

**Herman Bavinck (1854-1921)**  
**Reformed pedagogue**

**Drs. H. (Henk) Vermeulen**

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## 1. Passport

Herman Bavinck, born 13 December 1854 in Hoozeveer, the Netherlands, died 29 July 1921 in Amsterdam.

## 2. Narrative Introduction



*Bavinck lectured in the building of the Free University on the Keizersgracht in Amsterdam.*

What an impressive city and what an impressive building! Cornelis feels it right down to his toes: this is a special moment. September 1906, here and now begins his university studies. Before he takes the two steps and pushes open one of the double doors, he takes a short distance. At the water's edge he stands still to take in everything: all kinds of boats pass by, he smells the water and hears seagulls raging, carts rattling on the quayside, the place is crawling with people. High above him, on the facade of Keizersgracht 162, he saw in large letters: "Anno VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT 1884". Underneath, in the arch above the double doors, a wooden plaque. Cornelis is unable to distinguish the image; it resembles a woman pointing upwards. He can read the text around the image and he recognizes it immediately: "Onse hulpe sij in den

name des Heeren". (Our help is in the name of the LORD.) Now he resolutely pushes the door open. With God's help, Cornelis van Gelderen began his studies at the Vrije Universiteit (Free University, currently VU University of Amsterdam).

Today Cornelis is attending his first lecture by Professor Bavinck. Bavinck, he has known that name since his earliest childhood. Bavinck is a famous name, a man of stature in the reformed circle where Cornelis grew up. A celebrated preacher and speaker, a great writer and scientist and, according to his father, a true God-fearing theologian. Cornelis sees the book bindings of Bavinck's works in front of him, tightly next to each other in the oak bookcase in his parents' living room. His father is particularly impressed by Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics. And that, Cornelis has to give him, is entirely justified. He read the books himself and was touched by the impressive combination of faith and science.



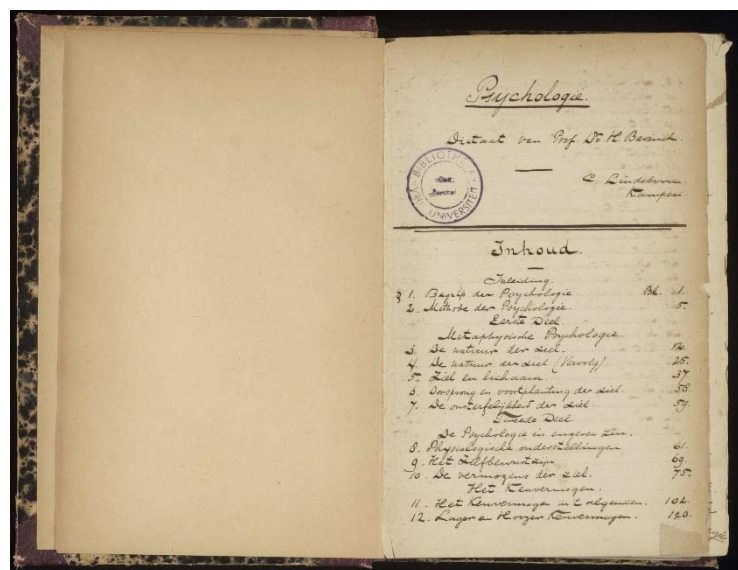
*The wooden plaque above the door of the building on the Keizersgracht now adorns the pulpit in the auditorium of the Free University.*

Bavinck is an omnivore, thinks Cornelis. I never thought that I would study with him in a subject other than theology. Despite all the interesting theological issues, pedagogy still fascinates more and the professor has published a lot about it in recent years.

He greets the professor with a certain reluctance and takes a seat with the other students. He sees the hustle and bustle of the city through the windows of the classroom. Fortunately, the city council has replaced the boulders in front of the building with logs. Although the sound is muted, there is still enough to see through the window to distract attention. Cornelis is not bothered by it - nor are the others. From the moment Professor Bavinck opens his mouth, he is captivated by his words. One impressive sentence after another passes over Bavinck's lips. 'The fact that parental care is a natural thing is even more evident when we consider that a person at birth is not what he can become, and much less, what he should become. In this respect man has his own special place.'

Cornelis hardly has time to think and to confirm or refute Bavinck's propositions. The professor has already, without consulting a dictate, switched to a related subject. He refers to angels and animals and emphasizes that only humans are educated. He talks about factors that have an effect on upbringing. The purpose of all upbringing is, according to the wonderful word of the apostle Paul, that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:17, knows Cornelis. He writes it down quickly in his cahier. 'There could not reasonably be any question of educating man and mankind if God did not stand behind all those factors that consciously or unconsciously affect us. He is the Creator of heaven and earth, who is the true educator of the whole human race and holds all the threads of world governance in his hand.'

It's dizzying, Cornelis. How is it possible that someone can be so educated and so eloquent. The professor does not falter once during his lecture, quotes dozens of authors and seems to know Scripture by heart. He discusses the most complex issues with the naturalness with which Cornelis' father discusses the work on the farm. 'What a pleasure to listen to these inspiring words,' thinks Cornelis. When the lecture is over, he stares at his own lecture diktat in amazement. He has written for pages, sometimes in the sentences of Professor Bavinck - without them actually getting through to him. He will have to reread them several times in order to master them all.



