Herman Bavinck was born on December 13, 1854 to Jan Bavinck (1826-1909) and Gesina Magdelena. His father, Jan Bavinck, was a gifted and influential minister in the churches of the Secession. In 1834 Hendrik de Cock (1801-1842) had led a reform movement that resulted in the formation of the *Afscheiding* or Secession churches. The Secession was an ecclesiastical reform movement that called the members of the Dutch State Reformed Church (*De Hervormde Kerk*)
back to the teaching and piety of the Reformed confessions and the church polity of the church order of Dordt. The deposition of Hendrik de Cock triggered the *Act of Secession or Return* that led to the existence of a new denomination deemed sectarian and illegal by the Dutch government and religious hierarchy. The ministers of the Secession wanted the three Forms of Unity (the *Heidelberg Catechism*, the *Belgic Confession of Faith*, and the *Canons of Dordt*) to function “as a living and authoritative confession of the church.”¹ Over against the doctrinal liberalism, the Secession ministers proclaimed the historic Reformed Faith. The Secession tapped into the resources of the Nadere Reformatie (Dutch Second or Further Reformation) which was a Puritan inspired reform movement that emphasized confessional orthodoxy and experiential godliness. Bavinck’s tradition drank from the well of this pietistic spirituality.

The Secession of 1834 protested the church polity of the state Dutch Reformed Church. King William I had appointed a state Department of Religion that governed the church through ecclesiastical boards. Instead of church authority being located in the elder leadership of the local church, ecclesiastical authority resided in the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the Department of Religion. The trigger for the *Afscheiding* was the discipline and deposition of Pastor Hendrik de Cock from his pastorate in Ulrum for (1) baptizing the children of parents who were members of neighboring congregations with modernistic ministers, (2) for criticizing unorthodox ministers who publicly wrote against confessional teaching, and (3) challenging the singing of hymns with unorthodox lyrics. The office-bearers of the church in Ulrim signed an “Act of Separation or Return” in which they committed to separating from the national church that revealed the marks of a false church and committed themselves to returning to the doctrine and life of the Reformed confessions and the church polity of the church order of Dort.

Jan Bavinck grew up in Bentheim, Germany. His connection to the reform movement in the Dutch churches came through Jan Berend Sundag, a reform-minded preacher in the German Alt-Reformierten Kirche (Old Reformed Church). Sundag traveled to Ulrum to study for the ministry under Hendrik de Cock. Jan grew up in the Reformierte Kirche, a church that had modernistic, anti-supernaturalistic, and moralistic ministers. Jan did not learn about the necessity of regeneration or conversion from A.L. van Nes, his childhood pastor. At age 16 Jan Bavinck heard Sundag preach on a farm, and this led to him joining the Old Reformed Church, which was a small, persecuted, German Reformed church that had close contacts with the Afscheiding churches across the border. The Old Reformed Church was an illegal church that met in barns and was “outside the auspices of the established Reformierte Kirche.”

In the German village of Bentheim, Dutch as well as German was used in church services.

Through remarkable providences, the Lord opened the door for Jan Bavinck to study for the ministry. Sundag requested that his classis select a ministerial candidate who could be trained to assist him in his labors. The classis had a tie vote (11-11) on the proposal. The members of the classis asked a girl who was preparing and serving the meals to draw a lot. She selected the piece of paper that read “for.” Then the classis had a tie vote between the choice of whether the supported student should be Frederik Huisken or Jan Bavinck. Once again, the girl selected a lot, with this one having the name ‘Bavinck’ written on it. Jan Bavinck began his ministerial studies under the Secession pastor W.A. Kok. On August 9, 1848 Jan was ordained in the Old Reformed Church. Jan initially pastored four small churches in the vicinity of Bentheim. He preached in barns. Jan

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married Gesina Magdelena, a member of the Hervormde Kerk, who lived in the Dutch town of Vriezenveer. Bavinck met her after his elders encouraged him to find a bride.

