

A. J. Betten: The Other Pioneer Pella Dominic

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In December 1900, just as the nineteenth century was closing, so too was the life of the last survivor of the Seceder pastors who led the 1847 Dutch immigration to the United States. The Reverend Antonie Jacob Betten died on December 6, 1900, in Orange City, Iowa, in his 88th year. The officiants at his well attended funeral in the town's First Reformed Church were the Rev. Dr. Nicholas Steffens, and the Reverends Matthew Kolyn and Jerry Winter, the three Orange City Reformed Church ministers. Kommer Van Stigt, the historian of early Pella, composed a lengthy, sympathetic (but not eulogistic) obituary for *De Volksvriend* (the local weekly), detailing something of the significance of Betten's life.¹ And yet, for whatever reasons, there is no inscribed stone to mark his grave in the Orange City cemetery, even though the rest of his family is buried there. In some ways, this symbolizes the often incongruous - enigmatic - nature of the man and his career.

Why is Betten worthy of our notice? In addition to being one of the five or six dominies of 1847, he was the only ordained minister other than Hendrik Pieter Scholte among the Pella Dutch during its crucial first decade; he co-led the successful effort to affiliate the majority of the town's immigrants with A. C. Van Raalte's Holland Classis and thereby with the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church (now the Reformed Church in America), and he was for three years the *de facto* first pastor of Pella's First Reformed Church. Although he came to be on the rolls of three RCA classes, was given a ministerial obituary in the minutes of General Synod of June 1901, did home missionary work for the denomination, and was mentioned in earlier editions of the *Historical Directory of the RCA*, his name has been dropped from the most recent (1992) edition of the *Historical Directory*, presumably because he was never the officially installed pastor of an RCA congregation.² Furthermore, while Betten was a man of considerable talent and commitment, he also had serious flaws and faced major obstacles - not altogether unlike some of his mentor Scholte's. But Betten never seems to have been revered like Scholte. In fact, one early admirer of Scholte repeatedly referred to Betten as "Judas" - one who betrayed Pella's founder.³ What are we to make of Antonie J. Betten? A look at highlights of his life will perhaps give us a better understanding of this somewhat puzzling figure.

Born in 1813 in the city of Utrecht, A. J. Betten was the younger son of Jan Betten, a wool carder (called a stocking maker by A. J. [1832]) who died when A. J. was only seven. His mother, Jacoba Klomp, remarried three and a half years later, to another wool carder, Jan Veldhuizen. Little is known of A. J.'s early life, except that he was exempted from national militia service in 1832, partly because of a "weak chest." Two years later, when he was not yet twenty-one, he married Jacoba Harmiena van der Hagt, two and a half years his senior. Betten earned his living as a shopkeeper until around 1840, when he began studying for the ministry under H. P. Scholte, the *Afscheiding* (Secession) pastor in Utrecht.⁴

When the revival and Secession came to the Reformed community in Utrecht in 1835, Betten's step-father (Jan Veldhuizen), Betten and his wife, his wife's brother, and, eventually, Betten's mother all took part in the exodus from the *Hervormde Kerk* (Reformed public church). Scholte preached in Betten's home in 1837, and Veldhuizen, Betten, and his wife joined in

calling Scholte to be the Utrecht pastor in 1839. Veldhuizen was soon a deacon, but Scholte's 1840 suspension by the Seceder synod put Veldhuizen and the Bettens on opposite sides of the ecclesiastical fence, because the Bettens supported Scholte and Veldhuizen supported the synod. There may, however, have been more separating Betten and his step-father than attitudes toward Scholte, because Veldhuizen, who would become an elder (with aspirations to become a pastor) in his branch of the church, would himself be suspended and eventually removed from office by classis (in 1849-50) for admittedly "beating and kicking" his wife (Betten's mother); she appealed - in vain - to a civil court for a legal separation because of what she called "continuous very harsh treatment" and "the coarsest insults." All this became public shortly after A. J. had gone to Pella, but he may well have been a witness to domestic violence in his youth.⁵

Returning to Betten's career, he received (as noted above) education for the ministry from Scholte, who was doing his part to supply badly needed leadership for the Seceders by training ministerial candidates - eleven of them - in Utrecht in the period around 1840. Several of these, like Betten, followed him to the United States. And most of them shared at least some of Scholte's biblicistic, dispensational, individualistic version of Calvinism (which set the Scholtians apart from the other two main Seceder parties). Betten was ordained to the ministry in July 1842 in Noordeloos (province of Zuid-Holland), whose Scholtian congregation he served for five years, until emigration took him and most of his people to Pella. Already, only two years after Betten entered the ministry, observers remarked on what would become career-long traits of his spoken and written utterances: he preached the truth, was very thorough and wide ranging (not confined to a single text); he tended to verbosity, to avoid getting down to earth, and to obscure his main point by going off on tangents.⁶

When the time came for many of the Secession people to leave "Babylon" for the "Promised Land" of America, Scholte was chosen president of the Society for Emigration to North America which was formed at Utrecht late in 1846; his vice president was A. J. Betten. The latter and another member of the board were in charge of the emigrants for the voyage aboard "The Nagasaki" from Rotterdam to Baltimore in the spring of 1847 - then via St. Louis to Pella.⁷