Students made extensive notes of Professor Bavinck's lectures. The picture shows the lecture dictat of Cornelis Lindboom (1872-1938).

A little later, the double doors behind him close and he walks up the busy Keizersgracht with a fellow student. Cornelis lacks words to express his admiration for Bavinck. 'I have heard that some people call him a seer. I can understand that.' The other agrees with him, but has a comment to make. 'The professor knows how to make everything crystal clear. But he presented it all so simply and naturally that I thought: is it really that simple?'

Cornelis recognises that: during the course of the lecture he felt increasingly insignificant. But he's not scared off. 'I've written down almost everything the professor said. I've heard everything, but I still have to study on it. Even though I'm only half as learned as Professor Bavinck, I start with good courage. And with God's help.'

### 3. Historical context

Herman Bavinck lived in the second half of the nineteenth and the first quarter of the twentieth century. As in other Western European countries, this period also saw major changes in the Netherlands. These changes related to different areas of life. Examples are social relations (e.g. the rise of the working class), technology (e.g. further expansion of factories and railways), politics (e.g. the emergence of political parties and the rise of socialism as a political movement), education (e.g. new types of schools and the financial equation of public schools and faith schools) and the church (e.g. the rise of a liberal theology and the emergence of new denominations). In order to better understand Bavinck, we will discuss the political, ecclesiastical and educational developments.

#### Politics

In 1848, just before Bavinck's birth, a new constitution had been adopted in the Netherlands. In principle, this law shifted power from the king to the parliament and made the ministers of the king's servants to servants of the parliament. The Constitution was an important milestone in the democratisation that had begun since the French Revolution. Not that the low countries by the sea in 1848 were suddenly an example of democracy. On paper, parliamentary democracy seemed clearly established, but the reform of practice was slower. Nevertheless, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the influence of the people on politics increased more and more. The introduction of the general right to vote for men (1917) and the general right to vote for women (1919) is often seen as the end of this development. Bavinck experienced it all.

#### Study question

1. Bavinck lived in a time of increasing democratisation in the Netherlands. With the increase of the influence of the people on the government, there was also more room for Christian education. What is the relationship between (Christian) education and the government in your own context?

## School

In 1917, the struggle for universal suffrage came to an end. At the same time as the new legislation on the right to vote, the Dutch parliament ended another struggle: the school fight. Initially, the school conflict focused on the right to set up one's own schools, regardless of government interference. The slogan was 'The school to the parents'. This goal was achieved in 1848, when freedom of education was enshrined in the constitution. After that, the school struggle focused on the financial equality of public schools and faith schools. Not only the education initiated by the state had to be paid for out of general funds, but also independent schools, i.e. schools founded by private individuals. In practice these were mostly Christian schools. During Bavinck's lifetime, this financial equation came closer step by step because the government was financing more and more parts of Christian education.

## Church

The school battle was linked to developments in the field of the church. Twenty years before Bavinck's birth, a group of conservative Protestants had detached themselves from the Dutch Reformed Church. That church was not a state church, but the privileged Protestant church. Until 1848 the government resisted the founding of new churches, but since the new constitution there was freedom of religion in the Netherlands. In 1834, a large group of people left the Dutch Reformed Church. Other groups followed later. Herman Bavinck was a member of one of these groups and became a pastor in the Christian Reformed Church. Developments in politics, education and the church led to the emancipation of various population groups, including the Reformed. These followers of Abraham Kuyper, because of their limited power and wealth, were referred to as the 'kleine luyden' (small people). In the course of the nineteenth century, however, their influence became ever greater. The number of reformed schools increased rapidly and in 1880 Kuyper founded its own reformed university: the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam. Herman Bavinck played a major role in the development of reformed education.

### Study question

2. Above it says that education has contributed to the emancipation of the reformed population group to which Bavinck belonged. How would education contribute to the emancipation of a population group? Is this also visible in your surroundings?

## Pedagogy

Although Herman Bavinck was first and foremost a theologian, his interest in pedagogy increased in the course of his life. In the Netherlands, pedagogy was still in its infancy at that time. The Roman Catholic professor Rombouts quoted in 1920 the reformed theologian Landwehr (one of Bavinck's students) about this period: 'The teachers used textbooks that (...) were usually based on an unscriptural basis'. He adds: 'They studied some method, got a good grade in

the exam, and thought it was good. Pedagogy was the monopoly of the people in education. Yet even the predecessors, the bookwriters and examiners usually had no sense of a real educator-science. The fact that someone from the learned world, a man with scientific authority, was involved in pedagogy was something unheard of in the Netherlands.' (Rombouts 1922, 6)

In Germany, on the other hand, the new pedagogical science had already developed considerably. In this way Bavinck could relate to the ideas of Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776-1841) and his followers. According to Herbart and his school it was important to transfer knowledge methodically. To this end, the material had to be divided into small pieces. If the pupil followed a strict system of learning steps, the imprinting of the subject matter would be completely successful. Later in the nineteenth century the reform pedagogues resisted the 'listening school' of Herbart. They wanted to think and act from the perspective of the individual, autonomous child. Bavinck turned against both currents in pedagogy, because according to him they put the goal of education in the human being itself.