After pastoring German Reformed churches, Jan accepted a call in 1853 to serve as a co-pastor of a Secession congregation in Hoogeveen along with his theological and pastoral mentor, W.A. Kok. The Secession churches recognized Jan’s intellectual, spiritual, and pastoral gifts. He helped to prepare young men for the ministry in the Christian Reformed Church. When the Secession churches planned to begin a new seminary in Kampen in 1854, Jan Bavinck received an appointment. He wavered. Herman Bavinck would inherit from his father a weakness in making important decisions. Jan Bavinck’s wife believed that had had the gifts for the position. Doubting his gifts, Jan chose to cast lots whether he should accept the appointment at Kampen. He wrote both an acceptance letter and one declining the call. He asked a young man to select and mail one of the envelopes. The selected enveloped contained a letter that declined the call. Jan tried to reverse course. He sent “an angst-ridden letter.” But the trustees of the theological school voted 7-2 against allowing Jan to reconsider the call. Ron Gleason writes that Jan could have “decisional paralysis.”

Herman Bavinck received a first-class education as a boy and teenager. He attended primary school at Bunschoten. Jan received a call to Almkerk and Emikhoven. When Herman was seven years old, his father enrolled him at the Hasselman Institute. There Herman received a classical education at a school where the Reformed confessions were taught. Eglinton describes the Hasselman Institute:

The Hasselman Institute was excellent in many regards. It offered a challenging, broad, modern curriculum; it was an intentionally Christian school and—advantageously, from the Bavinck’s perspective—was headed by a Seceder; it employed native English, French, and German speakers as teachers; and so on.

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Herman finished school at the Hasselman Institute in 1870 as a sixteen-year-old.

After graduating from the Hasselman Institute, Herman attended the Gymnasium in Zwolle, eighty miles from the parental home. Gleason writes: “He was placed in a school in the nearby city of Zwolle.”⁶ Dutch Gymnasia prepared students for university. At this time only 30 such classical schools existed in The Netherlands with only 1,300 students. This was a time when out of a Dutch population of 3.3 million people only 1,400 attended university.⁷ While at Zwolle, Herman began a dagboek or daily journal. In this journal he recorded his academic successes and his love life. Herman was an excellent student. Gleason writes that “Bavinck finished his second and third years of his study in one year and won first place prizes in the area of English, Dutch, and Math. Bavinck successfully completed his final year at the Latin School on June 27, 1872.”⁸ Eglinton writes about the young man’s academic success: “At the completion of his final exams at the gymnasium, he had won the class prizes in Latin, Greek, French, and Dutch. Academically, the gymnasium years had been a resounding success.”⁹

Preparing for the Ministry

Such were Jan’s gifts that he would be called to pastor the influential Secession church in Kampen that the professors and theological students attended. On May 24, 1873, Herman received a telegram with the news that his father had accepted the call to Kampen.¹⁰ The family moved to Kampen in August of 1873 just as Herman was finishing his studies at the gymnasium in Zwolle. Herman planned to prepare for the ministry. He already harbored the desire to receive his

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theological training at Leiden University. Later Bavinck would explain why he spent one year at Kampen prior to matriculating at Leiden University:

It was during the years 1873/74. I had completed my gymnasium education and harbored a strong desire to continue my studies at Leiden and become acquainted with Modern theology at close quarters. But my parents had only just moved to Kampen and were urging me to come home for at least a year and register as a student at the Theological School. Although I complied with this fully, I nonetheless held on to the desire to take part in a more scientific education than the Theological School could offer at that time; and so it was agreed that I would go to Leiden in Sept. 1874.¹¹

Because Herman had lived away from the family for two years, his parents wanted him to spend some time in Kampen with the family before going off to Leiden University. The family was close, and Bavinck’s younger siblings were young. Eglinton explains that

The Bavincks were a close family, Herman’s younger brothers Bernard and Dinus were only five and one when Herman moved to Zwolle (with Johan yet to be born). Given the proximity of Jan and Geziena’s new home to the Theological School, it may be that they saw Herman’s first-year post gymnasium as a good opportunity for their sons to live together for a year, at least, before Herman embarked on his university studies.¹²

