from when Kuyper was there, but it goes too far to state that they were passé. In point of fact, they still held to the German higher critical methods that Kuyper had been exposed to and they imparted their methodology to the young Bavinck.

Our “diamond in the rough” was not satisfied with merely completing the candidate phase of his study, but on September 20th of 1877 completed his candidate’s exam in the field of Semitic languages as well. As the pattern was beginning to develop, Snouck did the same thing the day prior to Bavinck. Quickly following on the heels of the candidate study Bavinck began his doctoral work. Upon completion of his exams, he, like all the

other doctoral students, had to write a paper of approximately fifty pages called a *scriptie*. One of his professors assigned him the topic: “A succinct demonstration of the influence of Schleiermacher upon the exposition of the Holy Scriptures.” On April 4, 1879 Bavinck defended his *scriptie* and doctoral exam, again with the appellation of *cum laude*. Bremmer insightfully remarks that it was precisely a year and a day after he had completed the candidate’s exam. A short notation in Bavinck’s diary for that day reads: “I received *cum laude* but I had the feeling that I deserved it less than at my candidate’s, SDG.”

It was now up to Bavinck to end his study time by writing his thesis. Only then would he receive his degree of Doctor in Theology. As he approached the time of the actual approval of his subject and the writing of the thesis Bavinck had considered a number of topics that he found interesting. Professor J.G.R. Acquoy, who had joined the faculty as teacher of Church History in 1878 advised him to write something on the history of the Separation. Originally, this seemed like both a good and rather obvious choice for Bavinck. It is noteworthy that the suggestion would even be made given the animosity between the CRC and the HK. In October 1879 Bavinck even made a trip to Genderen to do some research on the history of the Separation. His diary simply remarks that he found nothing of interest there.

Bavinck eventually settled in on writing about a topic dealing with Zwingli’s ethics. Once the topic of his doctoral dissertation had been approved, Bavinck worked hard in the months that followed. In a letter to Bavinck from Professor Kuenen dated April 16, 1880 Kuenen had already read a first draft of Bavinck’s dissertation. Bremmer is correct when he states that this was a remarkable procedure since Professor Scholten was Bavinck’s promoter. Nevertheless, it is evident that Bavinck placed a high premium on Kuenen’s opinion. The professor wrote that he had enjoyed reading the draft. Kuenen had some criticism of the draft but on the whole found the work more than acceptable. Kuenen had contacted Scholten about the manuscript and rather than being upset or feeling like Bavinck had done an end run around him, Scholten found Kuenen’s comments excellent (*uitmuntend*) and requested only a galley proof. On the 10th of June, 1880 Bavinck promoted with a dissertation entitled *De Ethiek van Ulrich Zwingli*.¹³ Scholtens favorable judgment exceeded Bavinck’s expectations and the faculty awarded him the title of Doctor of Theology *cum laude*.

After packing his belongings and saying good bye to professors, brothers and sisters in Christ, and his fellow-students, Bavinck left Leiden and traveled back to Kampen. There with his family and a few acquaintances he once more celebrated his academic accomplishments. His last notations in his diary on the day of his promotion summarize what was going on in his mind. In his typical small handwriting style he wrote, “And now what? What is there for me to do?”¹⁴ This would be a time where he would have to wait on the Lord he loved and served to show him what lay in store for him.

On July 21, 1878, prior to his promotion, Bavinck preached his first sermon in Enschede on the text 1 John 5:4b: *And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith*. It is noteworthy that this is the only published sermon of Bavinck’s. In all likelihood, this text also gives us a bit of autobiography of some of the struggles Bavinck was enduring as he studied at the liberal seminary in Leiden.

¹³ Herman Bavinck, *De Ethiek van Ulrich Zwingli*, (Kampen: Zalsman, 1880).

¹⁴ Diary, June 10, 1880.

There was an interesting development back in Kampen after Bavinck promoted that is noteworthy. Bavinck was CRC but had promoted at a liberal school. Therefore, in order to ensure that he had not lost his faith the theological seminary in Kampen required him to undergo the candidate exams. He completed the first part on the 16th and 17th of July, 1880. His diary records that some were not satisfied with his view of Scripture.¹⁵ Given the soundness of Bavinck's view of Scripture that we find in the *Reformed Dogmatics*, it would appear that there was a great deal of suspicion about him and about his education. On the 19th and 20th Bavinck completed the second part of the candidate exam. He successfully completed the oral portion of the exam, but in Kampen this branch of the examination also contained a sermon that the candidate was required to preach.