#### Study questions

3. According to Bavinck, those involved in reformed education should not first of all pay attention to the financial position of that education, but to pedagogy. What is this like in your own context?
4. Bavinck's publications contributed to the development of a Christian pedagogy. To what extent is your country thinking about a Christian vision on education? Can you, as a teacher leader, stimulate this reflection?
5. Bavinck opposes a pedagogy that sees the purpose of education exclusively in people. To what extent do you agree with Bavinck?

## 4. Biography

It was soon to be seen that the young Herman Bavinck would follow a special career. Already at the gymnasium he turned out to be a remarkably good pupil. His choice for the preacher's training of the Christian Reformed Church to which he belonged was still obvious for the son of a preacher. From a parental point of view it was a safe choice. But already after a year Bavinck left for the University of Leiden. According to Hepp (1921), this switch had the full consent of his father. However, Gleason argues that his decision struck like a bomb (quoted by Price 2013, 48), because there at the Faculty of Theology was not the Reformed spirit that he was used to, but rather a liberal spirit. Herman himself was aware of the challenge of studying at a liberal university. He wrote in his diary on 23 September 1874: 'Shall I remain in the faith? God grant it'. (Gleason 2010, 48) Later he looked back with gratitude on that Leiden period because his scientific interest was satisfied there. At the same time there was a certain sadness, 'because he thought he had lost some of his childlike faith. More than once he complained, that the accumulated science left his soul cold and empty'. (Hepp 1923)



## Reformed openness

*While he had become fully acquainted with modern theology during his studies in Leiden, he remained faithful to the Reformed ideas. This typifies his whole life: from a reformed position he was open in conversation with all kinds of other directions in theology. Even as his field of interest broadened more and more, including pedagogy, this 'reformed openness' remained his starting point.*

*Herman Bavinck grew up in the circle of the Secession, the group that had left the Dutch Reformed Church since 1834. The thinking of many Secession people was characterized by an inward-looking attitude, combined with avoidance of the ungodly world. Bavinck did not think that way. He was also active outside his own circle and had his contacts there. A good example of this is his correspondence with the Islamic connoisseur Christian Snouck Hurgronje, who had become a Muslim. To Snouck's difficult questions Bavinck tried to justify his orthodox faith. This was not always easy, but they remained friends throughout their lives. (Hepp 1923, Harinck 2015)*

*Bavinck's openness had everything to do with his views on the catholicity of the world church. He often advised candidates from the theological school to continue their studies abroad. He explained this advice to his colleague Van Gelderen with the words: "Then they can see that there is indeed something else than the question of baptism and rebirth". (Van Gelderen 1922)*

*Bavinck thought it was very important to be able to report on time, which also contributed to its reformed openness. He didn't just want to report on theology, but on the whole of the reformed life and thinking in terms of time. 'A Christian, a Reformed college cannot be scary, as long as it remains true to its name. For this has always been the strength of the Christian religion, that in all the proportions in which it was placed, it has shown an exemplary elasticity and an admirable universalism.' (Bavinck 1905, 28)*

*Bavinck's scientific interest and his vision on scientific practice contributed to his reformed openness. God makes the practice of science possible and that is why we can take a positive approach to science. Bavinck writes: 'We believe that it is God who, by His omnipotent and omnipresent power, maintains and rules all things in this century too. That is why we gratefully and hopefully accept the world which He has made known to us through science and in the midst of which He has given us a place. (...) So we gratefully make use of all the technical means made available to us by the human genius. In the same way, we joyfully accept the increase and expansion of our knowledge, to which science today offers us abundant opportunities.' (Bavinck 1911)*

*This reformed openness always remained an openness under tension, which according to some resulted in 'a peculiar contradiction'. 'A peculiar contradiction characterises Bavinck's attitude as a man of science,' wrote William Brede Kristensen, a religious scientist from Leiden. 'Nobody who*

*orientated his work more strongly towards the questions and needs of our time, our civilisation, our science, than Bavinck; and nobody who decidedly distanced himself from the spirit of the times than he did.'* (Exalto 2016)

*Bavinck also gained authority outside the Reformed circle as a man of science. This is evident, for example, from the fact that in 1922 Father S. Rombouts published a Guide to the study of Bavinck's pedagogical works for Catholic pedagogical practitioners. For Rombout's Roman Catholic public at that time it was certainly not self-evident to delve into the work of a reformed scientist. In his own Reformed circle he was recognised not only as a great scientist, but also as a pious scientist, who from his own deep conviction sought answers to the challenges of modern culture and society. (Schutte 2008)*

Herman Bavinck completed his studies with a doctorate cum laude on a study of the Swiss reformer Zwingli. The graduate theologian became a preacher in Franeker, but soon he would spread his wings more widely. In 1882 Herman Bavinck became professor of dogmatics at the age of twenty-eight at the Theological School of his church denomination in Kampen. It was the education that he had previously accused of a lack of scientific level, but the loyalty to his denomination brought him back to Kampen. He began by writing his Reformed Dogmatics, which would eventually consist of four parts. In 1891 he married Johanna Adriana Schippers (1868-1942).