Herman registered as a student at the Theological School on September 17, 1873.¹³ Technically he became a student at the theological school, but he scarcely attended classes. He also requested the privilege of taking the literary exam that would allow him to study theology. Most new students took general classes that prepared them for their theological studies. Eglinton writes that Herman “was also something of a misfit among the school’s student body.”¹⁴ The majority of his fellow students

had no previous education or had spent a short period studying under a Seceder minister. The incoming cohort included a baker, a gardener, a number of farm workers, a cooper, a salesman, and one student listed simply as having “no profession.”¹⁵

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¹⁵ Ibid., 67.
Herman “was the youngest, had received an education far superior to that of his fellow students, was from a higher social class, and hitherto had spent his life in education rather than employment.” The general studies classes that the new students attended would have been redundant for Bavinck. He had studied the same subjects at a higher academic level at the Gymnasium. Although Bavinck registered as a student, he did not attend the general studies classes. He was dissatisfied with the low academic quality of the teaching at Kampen.

After completing gymnasium, I spent one year at the Theol School in Kampen, where my father was now a minister. But the education there did not satisfy me. So in 1874, I went to Leiden to study theology under the famous professors Scholten and Kuenen. Bavinck’s choice upset some of the faculty at Kampen, especially angering Anthony Brummelkamp (1811-1888). Other professors like Helenius de Cock and Maarten Noordzij supported Bavinck. Bavinck did not take the literary exam yet—so he could not attend the theological classes. So, Bavinck technically became and would remain a ministerial student at the Theological School in Kampen although he never attended classes and would enroll at Leiden. He would return later to take and pass the literary exam before passing the theological exams to become a ministerial candidate. From 1873-1880 he remained on the books as a student at the Theological School in Kampen.

Bavinck recognized the spiritual dangers he faced before he started his second year at Leiden. He wrote in his journal: “O God, protect me in Leiden.” The next year (1876) he wrote about a struggle with doubt. Writing in his journal during a visit back home to Kampen, he wrote: “1 May Back to Leiden. Continuation of study under an attack of doubt, but also with feeling of the inner truth revealed through Christ.”

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16 Ibid., 68.
18 Cited by James Eglinton, Bavinck: A Critical Biography, 82.
In July of 1876 Bavinck was in Kampen where he sustained his literary exams. Anthony Brummelkamp and others thought that since Bavinck had passed this exam with distinction, he should now remain in Kampen for theological studies. Bavinck needed to write in his journal: “25 Sept. Under much external opposition, [I] went back to Leiden.” At Leiden Bavinck pursued two majors: systematic theology and Semitic languages.

Bavinck tells us that he wanted to pursue a more scientific approach to theology and wanted to study under influential modernist theologians like J.H. Scholten and A. Kuenen. We would say that he wanted to receive a more academic and scholarly theological education that could equip him to engage in theological research. He also wanted to study under modernist theologians so that he could learn their positions firsthand. Bavinck wrote: “I had completed my studying at the gymnasium and harbored a strong desire to further my studies at Leiden in order to become acquainted firsthand with modern theology.” He would study under the scholarly, but modernist theologians Johannes Henricus Scholten (1811-1885) and Abraham Kuenen (1828-1891). The former taught dogmatics although by Bavinck’s time Scholten seemed to live off his past writings. Kuenen taught Old Testament and due to Scholten’s weaknesses as a doctoral supervisor would direct Bavinck’s work on his dissertation on Zwingli’s ethics. The modernists at Leiden were anti-supernatural. Scholten made his reputation by recasting the traditional doctrine of predestination “into a monistic and panentheistic determinism.”