Pastor F.J. Bulens van Varsseveld assigned Matthew 15:14a (*Let them alone; they are blind guides*) to Bavinck clearly with a view to Bavinck's professors at Leiden. To make matters worse, he was supposed to preach the sermon the same day it was assigned. According to Hepp, Bavinck was livid; so mad in fact that he refused to preach the text. He explained that he would rather not be a candidate than to fall prey to such narrowmindedness.¹⁶ Father Bavinck attempted to intervene, but to no avail. Finally, at the "eleventh hour" Jan and other of Bavinck's friends convinced him to preach the sermon.

But Bavinck was not done. During the introduction to his sermon Valentine Hepp, basing his findings on an oral report from Pastor J.D. van der Munnik, who was present at Bavinck's sermon, puts these words in Bavinck's mouth: "The reason why this text was assigned to *me* is easily comprehended." The words were spoken under a thinly veiled anger and Bavinck's intent was so clear that Pastor Bulens blushed.¹⁷ Afterwards, Bavinck regained his composure and reigned in his anger and completed the sermon. It is plausible that even though Bulens was insensitive and made a poor choice of texts that he was merely expressing what others thought.

Once Bavinck was over the slight impasse he received numerous invitations to preach in the CRC. It is interesting that once Bavinck was given permission to preach in the churches that his first sermons give us some insight into the type of preacher he was. Being thoroughly Reformed it might be expect to preach on doctrines dealing with predestination, justification by faith, or some other similar doctrine. Bavinck's first sermon was preached in Leiden on January 26, 1878 based on the text found in Galatians 2:20 (*I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me*). Another of his favorite texts was Luke 15:17 (*But when he came to himself, he said, "How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger!*). Thus the themes of the Christian's union with Christ and the parable of the Prodigal Son formed the core around which Bavinck preached. Bremmer comments that Bavinck's choice of texts, both as a candidate and later in life, had a strong evangelical bent.¹⁸

It is apparent that Bavinck loved the CRC, but with a critical eye. On December 8-9, 1879 the theological seminary in Kampen celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary. There

¹⁵ Diary, July 16, 1880.

¹⁶ Hepp, *HB*, 83.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Bremmer, *HBZT*, 35.

were a number of speeches held in churches that Bavinck described as “cold” and “dry” When Helenius de Cock delivered his speech Bavinck characterized it with words such as long, dry, and superficial.¹⁹ But Bavinck was not the type to be critical simply for the sake of being critical. His heartfelt longing for the CRC was that it would remain faithful to the scriptures and also that the theological seminary would prepare its students well for the pastoral ministry. By studying in Leiden and remaining a faithful, active member of the CRC, Bavinck had made some very interesting contacts and friendships that would serve him well throughout his life. He accomplished this, by God’s grace, without losing his love for the historical Reformed faith. How would this young, brilliant theologian function as a pastor? Would he prove to be merely an academic or would he also possess a pastor’s heart? Would he be the type of pastor that stayed locked away in his study or would he be assessable to his congregation and would he shepherd them according to Scripture? In order to answer these questions, we’ll need to turn our attention to Bavinck’s only stint as a pastor in the Friesian village of Franeker.

Pastor in Franeker

Bavinck’s time as a pastor was short. He served one congregation only, but it was during that time that he continued his spiritual growth. Moreover, his labors among the members of the congregation molded and shaped Bavinck in ways he had never expected. As we weave our way through this portion of Bavinck’s life we shall pay special attention to his development as a pastor, his correspondence with Snouck, and his appointment to teach at the CRC theological seminary in Kampen.

Due to a lack of pastors in Bavinck’s day, a man of Bavinck’s qualifications was in huge demand. So much so that he was in Franeker less than six months before his first call came to another congregation. By all reasoning, this was an unfair call. It was issued to him by Amsterdam, which, of course, would have been appealing to any young pastor. It was truly a pastoral “plum.” They offered to double his salary, plus he would be in close proximity to the libraries and cultural amenities that Amsterdam offered.