His interest broadened. In 1904 Bavinck wrote to his friend Dosker: 'As I grow older my mind turns more and more away from dogmatic to philosophical studies and from these to their application to the practical needs of life about me' (Jaarsma 1935, 24). He published not only on theology, but also on religion and science, psychology, culture, pedagogy and education.

In 1903 he transferred to the Free University in Amsterdam. Many times he had been officially and unofficially asked to become a professor there. In the meantime, several attempts to merge the Theological School in Kampen and the Theological Faculty of the Free University had failed. Because of this, Bavinck thought it was time to make the transition to Amsterdam. From that moment on, the collaboration with the well-known Abraham Kuyper became even more intensive.

Shortly thereafter his most important pedagogical work was published: *Paedagogische beginselen* (Pedagogical principles) (1904). That book marked the rise of academic pedagogy in the Netherlands. It also ushered in a period of new impetus for reformed education. Bavinck realised that the end of the school struggle was approaching and equal rights for public and faith schools was imminent. If this equalization was a fact, all attention could be given to the substantive profile of Christian education.

Bavinck's focus on education and pedagogy had increased over the years. Since 1890 he had been a member of the School Council, an umbrella association of a number of Christian school organisations. In 1906 he became chairman of the newly founded Reformed School Association. This school organisation had a strong relationship with the Reformed Churches. Bavinck was also known as an educator outside his denomination. In 1906 he was appointed as a member of the Literature department of the Academy of Sciences. His membership of the Senate, of which he had been a member since 1911, also contributed to his

national fame. When the Education Council was established in 1919, Bavinck became president. Shortly before that, the Dutch constitution laid down the freedom of education and the financial equivalency of public schools and faith schools. Because of this new situation, the government and parliament needed an advisory body. Under the leadership of Herman Bavinck, the Education Council advised the government and parliament on education policy. Famous works of Bavinck in the pedagogical field are not only the already mentioned Pedagogical Principles but also The education of the more mature youth and The new education. In 1908 he published 'Het christelijk huisgezin' (The Christian Family), in which he stood up for the family as the cornerstone of society.

Herman Bavinck died on 29 July 1921. He was buried in his hometown Amsterdam. After a week the body was transferred without much ceremony to Vlaardingen and placed in his wife's family grave. (Harinck 2019)

## 5. Theme

Herman Bavinck was a man with a multifaceted interest. This means that for this introduction about him there are different perspectives possible. First of all he became known for his reflection on Christian pedagogy. However, in his involvement in various school organisations he also thought about and worked on the organisation of the Christian school. Below we focus mainly on the last theme: how do you shape education in a Christian way? From Bavinck's point of view, three things call for attention.

### Normative framework

The first is the way in which he comes to weigh up his ideas. He always starts his considerations with historical developments: how have people thought about the issue in the past? But also: what are the contemporary ideas? He is well aware of the thinking of his time and of current developments. As an academic, Bavinck appreciates the available scientific data. But scientific data can never be the only basis on which we base our choices, according to him. He is always looking for the frame of mind that becomes visible behind a certain position. For example, what view of mankind do scientists use when expressing an opinion on the purpose of education? And is that the right image of men? Bavinck is convinced that a normative framework is needed to answer such questions. For him, this framework consists of biblical values and norms. On the basis of the consideration of the elements mentioned above, he eventually arrives at a nuanced and well-founded opinion.

In his Paedagogical Principles (1904) Bavinck showed this style of thinking. At that time it would take another thirteen years before the full financial equality of public schools and faith schools was achieved. Even then, Bavinck stressed that the school battle was not so much a financial battle as a 'pedagogical and methodological battle'. The identity of the Christian schools had to be thought through and strengthened. In this way, Christian schools could develop into independent institutions, based on a well thought-out pedagogy.

### Study question

6. To what extent do you think it makes sense to take note of past views when thinking about pedagogical issues? Which pedagogues have had meaning in your own country? Is attention still being paid to their ideas?

## The curriculum

Secondly, in the design of Christian education, Bavinck draws attention to the subject matter. He observes that in the past all subjects for Christians were linked by theology. After all, the various school subjects all show a piece of God's creation reality. That gave a certain unity in the teaching material. In the nineteenth century the social developments, including those of the industrial revolution, caused the emergence of many new subjects in education. The unity of thought disappeared and fragmentation was the result.

The reform pedagogues of Bavinck's time put the needs of the students at the centre of their thinking. Bavinck accused them of aggravating the fragmentation of school subjects. From his Christian vision, he wants to counteract this fragmentation. This starts with the recognition that all things have one common source: God Himself. This creates an intrinsic unity in the things that we raise in education. Moreover, says Bavinck, the Christian faith also gives an organic unity in the vision of reality. In this way, all school subjects can be related to God.

The practical implementation of this connection is easier in primary education than in secondary education. In primary education, religion, history, biology, etc. are in constant contact with each other. In secondary education this is more difficult because every teacher often only teaches one subject there, but the pursuit from this Christian vision must be the same.

