

**Rev. Dr. Calvin Peter Thompson:
A Lifetime of Faithfulness**

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Church History 332

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May 1, 1997

It can be said that experience is the stuff of life. Circumstances. People. Places. Time. All of these things play an important role in molding and shaping an individual's personality and being. And the Lord uses who we are and what we know for his glory. Such is the case in the life of Rev. Dr. Calvin Peter Thompson. This man faced many struggles and trials. Yet, the Lord used his life, and the experiences of life, to shape this man into a strong, humble servant. The humble attitude of Dr. Thompson is brought out in the opening paragraph of his autobiography. He writes:

"When I was asked by many of my colleagues and the President of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, Dr. J. A. O. Preus, to set forth for the record some of the struggles and successes, the sweat and satisfaction, the toils and joys that I, and many of my Negro brothers experienced as missionaries to my people, I was a little reluctant to do this. I felt like John must have, when, in the late years of his life, he wrote his letters to the churches. John, the beloved apostle, had the glorious privilege of being endowed by the Holy Spirit to do his work. Though I believe that God gives strength to the weak in times of need, yet, I must say that these things are written with a deep sense of humility and by the aging hand and mind of a mortal man" (C. Thompson, 1).

It is extraordinary to consider how the Lord used time and circumstance in developing Dr. Thompson's life. His family background is smattered with experiences that are less than desirable. The Thompson family had to deal with the hardships of slavery in North America. Living as a slave in North America did not help to promote the bonds of a traditional family among African American slaves. In fact, slavery did just the opposite; it often destroyed and uprooted the family. In his autobiography, Dr. Thompson recalls some of the challenges that his grandparents faced as a young slave family early in this country:

"My grandmother, Amy, my father's mother, was a slave in Wilcox county, Virginia. It is profoundly amazing that I am able to trace my ancestry that far back, since the system of slavery attempted to completely destroy the Negro family and dehumanize black people in general. My grandmother on my father's side was sold to a slave owner named Moreau in Louisiana while my grandfather was kept by the master and trained to be a seaman. While my grandfather was at sea, his wife Amy was auctioned off. Having earned some money as a seaman, my grandfather purchased his freedom and had planned to do the same for his wife. Unfortunately, Amy, had been sold and taken to a place called Moreauville, named after her master, near Avoyelles Parish. My grandmother was pregnant when my grandfather left on the trip and soon after coming to Moreauville, gave birth to my father John" (C. Thompson, 1).

Soon Calvin Peter's grandfather desperately began to look for his family. But the Civil War brought his efforts to a halt. It became impossible to re-connect any family links that might have existed before the war. Transportation was deplorable, and a sort of confusion seemed to grip the entire nation. Sadly, Dr. Thompson recalls that his grandfather gave up trying to locate his lost family and never saw his son John.

(C.Thompson, 1)

Adversity and hardship. That is definitely how one could sum up the early history of the Thompson family. It would seem rather easy for the following generations to fall into despair. Under such circumstances it wouldn't be difficult to get angry and give up. It would be especially easy to feel this way if it seemed that a person's lot in life was determined by a random collection of variables thrown together by chance. An individual's actions would no longer be the fault of the individual, but merely that person's reaction to his or her particular situation in life. The conclusion? Life becomes meaningless and futile. It seems that this mind-set was quite common among African American families. And the Thompson family was of no exception. As a youngster, Calvin Peter often had dreams of a life of infamy. Dr. Thompson writes:

"Sitting and talking with my brother about my plans for the future I told him I wanted to follow in the footsteps of Jesse James. I said to him, 'When I grow up, I want to rob banks, hold up trains and live a life of glory.' My brother told me that this would only get me shot or hanged. I said to him, 'It does not matter if you commit a crime or not, the white man will hang you just the same. So why not be another Jesse James, get plenty of money and live it up while it lasts'" (C. Thompson, 3).

The tragedy of the Reconstruction seems to be the reason that young Thompson had this self-destructive mentality. In the South, the Reconstruction had devastating results. Many whites could not accept the idea of former slaves voting or holding office. Those who opposed the Reconstruction turned to violence. This filled the African American community with fear, anger, and resentment. Dr. Thompson paints a vivid picture of the tensity that many felt:

"This was the period in our history when there was a deliberate plan to intimidate and oppress the black man. It was accepted and sanctioned in the church and all other segments of life; the plan was put into action. The Negro had to live in constant fear of servitude to preserve his life. The smallest infraction against the system of servitude, segregation and injustice, perpetrated the Negro or conjured up by the white man might mean brutal treatment or lynching to any Negro" (C. Thompson, 3).