To his credit, Bavinck declined the call. Prior to his arrival in Franeker, the congregation there had experienced quite a bit of upheaval. Franeker is located in Friesland in the north of Holland near the village of Harlingen and about five miles from the Waddensee. Since 1842, there had been a CRC congregation in this idyllic-like village.²⁰ Franeker is an old, quaint village full of ubiquitous canals, narrow streets, many historical buildings, and intimate little homes.²¹ The congregation had gone through some trying times with two previous pastors. Pastor K.J. Pieters had served the congregation in Franeker from 1851-1875. There were times when his sermons did not square with true Reformed teaching, but his biggest problem and struggle was with alcohol. Eventually, the Elders of the church had a serious meeting with Pastor Pieters where they all had an open discussion about the problem. Pieters admitted that he made too frequent use of alcohol and promised not to allow another drop to pass over his lips.²²

At the same time, Pieters asked the Elders not to police his activities too closely because what he had promised that he was going to attempt would cause him much

¹⁹ Ibid. Comp. *Sola Gratia*, 64ff.

²⁰ Bremmer, *HBZT*, 37.

²¹ Hepp, *Herman Bavinck*, 91.

²² Ibid.

conflict. It wasn't long before Pieters fell off the proverbial wagon. The situation worsened and the Elders of the neighboring church in Harlingen were called in to help with the situation. Pieters' repeated promises were as frequent as his breaking of them. At the end of the day, the Elders in Franeker brought the matter to the attention of the Classis. After hearing the evidence, the Classis was compelled to advise Franeker that the ecclesiastical relationship between Pieters and the congregation be dissolved. He was given severance pay amounting to Hfl. 700 until he could find a call to another congregation. Neither Hepp nor Bremmer makes any mention of whether it was the intention of the Elders in Franeker to inform the congregation to which Pieters received a call of this undesirable, unbiblical situation. This is a worse case scenario of a congregation not explaining to the next congregation that there was definitely a problem with Pieters' life. Because of Pieters' long standing as the pastor in Franeker the Classis decision literally caused a split in the church. A number of members followed Pieters, who immediately following the decision of the Classis began preaching in a barn. For good measure and I might add as a show of rebellion he also administered the sacraments among those who followed him. Many of the ones who left the CRC congregation never returned, even after Pieters finally received another call. Part of the reason why they didn't return had to do with the fact that Pieters took a call in Franeker itself at the Free Evangelical Church, where he labored until his death.²³

Pieters' successor was Pastor P.W.H. Eskes. Hepp states that the Elders' minutes don't mention anything out of the ordinary about Eskes for the first two years. He had an extended "honeymoon" period with the congregation. Moreover, not having to deal with the controversies that swirled about Pieters must have been a breath of fresh air. It appears that once Eskes got more acquainted with the congregation, with Pieters' penchant to preach less than Reformed (read: biblical) sermons, and his drinking problem, Eskes decided what the congregation needed most was a healthy dose of preaching on the doctrine of election. Possibly Eskes' assessment was correct, but according to both Bremmer and Hepp Eskes carried it too far too often.

The congregation began to grow weary of the same topic Sunday in and Sunday out and became disgruntled. Once that happened, the flood gates were opened for more criticism. Apparently, Eskes was rightly accused of reading the works of Abraham Kuyper. To our way of thinking this should not be construed as something negative, but at the time it was because Kuyper was still in the HK. He had begun a newspaper called *The Herald (De Heraut)* and Eskes admitted to committing the cardinal sin of actually reading many of Kuyper's articles, which very thing Hepp describes as "by many in those day considered to be an *unforgivable* sin."²⁴ On February 8, 1880 the Elders recorded in the minutes that because of the preaching and Eskes' physical condition, which had no more strength for the ongoing "battle," that Eskes should leave the congregation in Franeker. He took their *advice*.

On November 2nd Bavinck accepted the call to Franeker. That same day, Bavinck wrote to his friend, Snouck: "As you have read, I have accepted the call to Franeker. It is a fairly large, and for an inexperienced candidate, and fairly difficult congregation. I shudder to enter into the practice, so much so that I would have preferred to turn down the call. But I am of the opinion that I may no longer pull back from such things and give

²³ Ibid., 92.

²⁴ Ibid. Italics mine.

myself up to my personal desires. My ordination is tentatively scheduled for Sunday, March 6, 1881. Therefore, I have a little time to prepare myself for this and that.”²⁵ For whatever reason, the ordination was postponed a week until March 13th.