Herman did have concerns about keeping the Faith in the unbelieving context at Leiden, but he kept the Faith. Scholten was Bavinck’s doctoral supervisor. Eglinton writes that Scholten comes across as a now elderly scholar living off the glories of his own dogmatic writings (penned some thirty years before this), who was uninterested in further constructive theological engagement with his students and who had a tendency to focus

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22 Ibid., 31.
theological discussion on the doctrine of election (due to his own rigid material determinism).\(^{23}\)

Scholten approved the topic of the ethics of Ulrich Zwingli for Bavinck’s dissertation. But it was Kuenen who would provide “the most significant constructive interaction with Bavinck’s developing doctoral thesis.”\(^{24}\) Bavinck graduated with a doctorate in 1880. Bavinck later thought that his education at Leiden did have a negative effect on him. But he also thought that his studies at Leiden had helped to improve his theological methodology.\(^{25}\) Abraham Kuyper immediately tried to hire him to teach at the new Free University in Amsterdam. This would be the first of multiple attempts to lure Bavinck to the university, culminating in a successful result in 1902.

**A Pietistic Background?**

Early biographers mistakenly portrayed Bavinck’s family background as characterized by pietistic world withdrawal. While it is true that Jan Bavinck’s home was characterized by remarkable piety, he provided the best education for Herman. Later Herman Bavinck would criticize pietists who withdrew from modern culture or escaped Dutch culture by emigrating to America.

Cory C. Brock has challenged simplistic ways of contrasting Bavinck as a member of a Secession church with strong pietistic strains and as a modern man. A. Anema, who taught with Bavinck at the Free University, wrote that Bavinck was both a “Secession preacher and a representative of modern culture.”\(^{26}\) Anema emphasized the challenges of being both these things: “In many respects it is a simple matter to be a preacher in the Secession Church, and, in a certain

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sense, it is also not that difficult to be a modern person. But in no way is it a simple matter to be the one as well as the other.”

**A Modern Man**

It is important to clarify the sense in which Bavinck was a modern man. He was a modern man in the sense that he engaged contemporary thought forms and attempted to write a dogmatics relevant for a new century. But he was not a modern man in the sense of someone holding to the anti-supernaturalism found among modernist (and ethical) theologians. But there is more to the story. Cory Brock shows how Bavinck was modern in the sense that he read and reacted to his contemporaries and the effect that the views of Kant, Hegel, and Schleiermacher exerted upon the study of dogmatics. But Bavinck remained confessional and orthodox in the content of what he wrote for his contemporaries. At the same time, he appropriated ideas, emphases, and thought forms from the modern theologians. Cory Brock investigates how Bavinck appropriated Schleiermacher’s concept of consciousness although he critically interacted with the turn to the subject among the moderns. Bavinck responds to Schleiermacher’s turn to the subject by admitting that the German preacher was correct insofar as “personal faith is imperative” for theological work. He states:

> In that respect the statement that every dogmatics is a confession of one’s own faith is perfectly true. But that is something very different from what, since Schleiermacher, has been understood by the theology of consciousness. For this theology denies that in nature or in Scripture there is a revelation that provides knowledge of God. It thus severs theology, and particularly dogmatics, from all its objective connections.

Showing influence from this modern turn to the subject, Bavinck writes: “Consequently, it is also the teaching of Scripture that objective revelation be completed in subjective illumination.”

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28 1.91.
29 1.91.
30 1.92.
Bolt describes the nature of the influence of Leiden University on Bavinck: “Its professors did influence him, especially in matters of method and approach.”31 He mentions the “scrupulously careful, historical-empirical approach” of Scholten and Kuenen.32 Bavinck wrote his friend from university days, Snouck Hurgronje: “If I have one thing for which to be thankful to Leiden, it is this: to attempt to understand the opponent.”33 Bolt concludes a biographical sketch of Bavinck by connecting Bavinck as a Secession preacher with him also being a modern man: “Bavinck was a man of deep piety and great learning who faced head-on the challenges posed to Reformed orthodoxy by modernity without forsaking his devout, pietist roots.”34