Bavinck is not only arguing in favour of keeping the various school subjects connected in this way. He also believes that it is important for the components of a school subject to be taught in a coherent way. After all, such a subject is an organic unit. It is important that the teacher, when dealing with a part, has the whole in mind and that he always shows the student that larger connection. 'If the object of knowledge is organic, it has inherent as well as instrumental value. The facts of history and the facts of science constitute more than so much information to be used in the effective control of one's environment. They have value in themselves, are treasures to be possessed as well as tools to be used. Enrichment of the human spirit in the possession of the truth is as significant as the enrichment of life in the operation of thinking in action.' (Jaarsma 1935, 204)

### Study questions

7. Bavinck wanted to counteract the fragmentation of education into different subject areas and themes. To what extent do you consider this fragmentation currently to be a problem?

8. According to Bavinck, the Christian faith provides an organic unity in the view of reality. In this way, all school subjects can be related to God. How does this happen in your educational practice?

## Educational theory

*Cornelius Jaarsma lists thirteen distinctive aspects of Bavinck's educational theory that are worth including here. It should be noted that all of these are not a direct correlation to classical education, but this list is helpful in understanding what Bavinck is thinking about education.*

- 1. Education is a conscious, purposeful, systematic life process of adjustment, orientation, and moulding of the individual.*
- 2. Education is a purposeful process, having its goal in the perfecting of man in the image of God.*
- 3. The origin of man is found in a direct creative act of God rather than in a process of biological evolution.*
- 4. The individual is a product of heredity and environment and the growing selfdetermination in the interaction of the former.*
- 5. Only a psychology recognizing the sensual-spiritual nature of man can be really fruitful in the study and practice of education.*
- 6. Education is normative as well as experimental in character.*
- 7. Religio-ethical education is the supreme function of the educative process. As such it should constitute the core of the entire curriculum.*
- 8. Method is the teacher's systematic, planned order of procedure.*
- 9. The way to self-control is through intelligent obedience. This is another way of saying that discipline is the way to freedom.*
- 10. The role of the teacher is that of friendly, sympathetic guidance.*
- 11. Church, culture, and state constitute the three great units of society; the family unit he regards basic to the whole structure. All these institutions find their center in the ultimate principles of reality and their goal in the kingdom of God.*
- 12. Social changes must be evaluated ethically according to norms inherent in man's social relationships.*
- 13. Education is a social function in the sense that the entire social order must assume its educational responsibility.*

*Source: Jaarsma, The Educational Philosophy of Herman Bavinck, 214-226.*

### Study questions

9. Which of these aspects appeals to you most? To what extent do you recognise this aspect in your own school practice?

## The organisation

Thinking about the design of Christian education, we now come to the third point: the organization. Following in the footsteps of their leader Abraham Kuyper, many reformed people were major organisers at the beginning of the twentieth century. Herman Bavinck also gave his strength to various organisations, including in the field of education. Behind this commitment was a clear vision: Bavinck was convinced that Christian education is served by cooperation at various levels. He was not only thinking about cooperation

between teachers, but also about cooperation at the level of the schools and about cooperation between school and parents.

He made this very clear in his brochure *De taak van het Gereformeerd Schoolverband* (The task of the Reformed School Association, 1906). This school association had been established partly thanks to Bavinck's efforts and in the aforementioned brochure he underlines its importance. In 1906, the greatest financial concerns for Christian education were over. 'Until now we have fought for the establishment and maintenance of the faith school, for the right and equality of that school. Now, from the outside, its existence is assured and its future guaranteed. Primarily the struggle is now about the inner confirmation and strengthening of the Christian school. We have moved on from the political period of the school struggle to the pedagogical and methodological period. Now we need a spiritual connection in order to preserve ourselves from individualism.' (Bavinck 1906, 15)

Bavinck argues for schools to work together. Teachers, too, should not work in an individualistic way. It is important that they strengthen each other and also seek cooperation with parents and churches. Again and again, the goal of this is the inner reinforcement of the Christian school. 'The Reformed School Association is not only an interrelationship, but also an internal, spiritual connection.' (Bavinck 1906, 29) 'Among teachers and parents, we must awaken and keep alive the interest in the spiritual, pedagogical flowering of Christian education. And in the long run only a school community will be able to do so.' (Bavinck 1906, 18)

Bavinck makes concrete proposals for the way in which this inner, spiritual community can be strengthened in Christian education. Parents and teachers become more closely involved when the teachers visit the parents and when meetings are organised in which parents and teachers discuss pedagogical subjects. 'Especially the meetings with the parents can be an important link between family and school in the future. But there is one main rule, as is the case for all meetings: they should not be annoying. They need to be well prepared and well conducted, with an interesting subject and an lively debate.' (Bavinck 1906, 28)

Cooperation between the schools is also important at the institute level, says Bavinck. At that level, current topics can be addressed, both in meetings and in the literature that is made available through the cooperation bodies. He also argues in favour of working together on a training course for teachers, a pedagogical library and a pedagogical magazine. 'The Christian school should be the best school, because it provides the most solid education and forms the best characters. But it is not the individual who is capable of this great and beautiful task, but all of us together, only in and through the community, who are capable of it.' (Bavinck 1906, 21)

### Study questions

10. Bavinck advocates cooperation between schools. How does the cooperation look like in your context? Which factors promote this cooperation and which factors impede it?

11. In order to strengthen the school's spiritual community, Bavinck wants to organise meetings of teachers and parents. What is the contact between teachers and parents in your situation? Which topics would you like to discuss with parents, given the research you have carried out in the master's programme?