Bavinck still had to pass his ecclesiastical exam in the classis Franeker, which he did on December 16th. During that time he was questioned in Dogmatics by Pastor Thomas Bos. I mention Bos’ name at this juncture because we are going to encounter it again later in Bavinck’s life. In particular, in 1902, as we shall see, Bos became one of Bavinck’s fiercest opponents.

It must have been a very special occasion both for the congregation as well as for Jan and Gesina Bavinck. Jan preached his son’s ordination sermon and ordained him into the pastoral ministry. The text Jan chose for the service Isaiah 52:7: “*How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news with happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.’*”

By means of interviews with members of the congregation in Franeker, Hepp provides us with some highly interesting insights into that auspicious day. After the sermon, Jan spoke a charge to Franeker’s new pastor. Herman was apparently wearing a rather “thick coat” for the occasion and it appeared that the more Jan spoke to him the more he disappeared into the lapels.²⁶ Hepp records that all during the charge Bavinck would not look up at his father.²⁷ An unidentified Elder sitting close to Bavinck saw what was going on and got Herman’s attention by giving him a nudge. Bavinck got the message, removed the jacket, and looked his father in the eye.²⁸

Bavinck was to preach his first sermon in his new congregation in the evening service. There is little known about what occurred in the time between the morning and evening services, but when Bavinck walked into the consistory room prior to evening worship he was noticeably distraught. The Elders became a little concerned as their newly installed pastor began pacing back and forth.²⁹ Father Jan calmed everyone when he explained that his son was simply very much under the impression of what he was about to do: to preach the Word of God. The Dutch call what was happening to Bavinck “sermon fever” (*preek koorts*). It appears that Bavinck, even though he was an accomplished preacher, never outgrew this phenomenon during his entire time in Franeker. Hepp’s observation that Bavinck would throw up every Sunday morning might be slightly exaggerated, but appears to contain an element of truth.³⁰

The good news is that Bavinck got over his nervousness and preached the evening service on the text 1 Thessalonians 2:4: “*...but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.*” The church was full for both services and afterwards Gesina held a relaxed time with the Elders and their wives where she encouraged the wives in particular to care for her unwed son.³¹

²⁵ Bavinck Archive, Bavinck to Hurgronje, November 2, 1880.

²⁶ Hepp, *Herman Bavinck*, 95.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

It goes without saying that those who are truly called to the pastoral ministry will be changed, molded, and shaped in the crucible of life that is attendant in every congregation. Bavinck's time in Franeker played an essential role in his development as a man of God and pastor of God's people. He had been transplanted from halls of academia to serve a small village. God moved him to Franeker to begin teaching him invaluable spiritual lessons that could not easily be learned—if at all—in an entirely academic setting. It would be in Franeker that the young theologian/pastor would see church life from a very different perspective and would learn to love saints who possessed a simple but robust faith in Christ.

Gesina's request for the females in Franeker to care for her unmarried son was taken to heart, but, as Hepp declares, it wasn't difficult for the congregational members to do.³² One of the first things we learn about Bavinck, therefore, is that from the outset he made himself available to his congregation. Even though the worship services were normally "more than full" with a number of the members of the HK in Franeker coming to hear Bavinck preach the Word, Bavinck was not only approachable, but also took the initiative to visit with as many members as he could.³³

And it was not only the "influential" members that Bavinck visited or the ones with "deep pockets." Both Hepp and Bremmer recount how the young pastor befriended some of the "outcasts" of Franeker and not only invited them to the worship service, but because one was an invalid, set up a special seating arrangement close to the pulpit to accommodate them.³⁴ It's possible that Bavinck had been told of his father's simple beginnings in Bentheim and how his mother had to struggle financially, but for whatever reason, he had a place in his heart for the average—or below average—member of Christ's Church.

There was also a vibrant, robust spiritual life among the members and attendees of the CRC in Franeker. In Bavinck's time there was a tradition that those who were not members of the congregation would be invited to stay and to socialize after the service. At first, there were only a few visitors that stayed, but as Bavinck's reputation as a preacher increased more and more began coming until there were about twenty staying and finally the group size grew to approximately eighty—and these were visitors. The church caretaker and his wife served coffee for everyone. Since many traveled a substantial distance to hear the Word, they brought their own sandwiches with them. For a Dutch/Friesian congregation it appears that even though Franeker had suffered from various problems at bottom they were actually a very friendly congregation.