Jan Bavinck supported his son’s academic approach to theology. In 1882, Jan, as chairman of the trustees of the theological school, gave a lecture surrounding the appointment of three new professors, including his son Herman. He advocated for a high-quality academic education for Seceder pastors. He said that the seminary in Kampen existed to produce “God-fearing, reliable, scientifically [wetenschappelijk] educated servants of the gospel.”35 Jan was aware of pietistic views towards ministerial training: “I know well that there are some who will regard such scientific knowledge as unnecessary in a servant of the gospel and who will therefore reject all scientific education.”36 Jan believed that the times required high quality academic theological training: “The nineteenth century legitimately set high demands on the servant of the gospel, which he will not be able to meet without rigorous study.”37 One reason why Herman received an appointment to the theological school was the desire of the trustees and synod to improve the academic quality of the Seceder seminary. Eglinton writes that a concern for a more rigorous academic education for

Seceder pastors predated Herman Bavinck. There were several attempts among the Seceders “to reconcile their own orthodox tradition with the scientifically oriented academy of their late modern culture.”

The Doleantie and Secession Churches

Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) played a leading role in another ecclesiastical reform movement, the Doleantie (the Grieving). In 1886 the Doleerende Kerken (Grieving Churches) came into existence. The Doleantie was a second Secession. As a rule, its members were richer, more educated, and more urbane than the Christians in the Secession churches. They had a greater appreciation of modern culture and were concerned about engaging their culture. Many of the original members of the Secession were farmers or blue-collar workers and lived in the country or in small towns. As a rule, the members of the Doleantie churches had greater social capital. Herman Bavinck grew up in the Secession churches, but when the Doleantie churches came into existence he immediately pushed for ecclesiastical union. In 1892 the Secession and Doleantie joined to create the De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands).

Bavinck declined an appointment at the Free University because he wanted to serve the Secession churches by teaching at the Theological School in Kampen. Since the church wanted to appoint professors with pastoral experience, he pursued ministerial candidacy in the Secession Churches. He received a call to a church in Franeker where he labored for a year and a half. This time in the ministry was fruitful, but lonely. He remained unmarried.

Meanwhile the trustees of the Theological School recognized weaknesses in the ministerial training in Kampen. The Secession Synod of 1882 decided to appoint three new professors, among

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whom was Herman Bavinck. Jan Bavinck’s autobiography mentions his response to the election of his son as a professor at the seminary:

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 his 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 God 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.39

The synod moved Helenius de Cock from dogmatics to liturgy and symbolics. Although de Cock was 60 years old, the synod replaced him with Bavinck as the professor of dogmatics.

Professor at Kampen

From 1883 to 1901 Bavinck taught at the Theological School in Kampen. Bavinck’s teaching and research elevated the quality of the ministerial training at Kampen. Anthony Hoekema writes: “He lifted the seminary from the mediocre to the academic level. His lectures were clear, instructive, and inspiring. His presentation was always lively, and his erudition was amazing.”40 Towards the end of his time at Kampen, Bavinck published his Gereformeerde Dogmatiek in four volumes (from 1895-1901).

After supporting the unification of the Secession and Doleantie churches, Bavinck worked hard for a unification of ministerial training. His arduous labors for this goal came to an end at the Synod of Arnhem (1902). The proposal that Bavinck advocated passed with a vote of 30-17. But

40 Anthony Hoekema, Herman Bavinck’s Doctrine of the Covenant (Full Bible Publications: Clover, SC, 2007), 9.
the minority, who lost the vote and who were against combining the Kampen Theological School with the theological school within the Free University, threatened schism. Gleason writes about how Thomas Bos, an opponent of the proposal, exercised a tyranny of the minority. Gleason writes about how Thomas Bos, an opponent of the proposal, exercised a tyranny of the minority.