## 6. Source text

The text below comes from De taak van het Gereformeerd Schoolverband (The task of the Reformed School Association, 1906, p. 25 et seq.) In order to support the idea of a school association, Bavinck makes a comparison with the Christian community. According to him, a church that is not part of a church association is going in the wrong direction. 'A congregation that remains independent is thus exposed to all kinds of internal disputes, divisions and faction struggle. This congregation can become a victim of the pride and dominance of some people. It is in danger of slipping from the foundation on which it is built. On the other hand, a church that lives in communion with others is supported by that community. That congregation is protected from despotism and preserved for rupture. It is strengthened in its existence and is attached to its confession.

*The same goes for the schools. If the government's subsidy gives them greater independence, they need the community. In order to continue to exist as Christian schools, they need the help and support, the advice and information, the care and the incentive of the community. The state pays attention to the competence of the teachers, to the condition of the classrooms, to the design and the level of education. The Christian content of the school, however, escapes the government's observation. And the church will at best be able to supervise the maintenance of the confession in education; but about the effect of that confession on education and on the formation of education by that confession it lacks the power and the authority to judge. Only schools which stand together on the basis of the same confession can support and guide one another. These schools have the same needs and demands, the same task and the same vocation; they can really be each other's information and encouragement. That is why, in connection with the differentiation of religious life, a link must be made between schools of the same confession.*

(...)

*In this Reformed School Association, as in the case of the churches, the focus should be on the schools themselves, and also on the district meetings. It is true that the initiative in setting up this organisation has been taken from above: it has been raised by the Vereniging voor Gereformeerd Schoolonderwijs (Association for Reformed School Education). But that was also the case at the time with the Reformed Church. First there were the national synods, and later the classical and provincial assemblies were added. Yet in the local church and in the classical context the weight of the Reformed church government lies. In the same way, the heart of school life must be beating in the local corporations. These corporations include the parents and the interested parties, the association and the board, the head with the teachers. The relations between all these parts of the local school community are partly regulated, but for another part they still need to be organized. This does not have to be a uniform regulation. If there is a regulation, it can indicate its place and its task to each of them.*

(...)

*This bond between family and school must not be broken. On the contrary, it must be strengthened in the coming period. The following means can be used to promote this: home visits by the teachers, meetings with the parents to discuss educational topics, lectures and lectures, newspapers and literature. The meetings with the parents in particular can form an important link between family and school in the future. But there is one main rule, as for all meetings: they should not be annoying. In order to be able to do this, meetings should not be held too often. The meeting should not be too long, well prepared and well managed, with an interesting subject and an animated debate. The relationship between school management and teachers also requires further regulation. Up to now, there have been all kinds of divergent and vague opinions on this subject in our circles. The issue is not so simple either and, moreover, because it concerns people, it has a sensitive side. But it has to be faced. By raising it in the various meetings of the Reformed School Association at the same time, a communis opinio can gradually be formed about it. This can then be laid down in a regulation. This is already certain, that in the Christian school anarchism does not belong, neither does despotism. Principles and history lead to a constitutional and parliamentary relationship.*

*After the local school cooperatives, the district organisation with its work is asking for our attention for a moment. (...) The work of this district organization consists of holding district meetings. This is where the interests of education are discussed. The district organization serves the schools by visiting each other, organizing school days, letting speakers perform, recommending and distributing pedagogical literature, and establishing, maintaining, and supervising teacher training. There is no shortage of work. However, it is important that there is a clear plan, a good method and a clearly defined goal. In this way, a district organisation can be fruitful and lead to results. That is why decentralisation of action, but centralisation of management, is now necessary.*

*The General Assembly is the appropriate body to do this. (...) In the first place, its work includes the raising of issues that deserve attention because of their importance and topicality. These are then discussed at local and district meetings during the course of the year; they are theoretically studied and explained in practical terms. In the next general assembly, the same subjects will be introduced for discussion by one or two experts, each of whom has a maximum of one hour. This is followed by discussion and can be summarised in a few conclusions.*

*The second order of the general meeting is in line with this. It must ensure that cheap literature is gradually made available on subjects relating to education and training. She can carry out this task by raising a subject or a group of subjects each year. It can also be done by having the speeches that were held at the general meeting, including the discussion held and the adopted conclusions, printed and made available at a low price. In addition, texts by others who wish to participate may also be published. These texts must then be sent to a competent committee and may be published after approval. Let the general meeting then follow a certain established order in determining the subjects. In the course of time, a range of information materials of the*



*Reformed School Association will be produced, which will reflect the ideas of our circle. These ideas can serve as a rule in practice and give a fixed form to education and upbringing. Thirdly, the mission of the meeting includes, although perhaps only in the future, the promotion of the teacher training for the Reformed schools, the foundation of a pedagogical library and the creation of a pedagogical magazine. Of these three, training is certainly the most important one. This training can be the means for the flourishing and development of the schools. In the past, this training was almost completely neglected. Nowadays, however, academic training is considered necessary for all teachers at all schools. Schools are faced with so many difficult issues that serious and calm study is urgently needed.*