Given the fact that Bavinck wasn't married his study was located in the upstairs of a married couple named Stekelenburg, who were members of the congregation. Far from being cramped, Hepp states the Bavinck's quarters were large enough to accommodate fifty people at a time and that it was not unusual for Bavinck to invite people to join him for pleasant evenings and animated discussions.³⁵ The only drawback was the smell of manure (*bemesten*) from the yard. Apparently, the Stekelenburgs were farmers. Graciously, the smell was not symbolic of anything.

³² Hepp, *Herman Bavinck*, 95

³³ *Ibid.*, 96.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 99. Comp. Bremmer, *HBZT*, 38.

³⁵ Hepp, *Herman Bavinck*, 97, 99.

Three areas of his life are noteworthy at this point:

First, Bavinck correctly placed the preaching of the Word of God as one of his top priorities. This priority bore much fruit as many came to hear his preaching; so much so that plans had to be made to take out the back wall of the church and in order to add additional space for pews.³⁶ His desire to feed God's sheep included being with them socially and visiting them in their homes, but of essential importance for their spiritual growth was feeding them with Scripture. A perusal of his sermon texts during his time in Franeker reveals that his primary concern was proclaiming the riches of Christ and the love of God to the CRC members. We find Bavinck preaching on text such as John 17:3 (*And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent*), 2 Corinthians 13:5 (*Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!*), and 1 Corinthians 3:9 (*For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building*). Faithfully, Bavinck preached twice a Sunday to the flock with which he had been entrusted. Hepp was told by some of the members of the congregation that on certain occasions Bavinck was so moved by the text he was preaching that tears would roll down his cheeks.

One of his other duties was to give catechetical instruction to the youth of the congregation. In general, he was a dutiful teacher, but especially at the beginning this was not his favorite task—maybe not even his second favorite task. In fact, he struggled with it. According to those who underwent catechism from Bavinck, Hepp tells us that they agreed that they did not learn a lot. Of course, these are the words of those who had received catechism from him almost four decades previous so the recollections were, no doubt, a little faded—if not jaded.³⁷ What valid recollections there were, there existed unanimity that the classes were structured—which is a good thing—and that Bavinck expected the students to be prepared. Each one was required to recite the particular question and answer assigned from the Heidelberg Catechism and Bavinck was a strict disciplinarian. One student particularly remembered an evening when Bavinck opened in prayer and while he was praying some of the students were giggling. Bavinck stopped, told the students that they were profaning God, and walked out of the room. He didn't have to deal with the giggling anymore.³⁸

Before we transition to the third area of interest in Bavinck's life during his time in Franeker I want to mention just a few other areas of his pastoral work. I've chosen to handle these here because they can be treated in summary fashion. Bavinck demanded of himself and the Elders that they visit each member in the congregation at least once a year—more if there were problem cases—and that they also visited the sick and shut-ins. Even though he never quite got around to visiting every member, he made the effort as did the consistory. The congregation benefited from these spiritual visits brought by the church leaders. There's a great lesson for the modern Church to learn from this. He also insisted on visiting the shut-ins as well as the infirm. The former was less of a challenge for him than the latter. To his credit, although he felt rather ill at ease—no pun intended—during these visits. It is my settled conviction that Hepp has misunderstood Bavinck at this point. He is possibly correct that Bavinck wrestled through some of those

³⁶ Ibid., 96.

³⁷ Ibid., 97.

³⁸ Ibid., 98.

visits; nevertheless Hepp sees it as a negative aspect of the visit that Bavinck talked more than he listened during them.