Then Bos went for the jugular when he stated, in effect, that if the meeting implemented what was passed by the majority, they should expect what all the churches feared and dreaded. For Bavinck and the others, Bos’s message was quite clear. This was a less than veiled threat that if Bavinck’s proposal passed, there would be a church split.\footnote{Ron Gleason, \textit{Herman Bavinck: Pastor, Churchman, Statesman, and Theologian} (P & R Publishing: Phillipsburg, NJ, 2010), 290.}

Intimidated by this threat of the minority, the synod voted 23-17 not to implement their previous decision to unify the theological schools. Bavinck publicly attacked this tyranny of the minority. He had labored for a decade to unify ministerial education.

When the united church (the GKN) could not agree on uniting theological education, Bavinck resigned his professorship at Kampen and accepted an appointment at the Free University. Bavinck and his colleague Biesterveld let the theological faculty at the Free University know that if the theological schools were not going to be united, they would be willing to entertain appointments at the Free University. Bavinck would not be dictated to by a tyrannical minority. He would show his support for unified ministerial education by moving to the Free University. Abraham Kuyper’s chair of dogmatics had fallen vacant in 1901 since Kuyper had been elected prime minister of The Netherlands. So, Bavinck became Kuyper’s successor in dogmatics. He taught at the Free University from 1902 until his death in 1921. This move struck a great blow to the Theological School in Kampen. More than half of the students followed Herman Bavinck to the Free University. The school in Kampen not only lost leading faculty but the majority of her students.
Professor at Amsterdam

During his professorship in Amsterdam, Bavinck revised and enlarged the four volumes of his *Reformed Dogmatics* between 1906-1911. Anthony Hoekema identifies the *Reformed Dogmatics* as Bavinck’s *magnum opus*: “This massive set, which in the second and third editions numbered 2,845 pages, sets forth the doctrines of Reformed theology with thoroughness, completeness, and scholarliness.” ⁴²

John Vriend translated this work into English under the title *Reformed Dogmatics*. John Bolt edited this work which was published from 2003-2008 by the Dutch Translation Society through Baker Book Publishers. Bruce Pass writes that “The publication of *Reformed Dogmatics* kindled a global interest in Bavinck and has given rise to further translation projects in English and other languages. Major works by Bavinck have been translated into Arabic, Chinese, German, Indonesian, Portuguese, and Russian.” ⁴³

Bavinck produced a popular dogmatics entitled *Magnalia dei: Onderwijzing in de Christelijke Religie naar Gereformeerde Belijdenis* in 1909 in 659 pages. This was published in English as *Our Reasonable Faith* (1956) and later republished as *The Wonderful Works of God* (2019). This work is less technical and written for the laity. In 1913 Bavinck published an even more abbreviated presentation of the Christian Faith, a 251-page long compendium for students entitled *Handleiding Gij het Onderwijs in den Christelijken Godsdienst* (*Manual for Instruction in the Christian Religion*). ⁴⁴

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⁴⁴ H. Bavinck, *Handleiding Bij Het Onderwijs in den Christelijken Godsdienst* (Kok: Kampen, 1913). This book has not been translated into English.
Emerging from Kuyper’s Shadow

Herman Bavinck has emerged from the shadow of his neo-Calvinist theological colleague, Abraham Kuyper, with the English translation of his four-volume *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* and numerous other writings. The publication of Bavinck translations by the Dutch Translation Society and other publishers has revitalized Bavinck research. In the study of Neo-Calvinism, Bavinck research has lived in the shadow of Kuyper research. Brian Mattson contrasts the more flamboyant and public Abraham Kuyper with the milder and private Herman Bavinck: “Yet after a hundred years, the wider world is beginning to realize what the Dutch have often sensed more keenly: of the two men, it was Bavinck, not Kuyper, who was the true theologian of Dutch Neo-Calvinism.”45 Bavinck as a theologian is not being viewed as Kuyper’s sidekick, but “more as an independent authority.”46

A Representative Dutch Reformed Theologian

Bavinck is a representative confessionally Reformed Dutch theologian. He wrote a Reformed Dogmatics that built on the received tradition that came from the Protestant reformers and the post-Reformation theologians. He did not repristinate Reformed theology but sought to revitalize it by bringing it into conversation with modern theology and the culture that was contemporary to him. He was influenced by the scientific methodology, linguistic formulations, and concerns of modern theology along with the situation of the Dutch church at the beginning of the twentieth century. He studied under modern theologians who were influenced by Schleiermacher. He wanted to update Reformed theology with the changing times. Towards the

46 Ibid., 1.
end of his life, he recognized the threat that came with the rise of an aggressive Nietzschean atheism, and, therefore, moved to defend mere Christianity.