*But studying without tools is impossible. That is why there is a need for a library that gathers everything that has to do with the school. The treasures of this library come to the aid of the study enthusiasts. Often there is a lack of time, strength and desire for that study. But even if these conditions are met, there still needs to be knowledge of the existing literature and the means to acquire them. In both cases, only a library with the most important pedagogical publications will be able to meet these needs. This library must be a subscriber to the most important educational journals and must collect all the data relating to education, particularly Christian education. First of all, it is important that our teaching world develops a sense of study that is much broader and deeper than it has been to date. But then it is the task of the School Association to respond to this by establishing a library and to give satisfaction.*

*And finally, the task of the Reformed School Association concerns the establishment and management of a pedagogical magazine. It is laudable that science is popularized by lectures and magazines, but it still keeps an aristocratic nature. There are many subjects which, because of the material or the method of treatment, can only be dealt with in a professional journal. In our circles, the pedagogical study often reproduces what others have said. Hopefully it will develop in such a way as to guide the development of education in the future. Then a magazine is the best way to make the pedagogical insights known to the circle of experts and to submit them to their opinion.*

#### Study questions

12. Bavinck strongly advocates that Christian schools work together. How do you judge from your own experience the effect of school collaboration?
13. What are your experiences with the teachers visiting the families?
14. Bavinck pleads for mutual visitation of schools. Do you see an advantage in this visitation; why or why not?
15. Do you think academic training of teachers is necessary? Why or why not?

## 7. Impact

It will not happen to many that a school is named after them during their lifetime. It happened to Herman Bavinck in 1913. As a theologian and educationalist he already had a great influence during his life, both within his own reformed circle and outside it. Together with Abraham Kuyper he led the Reformed segment of society. Van Gelderen spoke of 'our two great masters in

Systematic Theology, Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck'. (Van Gelderen 1922)

He spoke those words after Bavinck's death, but also during his life there are clear signs of this influence, whereby here we confine ourselves to the field of education. In 1906 a temporary committee was formed in Rotterdam to establish a reformed teacher training course. Bavinck had been calling for the improvement of the educational staff training for a number of years and this was explicitly referred to during the founding meeting. The Groningen teacher J.C. Wirtz was at the same time busy translating Bavinck's pedagogy for the teacher training courses into practice. The *Peдагогisch Tijdschrift voor het Christelijk Onderwijs* (Pedagogical Journal for Christian Education), published from 1909 onwards, was strongly oriented towards the ideas of the Amsterdam professor. In 1916 the *Vereeniging voor Christelijke Paedagogiek* (Association for Christian Pedagogy) started an annual holiday course in Reformed dogmatism. Course participants took a lot of Bavinck's writings and this remained the case in 1926, when the course became part of the pedagogical study programme at the *Vrije Universiteit*. (Exalto 2016)

Bavinck's influence was not limited to his own circle. His appointment in 1919 as chairman of the newly established Education Council was for many a logical consequence of his influential position in the Dutch education world. When Bavinck did not become a minister of education in the formation of the government in 1918, it was astonishing. 'Even outside the circle of his kindred spirits, some considered him to be the right man to do so. Later, however, the government openly acknowledged his merits in the field of education by appointing him President of the Education Council.' (Hepp 1921, 317) Because of his illness that was followed by his death, Bavinck was unable to achieve much in this position.

Bavinck's death in 1921 was for many people a reason to evaluate his life. In his inaugural speech (1922), dogmatist V. Hepp, Bavinck's successor at the Free University, called him a seer. The *Christelijk Schoolblad* (XV, 6) brought 'thanks to God for what He gave in him to our Christian education'. Father Rombouts observed that Bavinck had given the Netherlands a 'philosophically and historically well-founded theory of upbringing'. He wrote: 'People have been worried and are still worried about Ligthart, Montessori. And it's true: you can learn from both. However, only in parts, in educational matters, in methodology, in details. But our century has a much greater need for broad outlines, well anchored principles, as we find them at Bavinck. Those who study Bavinck seriously will enrich themselves in all respects: as human beings, as Christians, as educators.' (Rombouts 1922)

Bavinck's pedagogical work was not forgotten after his death. According to Price, five publications on Bavinck's pedagogy were published in the first sixteen years after his death. (Price 2013, 194) In 1928 J. Bredervelds *Christian Education: A Summary and critical discussion of Bavinck's Pedagogical Principles* appeared. The importance of his work in other countries was therefore also recognised. In 1938 the Utrecht educationalist J.H. Gunning Wzn. wrote about Bavinck's pedagogy: 'Perhaps in no area will his far-reaching and profound influence prove to be as sustainable as it is in this area'.

Yet at that time the attention for Herman Bavinck faded away, both in the Netherlands and abroad. Price is 'unaware of any book length volumes or

scholarly articles in the English language since 1936 dealing with Bavinck's understanding of education prior to the recent publication of Timothy Shaun'. (Price 2013, 194) In the Netherlands, the descendants of Kuyper and Bavinck rapidly distanced themselves from their reformed history after the Second World War. Bavinck was also forgotten outside that circle. Kroon and Levering no longer included him in their overview of great educators in 2008.