Upon settling in Pella, Betten, a city man, got a farm for the first couple of years. Young Henry Hospers (later mayor of Pella and Orange City), describes Betten's situation in a letter to his father dated 26 April 1848. The dominie lived in a log house on a farm about an hour and a quarter (presumably walking time) from Pella, with a 36-acre fenced field of grain [koren] near the Skunk River. "Entering his log house, which is very narrow, one sees various books, along with a clock which adorns the rough oak logs in a peculiar way. Toward evening, one usually sees Dominie Betten, sitting on a horse, with a cap and farmer's jacket, dressed totally as a countryman, looking for his grazing cows. His wife and children, who are all well-contented, seem fairly pleased with American life, yet when one gets into conversation with her, one always hears, 'What a difference, your mother will learn something, etc., etc.'"⁸ In that first year, Betten preached at the Sunday morning services in Pella, a six-mile walk away (one way) - and without any remuneration.⁹ When Scholte was briefly suspended in 1849, Betten became acting pastor and had hoped that the congregation would help him build a log house in town, but nothing came of that (ostensibly for lack of funds but also because Scholte reinstatement).¹⁰ He moved to town anyway - by spring 1850 and became a merchant. He, along with Scholte and many of his cohorts, took part in civic affairs and was elected to various

offices over the years.¹¹

Scholte, while advocating separation of church and state, wanted to minimize the differences between the sacred and the secular in the sense that there should be no pastors as such but rather a body of lay elders, who had secular occupations to support themselves, all of whom would preach (in rotation), catechize, and administer the sacraments. This was Scholte's way of recognizing the gifts of the Holy Spirit and of avoiding the problems in the Reformed system arising when ordained ministers were not available, e.g., *preeklezen* (elders having to read published sermons prepared by dominies), and infrequent administration of the sacraments. Opposed to any synodical or denominational control, Scholte's congregation was a law unto itself; membership was only by confession of faith; there were no letters of transfer.¹²

We need not enter into the sad tale of the disputes which Scholte, a man of enormous talent, personal charm, and homiletic power, had with his congregation. Suffice it to say that he was suspended temporarily from (preaching in) his church in 1849 and was permanently cut off in 1854 - in both cases because of the appearance of evil in his financial and business dealings.¹³ A. J. Betten helped lead the revolt both times - hence the appellation "Judas" applied to him by Scholte loyalists like Laurens van Bergeijk. With Scholte gone from the main body of the Pella Christian Church, and with his replacement (Elder Jacob Maasdam) fallen under a cloud because of suspect remarks about the Trinity, Betten was asked in October 1854 to preach regularly on Sundays - in essence, to act as pastor. An event which may have given impetus to this request was a funeral message Betten had given on Sunday, September 1st, for two young adults (siblings) who had died during a cholera epidemic; his remarks had made a deep impression, especially on the youth.¹⁴ In any case, he accepted the congregation's "call" with some hesitation, he said, because (among other things) he "has always had and still has many difficulties to contend with, and also that he thinks that he might confirm the impression held by some that his public preaching would be a hindrance to the unity of the whole body."¹⁵ These comments suggest some (unfortunately prophetic) self-awareness on Betten's part.

The following summer (July 1855), Betten was asked by the consistory "whether he would be prepared to place himself totally in the service of the congregation" as full-time pastor (abandoning all his secular affairs); he agreed to this (although he said it would take some time to sever all his business ties); the congregation agreed, too, although not without a few dissenting votes.¹⁶ The summer of 1856 saw Betten and fellow elder, A. C. Kuyper (future RCA minister) head the negotiations with Van Raalte which brought the union of most of this congregation with Holland Classis and the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church.¹⁷

Betten, between the fall of 1856 and the fall of 1857, continued to act as interim pastor while the congregation looked for a permanent minister but seemed to become increasingly ill at ease with the arrangement. The source of his dissatisfaction, according to him, was both the uncertainty of his position in the church as well as the church's intolerance of those who had fellowship (e.g., attending the Lord's Supper) with Scholtians outside the congregation. In October 1857 he told the consistory he was not unwilling to serve but had lost his enthusiasm for the work because of the uncertainty of the arrangement, not because he was unreformed (as some were evidently charging). In any event, even though Betten was willing to continue his service for the congregation, the people voted to dismiss him on October 12, 1857, after over three years as their acting pastor.¹⁸ Why? Was there more to his lack of enthusiasm for the task than the informal nature of his relationship with the church?

We need to go back to 1850. In December of that year his wife died, leaving him with six children between the ages of two and fourteen.¹⁹ Widowed barely more than three months, Betten married, in March 1851, a childless twenty-two-year-old widow (of seven months) nearly sixteen years younger than he. Presumably there was more involved here than finding a housekeeper/baby sitter - since he already had one in his oldest daughter, aged fifteen, only seven years younger than her step-mother. The new Mrs. Betten was "Jaantje" (Adriana/Adriaantje) van Pelt, widow of Cornelis Kuiper, son of Elder A. C. Kuiper (or Kuijper; later Kuyper; see above). The large Kuiper family had come to Pella from Charlois (rural Rotterdam) in 1849. While the Kuipers were an ardent Secession family, the Van Pelts do not appear to have been Seceders, at least not prominent ones.²⁰

As the lines from William Congreve ("The Old Bachelor") put it, "Thus grief still treads upon the heels of pleasure; Marry'd in haste, we may repent at leisure." The domestic life of Dominie Betten played a crucial role in his undoing as a minister, for the Pella church dismissed him because he could not keep order in his own family.²¹ After receiving the consistory committee report of their visit to Betten (and his view of his problem - reported above), the consistory (chaired by the Rev. C. van der Meulen, who was on an official pastoral visit from Classis Holland) proceeded to discuss his family, i.e., "the extreme disunity between him and his wife so that even the children are out of the house."²² Not only did Betten and his wife not get along (a family tradition says that she would hide his preaching clothes), but apparently more than one of the minor children by his first marriage were no longer living at home, possibly at odds with their new "mother." It is likely that this was the time when Betten's oldest son, Jan, then aged nineteen, left home, never to return.²³ However this may be, the consistory concluded its session by asking whether Betten, in such circumstances, could function as pastor for the edification of the congregation.²⁴