Bavinck is well known for his irenic interaction with opponents. From his professors at the University of Leiden he learned the value of correctly understanding and representing an opponent. Abraham Kuyper took him to task for being too soft on modern theologians. Bavinck yearned to produce sound theological scholarship in the service of the historic Reformed Faith and the Reformed churches. Brian G. Mattson writes that Bavinck “was an academic theologian *par excellence.*” John Bolt writes that Bavinck’s dogmatics “represents the concluding high point of some four centuries of remarkably productive Dutch Reformed theological reflection.” Bavinck builds on the thought of post-Reformation Dutch theologians like Voetius, van Mastricht, and the authors of the Liden *Synopsis purioris theologiae.* He also goes back to the church fathers. He cites Augustine more than Calvin.

John Bolt writes about how Bavinck interacted critically with modern philosophy and evolutionary science: “Bavinck takes modern philosophy (Kant, Schelling, Hegel), Darwin, and the claims of geological and biological science seriously but never uncritically. His willingness as a theologian to engage modern thought and science seriously is a hallmark of his exemplary work.”

Herman Bavinck was interested in matters of prolegomena and theological method. John Bolt writes, that for Bavinck,

A proper theological method thus must take Scripture, Christian tradition, and Christian consciousness seriously as resources. Hence, the term “dogmatic theology” is appropriate since it reflects the normative reality that theology arises from faith and seeks to serve the community of faith.

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48 1.11.
49 1.14.
50 1.20.
What does it mean that Bavinck wanted a more ‘scientific’ approach to theology? Bolt writes:

“Dogmatic theology is a science; it is disciplined, rigorous, systematic study of the knowledge of God.”

According to Bavinck, the theologian’s task is to absorb the unity of God’s thoughts in Scripture:

The imperative task of the dogmatician is to think God’s thoughts after him and to trace their unity. His work is not finished until he has mentally absorbed this unity and set it forth in a dogmatics. Accordingly, he does not come to God’s revelation with a ready-made system in order, as best he can, to force its content into it. On the contrary, even in his system a theologian’s sole responsibility is to think God’s thoughts after him and to reproduce the unity that is objectively present in the thoughts of God and has been recorded for the eye of faith in Scripture. That such a unity exists in the knowledge of God contained in revelation is not open to doubt; to refuse to acknowledge it would be to fall into skepticism, into a denial of the unity of God.

Bavinck believed that the theologian’s task was to identify the organic unity of Christian dogma:

The synthetic-genetic method also gives the dogmatician the advantage that he can show the unity and organic interconnectedness of dogmatics. The different dogmas are not isolated propositions but constitute a unity. Actually there is only one dogma, one that is rooted in Scripture and that has branched out and divided in a wide range of particular dogmas. Consequently, the method of the dogmatician cannot and may not be other than systematic.

Bavinck strove to be confessional and contemporary. Bolt writes:

In sum, Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics* is biblically and confessionally faithful, pastorally sensitive, challenging, and still relevant. Bavinck’s life and thought reflect a serious effort to be pious, orthodox, and thoroughly contemporary.

Herman Bavinck developed Reformed theology within the confessional tradition. His formulations are consciously within the tradition of the Protestant Reformers and the post-Reformation orthodox Reformed tradition. The result is that he formulated Reformed theology as

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51 1.20.
52 1.44-45.
53 1.94.
54 1.21.
a confessional theologian in a way that he thought relevant to his late 19\textsuperscript{th} century and early 20\textsuperscript{th} century context. The result is that he was a representative theologian within the Dutch Reformed confessional tradition.