In general, however, Bavinck was well pleased with his choice and enjoyed his time in Franeker. There were times, he confessed, when the work load seemed overwhelming and that, couple with the times when Bavinck was indifferent or ambivalent about his work certainly made his pastoral labors a challenge. When he was home during the day he was almost always alone; when he left his study and went into the village to make purchases or to visit the congregation he was always “The Pastor.”³⁹

When there was time to study outside of the preparation of sermons, catechism classes, and consistory meetings, Bavinck chose to concentrate on Dogmatics and Ethics.⁴⁰ After praising Snouck that he possessed a far greater intellect than Bavinck himself did (Bavinck called him a “Colossus of Learning”), Bavinck had this to say: “Honestly, I am becoming more and more Reformed.... I have acquired a great deal of respect and more piety with regards to faith and the labor of faith throughout the centuries. I have become more humble in my opinions and I have moved away from testing everything according to *my* (emphasis his) understanding and *my* reason.”⁴¹

He continues, “I believe more firmly than ever that the congregation of Christ, of which I am merely a simple member, has its own life, very different from every sort of life and thus has its own confession, worldview, life view, and, at least in its principles, its own “science.”⁴² In his concluding remarks Bavinck expresses the hope that even though with regards to faith he and Snouck are growing further apart that their friendship and appreciation for one another will continue.

It was also during his time in Franeker that Bavinck received his second call to be a professor at the newly-formed Free University of Amsterdam. Early in his ministerial career he had two prestigious opportunities: the congregation in Amsterdam and a provisional appointment to the Free University. Bavinck declined this appointment with the following words: “I love my Church. Preferably I want to work on building her up. The prosperity of her Theological School is the desire of my heart. There is a great deal that urgently needs improvement at that institution. The Christian Reformed Church is, by and large, convinced of this need and shall be looking for ways to improve the School at its forthcoming Synod in August. Honestly, I have a quiet desire and hope that the Synod will offer me a place at her School.... She has the first choice; thereafter I’m free.”⁴³ From this excerpt from the letter it is clear that Bavinck earnestly desired to be appointed by the CRC Synod that August *and* that he was very sympathetic towards the vision and work of the FU. Clearly, he wanted to ratchet up the level of teaching in Kampen. It is to his credit that he was so loyal to the CRC and desired to labor within the bounds of that church.

³⁹ Bavinck to Hurgronje, n.d.

⁴⁰ Ibid. In a later letter, Bavinck narrows the subjects down to one: Ethics.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

On August 15, 1882 the General Synod of the CRC opened and it elected Pastor W.H. Gispen as its Moderator.⁴⁴ The primary order of business, of course, was needed professors at the Theological Seminary in Kampen. Both Brummelkamp and van Velzen had been docents for almost three decades and as the CRC grew, so did their responsibilities. They needed help. The delegates voted not to give Brummelkamp and van Velzen their *emeritus* status, but rather to add two new professors to help the beleaguered Brummelkamp and van Velzen and to add a third to help share the load.⁴⁵

Even though the new professors were undoubtedly a priority, it wasn't until August 24th that the Synod actually got around to dealing with the matter. The delegates suggested a number of names, but the list was finally reduced to six. The candidates were requested to leave the meeting and wait outside. Along with D.K. Wielenga, Jan and Herman Bavinck were required to step outside. Father and son waited patiently. Another candidate, that we shall run into again, was Lucas Lindeboom.

Jan Bavinck's autobiography records the impressions of the father on that remarkable day. Jan recorded that the event was well worth a particular mention. Here is what he wrote about what he believed was worthy of consideration—all the emphases are his:

In 1882 the Christian Separated Reformed Churches were once again holding their Synod meeting in Zwolle, while it was 28 years ago that the General Synod of these churches was held in the same city. I was *28-years-old* when I was chosen as a *Docent at the Theological School* by the Synod of 1854 in Zwolle and my oldest son *Herman* had reached the age of 28 years old when he, in 1882 was named *Professor* in the same city to the same School. My son and I were, thus, 28 years after each other, each of us at the age of 28-years-old, in the same city, to the same task, namely to fellow-workers in the education of young men to the ministry of the Word. I declined my nomination, but standing on the floor of the meeting my son accepted him appointment declaring that he had prayed to God for this position at the Theological School. I know that there's nothing extraordinary in these events...but I saw the finger of the Lord in them and I thanked him that my son—I don't say that he was my successor—would take this position which I dared not fill because of my little faith (*kleingeloof*).⁴⁶

Bavinck wrote in his diary, “Striking (or Emotional—the Dutch word *treffend* can mean both and in this circumstance deciding on a 100% accurate translation is difficult) moment for me and my father.”⁴⁷

When all was said and done, Herman and Wielenga received thirty-nine of a possible forty votes and Lucas Lindeboom received thirty-two. It was a done deal: Herman would be a professor in Kampen. Bremmer surmises that the tension was too much for father and son Bavinck, so much so that Herman didn't return to Franeker to preach but persuaded a certain Pastor Eerdmans to fill the pulpit for him and to make the congregation aware of his appointment.⁴⁸ It is uncertain in my mind if Bremmer's