The answer to this question came three days later, when the consistory met again. "After many words and careful consideration, Brother Kuiper [former father-in-law of the second Mrs. Betten and now father-in-law of Betten's oldest daughter] makes the following motion: 'Taking into consideration that 1) Brother Betten has never been universally recognized in this congregation as pastor, 2) his entire conduct in spirit and tendency does not serve to the upbuilding and establishing of the congregation, and 3) his domestic circumstances are of such a nature that he cannot work with fruit in the congregation; we address to him the following note: "The situation between Bro. Betten and the Congregation is of such a nature that the latter can no longer ask him to serve as Pastor in her midst, while there are additional matters which make his further activity in the congregation inadvisable."' This motion passed with only one dissenting vote, by Elder Kommer de Hoog who would shortly return to Scholte's church. The consistory then decided that the elders take turns in conducting services, either by reading a sermon or by speaking to the edification of the congregation²⁵ - and later that same month Kuiper was elected president of the consistory.²⁶ He would now provide the interim leadership in the trying period before the congregation got a resident pastor in the person of Van Raalte's own son-in-law, the very effective (but sickly) Dominie Pieter Jan Oggel, at the beginning of 1860.²⁷

Thus ended - after three years - the informal but real pastoral relationship between A. J. Betten and the First Reformed Church of Pella. Henceforth he carried on as best he could, trying to find his niche, particularly in regard to ministry.²⁸ In the first several years he pursued a course which took him away from the Reformed Church. His first move was to explore

imitating Kommer de Hoog in returning to Scholte's congregation, for in August 1858 its consistory minutes report that "Betten comes to us expressing desire to join our fellowship. The congregation, not forgetting earlier happenings, declared itself ready to receive him if they learn that the existing matters between him and our pastor H. P. Scholte are cleared up."²⁹ But by the next week's meeting, Betten informed them that "he must withdraw his offer of fellowship," because, having talked with various brothers, including Scholte, "he is convinced that the matter has not yet come to ripeness." The consistory's comment on this is that "Betten still has come to no recognition of guilt before God for all those things about which the difference exists."³⁰ So "at present the congregation can express no fellowship with Brother Betten, . . . and there can be no congregation effort to resolve the existing differences."³¹

This meant that toward the end of 1858 Betten was a man without a church; he had "principal differences" with the Reformed and presumably personal differences with Scholte, neither of which could be resolved. What should he do? There was a third way open to a maverick like Betten in the fragmented church situation in Pella: the congregation pastored by Jacob Maasdam, one of Scholte's proteges from the Utrecht days. This group consisted of Scholtians without Scholte; they shared most of his principles but disliked his practices. They had opposed the union of the main Pella church body with the Reformed Church in 1856 and had then separated from it fairly peacefully. So, Betten after flirting with Scholte's group, negotiated with and joined Maasdam's group before the end of 1858, with the understanding that Maasdam and he would be co-pastors of "the First Christian Church" of Pella (Scholte's being "the Second Christian Church"). The collaboration lasted only one month because Maasdam died at the end of December 1858. This left Betten the sole pastor of the church, which work he carried out until January 1862.³²

For whatever reasons, the next - and final - chapter in Betten's life would be back within the Reformed Church, or at least on its fringes. We can only guess at why he left the First Christian Church to return to the congregation which had dispensed with his services over four years earlier.³³ One factor may have been the request to Classis Holland in April 1861 by some of the Dutch population of Amsterdam, Iowa, near Pella, to be organized as a congregation. Classis acceded to this request, directing Dominie Oggel of the First Reformed Church and two of his elders to implement it.³⁴ The following February (1862), Oggel reported to his consistory that "A. J. Betten visited him and has presented himself to be recognized and taken up as member in the Reformed Church here. After much discussion and deliberation, it was moved and carried to advise him that he should approach Classis to be received as a minister in the Classis, and to attempt to establish a second Dutch Reformed Church."³⁵ Two months later (April 1862), a letter from Pella was read in classis stating that "various brothers" (presumably the same ones as the year before) urged setting up a new Dutch congregation. This request was (again) approved, with Oggel and his consistory (again) authorized to carry it out, but with the stipulation that the formation of this congregation would not *ipso facto* transfer its pastor, Dominie Betten, into the Reformed Church, because the constitution of the Reformed Church required immigrant pastors, before they could preach in Reformed congregations, to have their credentials approved by classis. This decision was sent to the prospective congregation and to Betten.³⁶

Betten soon responded in a letter to the classis, contending that already for a long time he had been acknowledged as a minister in the Reformed Church and had demonstrated that he

still held the same ecclesiastical position. Meeting in special session in June 1862, Classis Holland, after hearing this letter, together with statements by Van Raalte of his dealings with Betten during Van Raalte's work on behalf of the classis in Pella, decided that it could not fail to appreciate Betten's status as a minister within the bounds of the Reformed Church but nevertheless desired his subscription to the doctrinal standards of the denomination (i.e., the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort), so that his agreement with and subjection to the church would be more demonstrable. Accordingly, Classis Holland sent Betten a copy of the formula of subscription for him to sign and return. Presumably he did so (eventually), judging from his later activity within the Reformed Church, but the classical minutes contain no mention of his having signed, and he was never listed as a member of Classis Holland.³⁷

Meanwhile, back in Pella, hundreds of miles southwest of Michigan, the formation of the proposed new Dutch Reformed congregation with Betten as pastor was making little progress. The consistory committee appointed in September 1862 to attend to this matter reported the next month that there was too little participation for a new church to be set up.³⁸ By early 1863, a second Reformed church, with English preaching, was being launched in Pella, while Dominie Oggel was increasingly inactive because of illness.³⁹ It was in this context, that "Dominie" Betten came to the consistory in February 1863, persisting in the request that a new (Dutch) congregation be formed, but the consistory replied that it could do nothing because classis had only authorized it to act in concert with Oggel, who was then ailing and thus absent. At Betten's urging, the consistory approached the Rev. Abraham Thompson, the organizer of Pella's Second Reformed Church, to see if he might be able to act in Oggel's place. But he indicated that no one could organize a congregation unless so authorized by classis; therefore, he could not become involved, especially since he belonged to Classis Illinois, not Classis Holland. Thompson suggested that Betten and the consistory ask Classis Holland (at its spring meeting) to find a substitute for Oggel; notified of this proposal, Betten could make no decision.⁴⁰ Why?