Over the past few decades, interest in neo-Calvinism has increased sharply in the English-speaking world, but Bavinck is also being read in South Korea, for example. In 2003, Bavinck's Reformed dogmatism was referred to in a review as 'a masterly work'. (Library Journal, 2003) Since the turn of the century, many scientific articles and dissertations on Herman Bavinck have been published. The Calvin College in Grand Rapids has had a Bavinck Institute for some years now. Van der Kooi (2016) writes in response to the translation of the Reformed Dogmatics and other translations of Bavinck's work: 'It is no less than overwhelming what this project has brought about. Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics is not only read in North America and Canada, but also in Scotland and in Korea Reformed Dogmatics has found its way. (...) What makes this neo-calvinism attractive in some parts of the world? From my own experience I have noticed that it is especially attractive to students who grew up in the sphere of methodism, or more precisely: in an environment where there is a sharp separation between faith and society. Salvation, they have learned, is salvation of the soul for eternal life. The world, society is another thing, with its own laws and inevitabilities. When Christian salvation is only something that concerns the soul, the message of neo-calvinism is surprising. God's will and rule is about all life, including work, politics, the city, money, economics, culture, fashion. Ordinary life comes under God's control. The attraction is that it at least invites us to think about our own society, about the world of culture, politics, work and economy in the light of the Gospel. And it does not only encourage thinking, but also action, initiative. (...) There is a reason in terms of content that has to do with this idea of God's sovereignty over the whole of life.'

In 2019 there will be 'a Bavinck revival, but unfortunately it is outside the Netherlands,' according to Dirk van Keulen. (Reformatorsch Dagblad 19 September 2019) This revival is limited to theological work. A Russian and possibly also a Chinese translation of Bavinck's dogmatism are underway. In 2019 a previously unpublished work by Bavinck was published: Reformed Ethics. It was published in both Dutch and English. Especially in the Anglo-Saxon world, the attention for Herman Bavinck still seems to be alive and kicking.

## 8. Actualisation

Bavinck's ideas are important for our time in many ways. For example, his description of the purpose of upbringing is still worth considering: 'The ideal of a Christian upbringing (...) is: true godliness, organically connected with sound knowledge and true civilisation (Bildung). Thus we form men of God, (...) perfectly equipped for all good work.' (The later Reformed theologian Jan Waterink saw this differently. According to him this text is not about the pupil, but about the teacher. (De Muijnck 2018, 38))

Within the theme of this introduction to Bavinck, his ideas about the construction and organisation of schools in particular demand attention. In Bavinck's time, the Christian schools in the Netherlands received more and more government

subsidies and eventually financial equivalence between public schools and faith schools was achieved. It is striking that Bavinck does not only consider this government subsidy to be positive. It seems that he is afraid that too much obviousness will creep into the Christian school. This can weaken the cordial connection to Christ and the effect of the Christian faith on education. (See the first part of the source text above.)

In order to keep this inner involvement of those involved in the Christian school alive, cooperation is needed. Cooperation between teachers, between parents and teachers, and between schools. In this context, Bavinck advocates a teacher training course in which future teachers acquire a solid amount of knowledge and at the same time, as a person and a professional, are trained to become true Christian teachers. At least in the Netherlands, this appeal is currently of great importance.

## 9. Primary concepts

### *Common grace*

In the first place, there is common grace making human life possible. It expresses itself in outward blessings but also in inward blessings, such as maintaining in man reason and intellect, conscious, natural love and a sense of truth, religious and moral concepts, sensibility to shame and honor, fear of disgrace and punishment. And every pedagogy—even though in theory denying it—owes its very existence to the common grace of God. (Brederveld, 48)

### *Purpose of education*

The ideal of a Christian education (...) is: true godliness, organically connected with sound knowledge and true civilization (Bildung). Thus we form men of God, (...) perfectly equipped for all good work.

### *Vision on reality*

In particular, the doctrine of creation is influential in the broader picture of his theology. The cultural mandate of Genesis 1:28 leads the neo-Calvinist to a position in which the Christian is best equipped to influence all spheres of life in God's created order. Therefore, in Bavinck's advocacy of pedagogy he is also arguing for a theological foundation so that the Christian may be equipped to defend the faith and influence culture. (Price 239)

Primarily, in the neo-Calvinist context such a belief should create a theologically informed citizenry that attempts to transform culture in all spheres of life. (Price 236)

(This college) has emphasized producing individuals who could attempt to fulfil Kuyper's words, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'" In this statement he promotes Christian engagement in all spheres of knowledge. (Price 251)

## 10. Suggestions for action

Bavinck argues that all school subjects can be related to God, because He is the origin of reality. Often one thinks of biblical narration or biology. Bavinck's ideas are also important for other school subjects. When preparing a lesson or series

of lessons, always consider the question of how you can make a connection with the Christian faith in this lesson. It is important to be creative, so that students are surprised by the insights you develop.

In some cultural contexts it is especially important that the school trains for a good diploma. The temptation therefore exists that teachers focus on qualification and emphasise the importance of knowledge, while forgetting about personal development. In the light of Bavinck's ideas, it is important that teachers regularly discuss this with each other.

It may be that parents can send children to a certain school mainly because of the high quality of the education. For the Christian school it is important to keep communicating with parents about what the purpose of Christian education is. Then it is important for the school to be able to make concrete what is done in addition to the attention for knowledge in order to train pupils to become active Christian citizens.

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