

# Herman Bavinck

**Herman Bavinck** (13 December 1854, Hoogeveen, Drenthe – 29 July 1921, Amsterdam) was a Dutch Reformed theologian and churchman. He was one of the greatest Calvinist scholars of the world with Abraham Kuyper and B. B. Warfield.



Herman Bavinck.

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## Biography

### Background

Bavinck was born in the town of Hoogeveen in the Netherlands to a German father. He first went to theological school at Kampen, but then moved on to Leiden for further training. He graduated in 1880 from Leiden having completed a dissertation on Ulrich Zwingli.

A year later, Bavinck was appointed Professor of Dogmatics at Kampen Theological Seminary. While serving there, he also assisted his denomination that had formed out of the withdrawal of orthodox Calvinists earlier from the state Hervormde Kerk, a withdrawal movement called the "Afscheiding" (Secession) in its merger with a second and subsequent larger breakaway movement that also left the Hervormde Kerk, this time under the leadership of Abraham Kuyper, a movement called "the Doleantie" (the Complaint: a historical reference to the term used by orthodox Reformed ministers who opposed Arminianism prior to the National Synod of Dordt, 1618–19).

The now-united Church combined the "Afgescheidenen" and "Dolerenden" into the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (GKiN). As a result of the merger, GKiN inherited the denominational seminary of the Afscheiding churches and that seminary became the denominational seminary of the GKiN, where Bavinck stayed put, so as to ease the transition of his colleagues and people within the much larger new Church. Already, when the Afgescheidenen merged with the Dolerenden, there was a minority of the Seceders who stayed out of the union; they formed their new denomination as the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken (CGK), and they established their own theological seminary in the town of Apeldoorn.

### Move to Amsterdam

Amidst all these developments, Bavinck stayed put and pursued his class lectures, research, writing, and publication - making his distinctive mark as an orthodox Calvinist theologian and churchman.

The recently founded Free University in Amsterdam (VU), under the leadership of Abraham Kuyper, was meant to be a bastion of Reformed learning in all fields of thought. The Free University including its Theology Faculty for training clergy, unlike Kampen Seminary, was independent of both the state and all church denominations. But, of course, theology was the VU's initial leading concern for some decades. So, Bavinck, when he was first invited to join the VU Faculty, had to weigh the merits of teaching what concerned him in his theological research, in such a seemingly independent environment. With Kuyper in the same faculty, he might have come to feel quite crowded.

After refusing the invitation of Abraham Kuyper several times to come to Amsterdam, finally Bavinck accepted Kuyper's plea. In 1902 he succeeded Abraham Kuyper as Professor of Theology at the Free University in Amsterdam. Kuyper himself had developed other workloads, and simply wanted the best man available to replace himself. Thus, Bavinck moved to the big city, with his first edition of multi-volume Gereformeerde Dogmatiek already in publication. He arrived well-credentialed and well-respected. He remained at VU for the remainder of his teaching career. In 1906 he became member of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences.<sup>[1]</sup> In 1911, he was named to the Senate of the Netherlands Parliament. He assisted in the encouragement of the Gereformeerde people to build their own Christian schools, without state financial help, until such a time as the 80-years "School War" was brought to an end by the granting of government assistance to all schools.

In 1908 he visited the United States and gave the Stone Lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary.

## Bavinck and Kuyper

Inevitably he has been compared with his contemporary Abraham Kuyper. J. H. Landwehr, Bavinck's first biographer, had this to say of the two: "Bavinck was an Aristotelian, Kuyper had a Platonic spirit. Bavinck was the man of clear concept, Kuyper the man of the fecund idea. Bavinck worked with the historically given; Kuyper proceeded speculatively by way of intuition. Bavinck's was primarily an inductive mind; Kuyper's primarily deductive." One major difference in ideas between Bavinck and Kuyper is formulated largely in theological terms contrasting a doctrine called "Common Grace" with a doctrine called "the Antithesis." Bavinck emphasized Common Grace, while Kuyper emphasized (sometimes severely) the Antithesis. A comparison of the two positions, which came to designate two interwoven and contentious traditions in the GKiN and the Neo-Calvinist Christian social movements that flowed from its membership, is presented in Jacob Klapwijk's important work of Reformational philosophy, entitled *Bringing into Captivity Every Thought* (English, 1986).

# Theology

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## Bavinck's Doctrine of Revelation

Bavinck sensed the open question caused by the subjectivistic tendency of Friedrich Schleiermacher's doctrine of revelation. Deeply concerned with the problem of objectivism and subjectivism in the doctrine of revelation, he employed Schleiermacher's doctrine of revelation in his own way and regarded the Bible as the objective standard for his theological work. Bavinck also stressed the importance of the church, which forms the Christian consciousness and experience.

# Publications

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- *The Doctrine of God* (transl. 1951).
- *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*<sup>[2]</sup> (4 vols, many editions in Dutch, now completely translated into English as *Reformed Dogmatics*)
- *Our Reasonable Faith* (1909; transl. 1956).
- *Philosophy of Revelation* (The Stone Lectures, Princeton, USA) (1909).
- *The Christian Family* (1912; transl. 2012).
- *The Last Things* (transl 1996).
- *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society* (John Bolt, ed.; trans. 2008).
- Bavinck, Herman (1992). "The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church" ([https://bavinckinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/Bavinck\\_Catholicity\\_CTJ27.pdf](https://bavinckinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/Bavinck_Catholicity_CTJ27.pdf)) (PDF). *Calvin Theological Journal*. **27** (2): 220–251.