Perhaps his personal affairs contributed to his uncertainty, for it was just at this point that Betten's marriage again "reared its ugly head." After visiting with him about this subject, Elder A. C. Kuyper and another elder⁴¹ reported at a consistory meeting in early April 1863, that "it appears that he has put a heavy yoke on his neck with his present wife, so that he is to be pitied. After they had spoken with him and had presented the difficulties in reconciling his situation with the requirements of an elder and his family according to I Timothy 3, Betten declared that he himself was not without concerns regarding the exercise of the ministry as pastor in connection with his family; [but] that it was not clear to him that someone being in the ministry, and thereafter coming into such circumstances with his family, would have sufficient basis in this to relinquish the ministry." The consistory decided to write classis for advice about the situation of Betten with regard to his family.⁴² In response to this, Classis Holland decided at its 15 April 1863 meeting that the idea of a second Dutch church in Pella be put on hold because there was little demand for it, Oggel was absent, and Betten had difficulties at home.⁴³

For the rest of the decade of the 1860s, Betten's preaching at one or more places in or near Pella - in a kind of ecclesiastical limbo and not without some appearance of rivalry with Pella's First Reformed Church - seems to have been grudgingly tolerated by the church.⁴⁴ Even though the First Reformed Church was without an installed pastor from 1863 to 1866, there is

no record of Betten having been invited to preach there until 1869, when, during a four-month absence of the Rev. Egbert Winter, he supplied the pulpit.⁴⁵ Thus, when Betten voyaged to see his very aged mother toward the end of 1869, he was able to take with him a certificate from the consistory "attesting that he was a minister in the Reformed Church and that as such he preached to the edification of our congregation in the last months in the absence of Dominie Winter"; left unsaid was the fact that Betten's name did not (yet) appear in the official roster of RCA ministers.⁴⁶

In addition to the ecclesiastical certificate, Betten doubtless also took with him to the Netherlands a less positive report, i.e., about his marriage, to his mother, a woman who knew about marital difficulties first hand. The consistory minutes for 22 August 1870 tell us that "Dominie Betten's wife must abstain from participating in the Lord's Supper as long as she and her husband live in disunity."⁴⁷ As far as can be discerned from the records available, Jaantje Betten was more to blame than A. J. for their lack of domestic harmony.⁴⁸ In spite of these troubles, Betten retained a certain amount of respect and prominence in the community. For instance, he delivered an address at the twenty-fifth anniversary of Pella in 1872 and led in prayer at a joint Pella-Orange City church service on a Pella visit to Orange City in 1873.⁴⁹ The 1870s were, nevertheless, years of major if not drastic transition for Betten. While he inched closer to the denomination by serving official Reformed Church mission stations near Pella with names like Sand Ridge and Elk Creek - and got on the payroll of the RCA Board of Domestic Missions (returning to the official roster of RCA ministers in 1873 after a single initial appearance in 1862)⁵⁰ - he was divorced and left Pella about 1875, settling in Orange City, Iowa (March 1876), to live with his second son by his first wife, A. J. Betten, Jr. (Orange City's mayor), who had gone there in 1871.⁵¹ Here Dominie A. J. Betten spent the rest of his days as a "superannuated clergyman."⁵²

The divorce and removal to Orange City did not entirely rid him of the embarrassment of his former wife and their children, because she and they also settled in Orange City by 1878 (perhaps attracted by the presence of her brother in the area),⁵³ where they owned and ran a saloon-cum-billiard hall-cum-restaurant.⁵⁴ Not that A. J. was a teetotaler, having paid for a license to sell liquor in 1870 and 1871 in Pella;⁵⁵ earlier (in 1865), he had had to appear before U. S. Commissioner H. P. Scholte for selling liquor without a license.⁵⁶ However this may be, Jaantje Van Pelt Betten died rather suddenly in 1887, aged fifty-eight. She and her sons had not joined the only Reformed Church in town (First Reformed) when they came to Orange City, so her funeral was conducted at home by Dominies Seine Bolks (the retired pastor of First Reformed) and John De Spelder (the minister of the newly formed English-language American Reformed Church). She was buried in the Orange City cemetery under her maiden name.⁵⁷

How did our divorced, superannuated clergyman spend his last quarter century? Initially he tried his hand again as a dry goods merchant,⁵⁸ preached at outlying country schoolhouses and occasionally as a substitute at First Reformed Church of Orange City (first for Dominie Bolks and then for Dominie Ale Buursma), conducted a few marriages (in spite of his own marital failure), and in 1878 was even one of a "trio" considered for a call to the Ebenezer Reformed Church near Holland, Michigan, where his former colleague A. C. Kuyper (ordained an RCA minister in 1867) had just retired as pastor.⁵⁹ As the 1880s passed, Betten withdrew increasingly from public life, largely due to his growing deafness.⁶⁰

Controversy, albeit of a modest sort, continued to surround him in his later years,

because of his Scholtianism (once a Scholte man, always a Scholte man!). A few examples will suffice. Evidently in response to suspicions about his ecclesiastical loyalty, he sent a letter to the consistory of Orange City's First Reformed Church in 1879 reporting that his preaching (in the Van Steenwijk country schoolhouse) did not have schism as its aim, and that, to show this, he would not preach there for a while.⁶¹ Nearly nine years later, in February 1888, the consistory rebuked Betten for what they considered an insulting article in *De Volksvriend* against their popular pastor, Dominie Ale Buursma. *De Volksvriend* had just finished publishing a long series of articles translated and submitted by Buursma, from a book by an American Presbyterian postmillennialist (John C. Rankin) attacking premillennialism. Prior to the Buursma-Rankin series, Betten had frequently published pieces in *De Volksvriend* and elsewhere promoting dispensational premillennialism similar to that of Scholte (who had been a disciple of John Nelson Darby in this).⁶² Since the 1870s, at least, Betten had devoted most of his diminishing energies to the study of biblical prophecy; he is even said to have contemplated a book on this subject.⁶³