⁴⁴ Willem Hendrik Gispen (1833-1909). Gispen was a man with exceptional gifts. He was one of those rare pastors who was given the privilege to preach the Word by means of a special article in the CRC Book of Church Order. Gispen did not attend seminary but under Article 8 was allowed to become a pastor. He served churches in De Lier, Vlissingen, Giessendam, Kampen, and Amsterdam (1881). He took the call that Bavinck declined. Gispen was also a personal friend of the Bavinck family.

⁴⁵ Bremmer, *HBZT*, 43.

⁴⁶ *JBA*, 51.

⁴⁷ Diary, August 24, 1882.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, August 26, 1882.

assessment is correct. There is little doubt that it was an emotional time for both Bavincks, but the Synod did not officially end until August 30th and given the distance to Franeker and the means of transportation in 1882 it made more sense for Herman to remain in Zwolle until the conclusion all the more since it would not be until after the close of the Synod that Bavinck would be assigned his classes. Bremmer is correct when he mentions one of the reasons Bavinck didn't return is what he recorded in his diary: that he was too tired to travel to Franeker.⁴⁹

After the close of the Synod the Curators met to assign the various classes. Those given to him would require a great deal of preparation. In the theological section he would teach Dogmatics, Polemics, Ethics, and Encyclopedia. In the literary part Bavinck would hold forth in the Classics, Mythology, Philosophy, and fourth year Greek. It was to his indubitable advantage that even though the load was large, the classes dovetailed with his study in Leiden.

The 3rd of September finds Bavinck back in Franeker preaching on one of his favorite texts: Psalm 36:9: *For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light.* The entire situation must have been bitter-sweet for the CRC congregation in Franeker. For the first time in a long while, they had a pastor who was not only an excellent preacher, but also who was bringing back elements of peace and harmony instead of controversy and upheaval. Surely they were dismayed—and no doubt apprehensive—when Bavinck received his call to Amsterdam and equally delighted when he declined. Without question, they would have loved to have had him in their midst for much longer, but that was not to be.

On October 8th Bavinck penned his acceptance letter to the Moderator of the General Synod, Pastor Gispen. A couple of weeks later Bavinck preached his farewell sermon to his beloved congregation. He chose John 17:17 (*Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth*) as his text. Bremmer remarks that such a such on such an occasion was characteristic of the young pastor, now professor.⁵⁰ Bavinck's diary has the notation that the church was filled to overflowing on the occasion and that it was an unforgettable day.⁵¹

In one sense, it was odd that such a brief notation would summarize his pastoral labors. But it is often this way in God's providence. The Lord gives a pastor and congregation to one another and a deep love and affection is first planted and then grows to fruition. As frequently as we hear "horror stories" about pastors and their flock, it is highly encouraging to know that those stories are counter-balanced by those like Bavinck's experience in Franeker. It was truly a painful experience for both pastor and congregation because they had labored in the vineyard of Christ together and had grown to love God and each other in the process.

Writing about days like this where a young pastor was moving on to be a professor and one of the most—if not *the* most—accomplished theologians in all of Holland gives pause for reflection. In the grand scheme of things, the world was not interested in whether Bavinck stayed or left; it was not interested in the history of the CRC in Franeker. The church where Bavinck preached the Word of God to God's people no

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Bremmer, *HBZT*, 44.

⁵¹ Diary, October 8, 1882.

longer exists in the same place. For whatever reason, the building was sold, remodeled, and turned into a building housing a socialistic union.

At any rate, on the 6th of November Bavinck moved to Kampen and took a room in his parents' house at Burgwal 56 next to the "new church" that had been built in 1875. The times in Zwolle, Leiden, and Franeker were now over. From now on, Herman, Jan, and Gesina would live in the same town for quite a number of years. It would be in Kampen (1883-1902) that Herman Bavinck would leave his stamp on the CR churches. The ways of the Lord are truly inscrutable.

In our next and final installment, we shall examine Bavinck's teaching in Kampen, in Amsterdam, his efforts in the church union between the Separatists and Kuyper's Doleantie, his life in politics, his illness and final days, as well as an assessment of his theology.