## See also

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- John Bolt (theologian)

## Notes

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1. "Herman Bavinck (1854 – 1921)" (<http://www.dwc.knaw.nl/biografie/pmknaw/?pagetype=authorDetail&ald=PE0000987>). Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences. Retrieved 26 July 2015.
2. Herman Bavinck, Gereformeerde Dogmatiek I inhoud (<http://www.neocalvinisme.nl/hb/dga/hbdga1.html>) at [www.neocalvinisme.nl](http://www.neocalvinisme.nl)

## Resources

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- [Herman Bavinck on the Law–Gospel Distinction and Preaching \(http://auxesis.net/bavinck/law\\_gospel\\_distinction\\_and\\_preaching.php\)](http://auxesis.net/bavinck/law_gospel_distinction_and_preaching.php)
- [Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms in the Thought of Herman Bavinck \(https://web.archive.org/web/20100928162126/http://auxesis.net/kloosterman/natural\\_law\\_two\\_kingdoms\\_bavinck.pdf\)](https://web.archive.org/web/20100928162126/http://auxesis.net/kloosterman/natural_law_two_kingdoms_bavinck.pdf)
- [Our Reasonable Faith \(Chinese Translation\) \(http://www.chinachristianbooks.org/Home/ChildrenContent.aspx?CategoryId=8fcf6c42-e69c-4847-b892-343866810b70&SubCategoryId=00000000-0000-0000-0000-000000000000&ContentId=e0cd1093-b3dc-4fe0-816f-f3f945520b28\)](http://www.chinachristianbooks.org/Home/ChildrenContent.aspx?CategoryId=8fcf6c42-e69c-4847-b892-343866810b70&SubCategoryId=00000000-0000-0000-0000-000000000000&ContentId=e0cd1093-b3dc-4fe0-816f-f3f945520b28)
- Bolt, John. 2015. *Bavinck on the Christian Life: Following Jesus in Faithful Service*. Crossway.
- Woo, B. Hoon (2015). "Bavinck and Barth on Schleiermacher's Doctrine of Revelation" ([https://www.academia.edu/25177723/\\_Bavinck\\_and\\_Barth\\_on\\_Schleiermacher\\_s\\_Doctrine\\_of\\_Revelation\\_Korea\\_Reformed\\_Theology\\_48\\_2015\\_38-71](https://www.academia.edu/25177723/_Bavinck_and_Barth_on_Schleiermacher_s_Doctrine_of_Revelation_Korea_Reformed_Theology_48_2015_38-71)). *Korea Reformed Theology*. **48**: 38–71.

## External links

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- [The Bavinck Institute \(http://bavinckinstitute.org/\)](http://bavinckinstitute.org/) – Offers an up-to-date Bavinck bibliography and publishes *The Bavinck Review*.
- [hermanbavinck.org \(http://hermanbavinck.org\)](http://hermanbavinck.org) – A full index of books, articles, lectures, news, information, discussions, and updates on the life and writings of Herman Bavinck.
- [Book Review : First three volumes of Reformed Dogmatics \(http://www.reformation21.org/shelf-life/reformed-dogmatics-volume-13.php\)](http://www.reformation21.org/shelf-life/reformed-dogmatics-volume-13.php)
- [A Cathartic Reading of Herman Bavinck \(http://dare.ubvu.vu.nl/bitstream/1871/28784/1/dissertation.pdf\)](http://dare.ubvu.vu.nl/bitstream/1871/28784/1/dissertation.pdf)
- [Works by Herman Bavinck \(https://www.gutenberg.org/author/Bavinck,+Herman\)](https://www.gutenberg.org/author/Bavinck,+Herman) at [Project Gutenberg](#)
- [Works by or about Herman Bavinck \(https://archive.org/search.php?query=%28%28subject%3A%22Bavinck%2C%20Herman%22%20OR%20subject%3A%22Herman%20Bavinck%22%20OR%20creator%3A%22Bavinck%2C%20Herman%22%20OR%20creator%3A%22Herman%20Bavinck%22%20OR%20creator%3A%22Bavinck%2C%20H%2E%22%20OR%20title%3A%22Herman%20Bavinck%22%20OR%20description%3A%22Bavinck%2C%20Herman%22%20OR%20description%3A%22Herman%20Bavinck%22%29%20OR%20%28%221854-1921%22%20AND%20Bavinck%29%29%20AND%20%28-mediatype:software%29\)](https://archive.org/search.php?query=%28%28subject%3A%22Bavinck%2C%20Herman%22%20OR%20subject%3A%22Herman%20Bavinck%22%20OR%20creator%3A%22Bavinck%2C%20Herman%22%20OR%20creator%3A%22Herman%20Bavinck%22%20OR%20creator%3A%22Bavinck%2C%20H%2E%22%20OR%20title%3A%22Herman%20Bavinck%22%20OR%20description%3A%22Bavinck%2C%20Herman%22%20OR%20description%3A%22Herman%20Bavinck%22%29%20OR%20%28%221854-1921%22%20AND%20Bavinck%29%29%20AND%20%28-mediatype:software%29) at [Internet Archive](#)

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