Betten's April 1888 request to withdraw from Classis Iowa was evidently a direct result of his public eschatological dispute with Buursma and subsequent rebuke by the consistory. The classical minutes suggest this interpretation: Rev. A. J. Betten requests leave to withdraw from Classis, being desirous of severing his relations to the Classis of Iowa, giving no reasons therefor, save some expressions in his communication containing, seemingly, accusations that the truths of the Bible are diluted and the Word of God bound. Waiving our opinion on these expressions, it seems to your Committee [on Overtures] that such a request is entirely out of order and cannot for a moment be entertained, @ because it was contrary to the constitution of the RCA. The classis then voted to adopt the committee report and refuse Betten's request. The issue, however, was somewhat academic, since Betten had not attended classis meetings in recent years anyway, perhaps partly because of his growing hearing loss.⁶⁴

In general, Betten was increasingly isolated by events and deafness from life in the "real" world. His ministry shifted from the pulpit to the press as he poured out article after article in *De Volksvriend* during the 1880s and into the 1890s on the prophetic Scriptures. This is reminiscent in many ways of the last years of Betten's mentor, H. P. Scholte, who became more and more preoccupied with eschatology, as his writings in his monthly, *De Toekomst* (1866-1868), demonstrate. Perhaps Betten hoped to be able to manage the future in a way in which he had been unable to control the present, especially his marriage and his ministry.

What verdict should the historian render on the life and work of the Rev. Antonie Jacob Betten? Unfortunately, while we have a lot of eschatological writing from his pen, we have little else. Especially lamentable is the loss of his correspondence. His letters would have given him a less enigmatic, a more human, face. But, in a sense, we already have seen a man with an all too human face. As the Apostle says, "We hold this treasure in earthen vessels." Betten, with all his inconsistencies, certainly was a flawed instrument in the hands of the Lord, and yet he did leave a permanent legacy in the lives of those he touched, for good or ill, and particularly in the formation of the First Reformed Church of Pella, Iowa, which exists to this day and has had many daughters (including the churches of Orange City). "Judas of the prairie?" Probably not - if for no other reason than that the very gifted Scholte had many who betrayed him because of his uncanny ability to disillusion even his most loyal followers. As for Betten, he managed, through a good deal of adversity, much of it self-inflicted, to finish the race - and a long one

it was. But our survey shows that he did more than merely outlive all his friends and enemies. We need not erect a major monument to Betten, but I think that he deserves a small corner, at least, in the next edition of the *Historical Directory of the Reformed Church in America*.

Endnotes

1. *De Volksvriend*, 13 December 1900; also *The Sioux County Herald*, December 12, 1900.
2. *Acts and Proceedings of the General Synod of the RCA* (New York: Board of Publication of the RCA, 1901), vol. XIX (June 1895-June 1901), 1230; Peter N. Vanden Berge, ed., *Historical Directory of the Reformed Church in America 1628-1965* (New Brunswick, NJ: Commission on History, RCA, 1966), 214; Russell L. Gasero, ed., *Historical Directory of the Reformed Church in America 1628-1992* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992). References to other sources for this paragraph will appear later in this paper.
3. Laurens van Bergeijk, "Geschiedenis van vijf en twintig jaren van . . . H. P. Scholte . . ." (1855/1858; unpublished manuscript in the Central College Archives). On Van Bergeijk, see C. Smits, *De Afscheiding van 1834*, vol. I: *Gorinchem en "Beneden-Gelderland"* (Oudkarspel: Drukkerij-Uitgeverij De Nijverheid, 1971), 400f.
4. Civil birth and marriage records, Gemeente Archief Utrecht.
5. Smits, vol. IV, *Provincie Utrecht* (Dordrecht: J. P. van den Tol, 1980), pp. 199, 233, 272-274, 287-289, 460-469; vol. III, *Documenten uit het archief ds. H. P. Scholte bewaard te Pella, Iowa, U.S.A.* (Dordrecht: J. P. Van den Tol, 1977), 39.
6. Smits, vol. I, p. 165; vol. II, *Classis Dordrecht c.a.* (Dordrecht: J. P. van den Tol, 1974), pp. 357-362, 204f; vol. IV, 254f.
7. Smits, I, 207; II, 360f; J. Stellingwerff, *Amsterdamse emigranten: onbekende brieven uit de prairie van Iowa 1846-1873* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1975), pp. 44f, 65-67; K. van Stigt, *Geschiedenis van Pella, Iowa, en omgeving*, vol. I (Pella: Weekblad Drukkerij, 1897), 87f, 116-124.
8. Stellingwerff, pp. 136f.
9. Van Stigt, *De Volksvriend*, 13 December 1900.
10. "Aanteekeningboek van de Handelingen des Kerkenraads van de Gemeente Jesu Christi te Pella, begonnen in het jaar onzes Heeren 1848," 7 and 28 May, 4 and 11 June, 6 and 13 August 1849. The original of this manuscript is at the Pella Historical Society, while a typescript transcript is in the Central College Archives.

11. U. S. census, Marion County, Iowa, 1850 (June), 1860, and 1870; Van Stigt, vol. II, 44, 70, and *De Volksvriend*, 13 December 1900. More study needs to be done in the Marion County and Pella town records regarding Betten's civic and business activities.

12. Jacob van Hinte, *Netherlanders in America . . .*, Robert P. Swierenga, general editor, Adriaan de Wit, chief translator (Grand Rapids: [1928] Baker Book House, 1985), pp. 284-288; Van Stigt, II, 111-116. For the best and most thorough account of Scholte and his ideals, see L. Oostendorp, *H. P. Scholte. Leader of the Secession of 1834 and Founder of Pella . . .* (Franeker, The Netherlands: T. Wever, 1964). The consistory minutes (see note 10 above) reveal something of the nature of Scholte's Christian vision; e.g., well-known, long-time church members from the Netherlands were received into membership only on (renewed) confession of their faith.

13. "Aanteekeningboek . . .," beginning 14 January 1849 and continuing to 8 October 1849, recounts how Scholte is called to account, is suspended, and finally restored. The Dutch language minutes of the "Christelijke Gemeente" (Christian Church [Congregation]) of Pella beginning 24 July 1854 are preserved at the First Reformed Church of Pella, whose own Dutch language minutes (beginning 1856) are simply a continuation of the minutes of the "Christelijke Gemeente"; the English translation of these minutes at First Reformed Church of Pella is not entirely adequate; for this paper I have made my own translation. The minutes start with the final break with Scholte already in progress. Scholte took his following with him, setting up his own congregation which lasted until he died in 1868. For further on the difficulties of Scholte with his original congregation, see Van Stigt, II, 125-127, and Van Hinte, pp. 364f.

14. Van Stigt, II, 92.

15. Christian Church consistory minutes, 9 October 1854.

16. Christian Church consistory minutes, 10, 24, and 31 July 1855.

17. Christian Church consistory minutes, 18, 19, and 23 September 1856. The church was tired of disputes and divisions, and longed for a connectional polity.

18. First Reformed Church consistory minutes (see note 13 above), 12 October 1857; also 15 October 1856.

19. U.S. census, Marion County, Iowa, 1850 (June); Van Stigt, *De Volksvriend*, 13 December 1900.

20. Scholte, Betten's model in many ways, had also taken a much younger woman as his second wife. Jaantje van Pelt had married Cornelis Kuiper in Charlois in October 1848; they came with the Kuiper family to Pella in the summer of 1849; and he died there in August 1850. Betten's two older daughters by his first wife would marry two of the elder Kuiper's sons (one of whom would become a longtime mayor of Pella). The first three children of A. J. and Jaantje died in infancy. U.S. census, Marion County, Iowa, 1850; Van Stigt, *De Volksvriend*, 13 December

1900; Lester J. Kuyper and Peter H. Kuyper, *Kuyper Genealogy 1694-1971: The Arie Corneliszoon Kuyper Family Record* (privately published; in Central College Archives); Marion County marriage records. Smits, vol. VII: *Classes Rotterdam en Leiden* (Dordrecht: J. P. van den Tol, 1986), mentions Elder A. C. Kuijper many times (with a short life sketch of him on p. 205n) as Scholte's great supporter in the Rotterdam (Charlois) area; for more on Kuijper (Kuiper), see also Smits, vol. V: *Documenten uit het archief ds. H. P. Scholte, bewaard te Pella, Iowa, U.S.A. (vervolg)* (Dordrecht: J. P. van den Tol, 1982), pp. 238-240, etc. The Van Pelts make no real appearance in any of Smits' nine volumes on the Secession in the Netherlands.

21. The following information is derived almost exclusively from the consistory minutes of the First Reformed Church of Pella, for Van Stigt, usually quite informative, is notably silent on this unhappy episode; he merely notes that Betten drifted away from the Reformed congregation in Pella; and Van Bergeijk also says nothing, although he is ordinarily eager to discredit Scholte's "betrayers."

22. First Reformed Church consistory minutes, 12 October 1857.

23. Betten family folder in Northwestern College Archives. At the Elderhostel held at Northwestern College in May 1997, a great-granddaughter of this Jan Betten recounted that he went to the South and served in the Confederate Army. According to information in the Betten family folder, he settled in Arkansas and lived to 1917.

24. First Reformed Church consistory minutes, 12 October 1857.

25. First Reformed Church consistory minutes, 15 October 1857. We should recall Betten's initial reservations in October 1854 about serving as pastor, as well as the concerns he expressed in the 12 October 1857 consistory meeting; in other words, he recognized at least some of these problems himself. De Hoog's return to Scholte's church is mentioned in First Reformed Church consistory minutes 9 November 1857 as well as in the 19 November 1857 minutes of Scholte's Christian Church (*Christelijke Gemeente*; these may be found at First Reformed Church, Pella).

26. First Reformed Church consistory minutes, 26 October 1857.

27. First Reformed Church consistory minutes, 1857-1863. For Kuiper, see *Kuyper Genealogy*. For Oggel, see Smits, IV, 175-177; also Van Stigt, vol. III, 107-110. A student of Van Raalte, Oggel was ordained when only twenty years old (1849) as pastor of the Utrecht Scholtian group and almost immediately united this faction with that which had followed Jan Veldhuizen, Betten's step-father (suspended as elder in the spring of 1849). Oggel came to the United States to serve as Reformed Church pastor in Grand Haven, Michigan 1856-1859 (during which time he married Van Raalte's daughter), and from there he went to Pella, where he again (as in Utrecht) exercised a much-needed healing presence.

28. He continued in business "on the side," to make ends meet for his growing family; he and his wife continued to have children until 1866; Betten family folder in Northwestern College Archives.
29. Christian Church consistory minutes, 26 August 1858.
30. Christian Church consistory minutes, 2 September 1858.
31. Christian Church consistory minutes, 9 September 1858.
32. Van Stigt, III, 122, 125. After Betten, this congregation had no regular pastor, only elders taking turns leading worship.
33. Perhaps the return had to do with difficulties in Betten's church or with the effective ministry of Oggel at First Reformed Church - or both; we do not know.
34. Classis Holland minutes 17/18 April 1861, Article XIX; manuscript in Western Seminary Collection of the Joint Archives of Holland.
35. First Reformed Church consistory minutes, 10 February 1862.
36. Classis Holland minutes, 23 April 1862, Article I. Constitution of the Reformed (Protestant) Dutch Church (1833), Chapter I, Article I, Section 22, in Edward Tanjore Corwin, *A Digest of Constitutional and Synodical Legislation of the Reformed Church in America* (New York: The Board of Publication of the Reformed Church in America, 1906), xxiii. Somewhat surprisingly, Betten appears (for the first time) on the ministerial roll of the Reformed Church in the June 1862 minutes of the General Synod (but not again for about a decade) but not as a member of Classis Holland.
37. Classis Holland minutes, 25 June 1862, Article XIV. The minutes of Classis Holland were checked until 1866, when Pella was transferred to Classis Illinois (closer to Pella), whose minutes are lost.
38. First Reformed Church consistory minutes, 29 September and 13 October 1862.
39. First Reformed Church consistory minutes, 5 and 12 January 1863.
40. First Reformed Church consistory minutes, 23 February and 2 March 1863. Thompson, a member of Classis Illinois, had organized Pella's Second Reformed Church on 13 February 1863; he later served as its regularly installed pastor; Van Stigt, III, 126f. The First Reformed Church of Pella was the largest congregation in Classis Holland (much larger than even Van Raalte's church in Holland, Michigan); see the statistical reports of the various congregations in the annual General Synod minutes. The formation of other congregations in the Pella area was made imperative not only by the size of First Church but also by the precarious health of Oggel. In the consistory minutes of First Church, Betten was for the first time called "Rev." ("Dominie") Betten on 23 February 1863; that may be a hint that he had already signed the

doctrinal standards of the Reformed Church; see footnote 37 above.

41. Koenraad de Jong, another Scholte protege from the Utrecht days.

42. First Reformed Church consistory minutes, 6 April 1863; also 30 March 1863. Already a year earlier, in April 1862, the consistory barred a man named Van Pelt from the Lord's Supper because of his "irreconcilable" attitude in regard to Betten; no details are given; First Reformed Church consistory minutes, 21 and 28 April 1862. This Van Pelt was almost certainly Leendert van Pelt, presumably the older brother of the second Mrs. Betten (Adriana van Pelt); he had come from Charlois (where Adriana had married Cornelis Kuiper) in 1855, as a shopkeeper, aged thirty-three, with his wife and four children; Van Stigt, II, 106; Robert P. Swierenga, compiler, *Dutch Households in U. S. Population Censuses 1850, 1860, 1870* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1987); Leendert Van Pelt moved to Sioux County in 1870.

43. Classis Holland minutes, 15 April 1863. This is the last reference to Betten in the Classis Holland minutes. When Oggel was on sick leave in the spring of 1863, the First Reformed Church consistory, ignoring Betten, sought the services of the Rev. Roelof Pieters of Michigan; consistory minutes, 4 May 1863.

44. First Reformed Church consistory minutes, 12 December 1864, 7 May and 9 July 1866, and 5 April 1869.

45. First Reformed Church consistory minutes, 19 April, 17 May, 28 June, and 4 October 1869.

46. First Reformed Church consistory minutes, 20 September 1869. Except for the General Synod minutes of June 1862, Betten's name does not appear as a member of any classis in the Reformed Church until June 1873 (Classis Illinois).

47. First Reformed Church consistory minutes, 22 August 1870. The consistory continued to work with her - evidently none too successfully; 27 February and 13 March 1871; no details are given. Unfortunately, the consistory minutes after April 1872 were not studied for further references to the Bettens.

48. Whether we today, with our greater sensitivity to women, would give as much of the blame to Mrs. Betten as did the all-male consistory, is, in view of the paucity of the evidence, a moot point.

49. *Pella's Weekblad*, 11 September 1872 and 18 October 1873.

50. And from then on until his death, except for 1877; in 1876 he was still listed in the Pella area, while starting in 1878 (until he died) his name appeared under Orange City - both Classis Illinois (Orange City was later under Classis Iowa). In the earlier years (1873-1876), his last name was misspelled, e.g., "Battin" (and even "Butler!"); see annual statistical reports in the minutes of the General Synod. For his 1862 appearance on the RCA ministerial roster, see

footnote 36 above. For his service at Sand Ridge and Elk Creek, see Particular Synod of Chicago minutes (reports of Classis of Illinois), May 1874 and May 1876; also the reports of the Board of Domestic Missions 1873-1875; these documents are to be found in the RCA Archives at New Brunswick Theological Seminary.

51. Van Stigt, *De Volksvriend*, 13 December 1900, says nothing of the divorce. That information comes from public records such as the U.S. census, Sioux County, Iowa, (June) 1880, where both Betten and his second wife are listed as "divorced." There is no record of a divorce in Sioux County (or in Lincoln, Nebraska, where Betten sometimes visited a daughter by his first wife), so it probably occurred in the Pella area (the Marion County divorce records were difficult to consult in Knoxville, the county seat, January 1996), about 1875, because Betten was called "a single man," of Sioux County, on 11 March 1876, when he sold a town lot in Pella (Marion County Deed Book 10, p. 245; the deed was filed 7 December 1876). It is quite possible that the consistory minutes of the First Reformed Church of Pella mention the divorce, but they were not consulted after April 1872; Classis Illinois minutes are not extant for this period. Betten had come to live in Orange City by the spring of 1876; *De Volksvriend*, 6 April 1876; a year earlier he was still a visitor (*De Volksvriend*, 15 May 1875). That his divorce did not seem to affect his ministerial status probably testifies to the facts that he was regarded as the "innocent party" and that he was "retired" and had always been (at best) only on the fringe of the RCA; his name was dropped from the list of RCA ministers in June 1877, but that may have been because of his removal to Sioux County.

52. U. S. census, Sioux County, Iowa, (June) 1880. "Superannuated clergyman" was probably A. J.'s self-designation; he liked big words.

53. Leendert Van Pelt had lived in Sioux County since 1870; see footnote 42 above.

54. U. S. census, Sioux County, Iowa, (June) 1880 (Adriana Van Pelt was "keeping house," while her sons Dirk and Jake were directly involved with the saloon business, and two younger children were "at home"); Swierenga, *Dutch Households* . . . ; Sioux County, Iowa, Miscellaneous Deed Records, Book 2, p. 173 (16 March 1878; Adriana Van Pelt bought restaurant and billiard hall); see also Sioux County, Iowa, Orange City Village Deeds, Book A, p. 202 (16 March 1878). *De Volksvriend*, 20 October 1877; 2, 9, and 23 May, 22 August (young Herman Betten struck the sheriff on the saloon premises), 21 November, and 5 December 1878; and years following. Similar entries are in the *Sioux County Herald* for these years. Soon there was a Betten Hotel in Orange City, which existed for many years. For a colorful description of the saloon-keeping Bettens, see Charles L. Dyke, *The Story of Sioux County*, (2nd ed.; Orange City: [Versteegen Printing Co., Sioux City], 1942), pp. 209-211, 366, 531.

55. *Pella's Weekblad*, 15 April 1871.

56. Oostendorp, p. 172.

57. *De Volksvriend*, 19 May 1887. The obituary, however, gives her name as Betten. First Reformed Church's earliest membership book (in the church vault) lists only Jaantje's brother, Leendert Van Pelt (with his family) as a member. Not only was Mrs. Betten not a member of this church but neither was A. J. himself (perhaps he regarded his membership as being in the local classis, although the pastors of First Reformed Church, e.g., Seine Bolks, were normally listed in its membership book). Nor were any Bettens early members of the American Reformed Church of Orange City (organized 1885) or of the First Christian Reformed Church (organized 1871). These were the only churches in town by the 1880s.

58. This may have been in partnership with his son, A. J. Betten, Jr.; *De Volksvriend*, 11 May, 1 June, and 13 July, 1876; *The Sioux County Herald*, January 25, 1877; Sioux County, Iowa, Miscellaneous Records, Book 2, p. 127, dated 12 November 1877; but *De Volksvriend* of 21 March 1878 reported that the store of Betten and Company was transferred into the hands of A. J. Betten, Jr., who would continue "this well visited store." The father may have left town for a brief period in 1878, because *De Volksvriend* of 22 August 1878 mentioned that he was then visiting family in Orange City. It is just possible that Dominie Betten was not entirely comfortable doing business near the saloon of his former wife and children; this had just begun operation; see note 54 above.

59. On his preaching in country schoolhouses and even as laying the foundation for the Newark, Iowa, congregation (organized 1882), see Edward Tanjore Corwin, *A Manual of the Reformed Church in America* . . . (4th ed., rev. and enlarged; New York: Board of Publication of the Reformed Church in America, 1902), p. 322. On his substituting for Bolks for three weeks, see *De Volksvriend*, 4 May 1876; on his substituting for Buursma for two weeks, see *De Volksvriend*, 6 October 1881; he also preached for the Reformed people in nearby Sioux Center, Iowa (*De Volksvriend*, 2 August 1877). The marriage records of Sioux County indicate that Betten conducted marriages for several years beginning in 1876 (with one for Mary Van Pelt, possibly a daughter of Leendert and thus Jaantje's niece). On his potential call to succeed Kuyper, see *De Hope*, 10 July 1878 (in the Hope College Collection of the Joint Archives of Holland); the call seems not to have been extended to him.

60. Van Stigt, *De Volksvriend*, 13 December 1900.

61. First Reformed Church consistory minutes, 10 September 1879.

62. First Reformed Church consistory minutes, 15 February 1888. The Betten article attacking Buursma appeared in *De Volksvriend*, 2 February 1888; he objected to the Rankin-Buursma spiritualizing of biblical prophecy (e.g., Daniel 2); their method of interpretation is "nothing else . . . than that of humans." The series of articles by Rankin began in the 4 August 1887 issue and continued until 26 January 1888 (a total of twenty-four articles); following the last article, the editor - none other than A. J. Betten, Jr. - observed that Buursma (his pastor, incidentally) had promised that the series would be short and good, but that it had been neither. *De Volksvriend* of the following week carried the elder Betten's controversial response.

63. *The Sioux County Herald*, December 12, 1900. Also see Earl Wm. Kennedy, "Prairie Premillennialism: Dutch Calvinist Chiliasm in Iowa 1847-1900, or the Long Shadow of Hendrik Pieter Scholte," *Reformed Review*, vol. 46, no. 2 (winter 1992), 153-167, especially 160-163. Betten had published articles on the future beginning in the 1870s with a couple of pieces in *De Hope* (3 May and 16 August 1876; A. C. Kuyper was publishing similar chiliastic material in *De Hope* about this time; *De Hope*, seeking to avoid controversy on eschatology, rejected an article by Betten in the fall of 1876; *De Volksvriend*, 26 October 1876) as well as in *De Christelijke Heraut* of Pella (not extant) in the early 1880s; and these became a flood from the mid 1880s to the early 1890s in *De Volksvriend* (e.g., a series on Revelation 1-3 on the eve of his eightieth birthday in 1893 - 16 and 23 February, 9 and 30 March), edited from 1886 to 1891 by his son, with whom he lived.

64. Iowa Classis minutes, pp. 219f, 10-12 April 1888 (Northwestern College Archives). Constitution of the RCA, Article II, Section 13 (1874), in Corwin, *Digest*, xvii. Betten did attend at least one meeting of Classis Illinois (when it met in Orange City), 10 July 1880; its minutes are lost, but his presence is reported in *De Volksvriend*, 15 July 1880; there is no evidence of Betten's having attended any meetings of Classis Iowa, within whose bounds he lived since its formation in 1884.