Dr. Thompson mentioned that African Americans felt definite oppression from all aspects of life, even the church. The church body he refers to is the Roman Catholic Church. Segregation had taken its toll. The sad roots of prejudice and oppression had drilled their way into the Catholic church in Mansura, Louisiana. He recalls the history as well as the fall of the Catholic church in his hometown:

"Cocoville, now called Lutherville, was a community of white and blacks before the Civil War. According to hearsay, long before the Civil War, some Catholic Missionaries came to this community. Some people say the missionaries came from Opelousas, Louisiana, and others say that they came from New Orleans, Louisiana, and started a mission about five blocks from my house. Whites and blacks attended the Catholic Mission Post. After the Civil War was over, the white membership increased and gained control of the church. When this happened, the whites moved the church from its former location to the little town of Mansura, about 3 miles from Cocoville. Mansura is a little town named after the first family who settled there by the name of Mansui. After the church moved to Mansura, Negroes still remained as members, but the Indians left the church because they felt the hand of oppression from the whites. Negroes remained in the church, but they knew that the lines of segregation and oppression were drawn, and things in the Catholic church in Mansura, Louisiana would never be the same again" (C. Thompson, 2,3).

All of these factors set the stage for the life experiences that would mold and develop Calvin Thompson into Rev. Thompson. Of course, adversity played a major role in the history of Calvin Thompson. Yet, he did experience prosperity as well. The mere fact that he was a "Thompson" was a definite benefit. Dr. Thompson explains in his own words:

"My father John did not take his master's name, Moreau. After the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, my father left his master and took the family name of Thompson. He and my mother were married and their first child, Harriet was born in 1864. I am the eighth child of a family of nine ... I suppose I was fortunate in many ways, for my father owned his own farm which was about one-hundred acres before the lost the forth. At the turn of the century if a Negro owned property of any kind, especially a tract of land, he was considered an important Negro by both white and black in the community. In Louisiana, if one owned land, he could easily purchase the things that he needed for the next year's crops or borrow enough money to get him through until harvest time. He did not have to go through the pain and degrading experience of either a renter or share-cropper. He was not easily swindled by the 'man' who owned the country store" (C. Thompson, 1,2).

It is obvious that John Thompson was an intelligent man. Calvin must have learned many valuable lessons in farming and business dealings from his father. It's also obvious that these lessons would help him later in his life.

As was mentioned, young Thompson often felt frustrated and angry at the church. This was because he felt that the Catholic church was doing very little for his people. It did nothing for his education, and the whole concept of God seemed a bit of a mystery to him. Dr. Thompson recalls one particularly disturbing experience:

"The day before making his first communion, my brother, Ferdinand, took me along with him to see how those who were making their first communion must behave. He did this in order to encourage me to take instruction and make my first communion. The old priest began drilling the class on what they should do when coming to the altar. He told the class, 'When I tap the book in my hand twice, you stand up and when I tap the book once, you come up to the altar rail.' One of the Negroes in the class ran up to the altar followed single file by the other Negroes in the class, and knelt at the altar ahead of everyone else. When the old priest saw that none of the whites came to the altar rail, he was furious. My brother and some other blacks remained behind. As the old priest's face turned red and his head rocked back and forth in outraged anger, he turned to the altar and said to the Negroes kneeling there, 'Did you not see that the whites had not come to the altar? What is the matter with you donkeys, you brutes. Get up from there. Go back to your seats!' ... I had been sitting in a seat in the back and saw all that was going on. When the class was dismissed and we were on our way home, my brother asked, 'Did you see what must be done to make your first communion?' The whole experience was so offensive to me that I wondered how could this exist in the church. It haunted me to the point that I asked myself if that was the church of God, and if God really existed, how could he let this happen. If God was really responsible for this 'happening' then I felt that I could no longer believe in God. As for the priests I decided that they were fooling and frightening the people to beat them out of their money" (C. Thompson, 3).

With this experience in mind, young Calvin was determined to grow up and become a "Jesse James" now more than ever. Along with that determination came the resolve to live a life of spiritual ignorance. Young Calvin Thompson was angry with God. He seemed to have had enough of God. And why not! What had God done for him? He had seen nothing but difficulty and pain. His family and community constantly struggled. It seemed that the entire town of Mansura had fallen into despair and was tail-spinning towards hell. Yet, something happened to change all of that. A quiet proclamation of good news had come to Mansura and changed the lives of the people there forever, especially the life of Calvin Thompson:

"When the Lutheran Church came with the Gospel, the whole community was in spiritual ignorance. It was the Gospel of Jesus Christ that changed all this. Before this no one went to church because the

Catholic Church had become the church for whites only. There was no church to go to on Sunday. The grown-ups spent their time gambling and drinking and the children followed in their steps. The Lutheran Church came with the saving Gospel and this changed the whole character of the community. Instead of swearing and cursing which formerly prevailed, prayer and singing were heard in the homes, at church and in the streets. Since this was a small community and still is, most of the people surrounding the church became members of the Lutheran Church" (C. Thompson, 4).

The gospel of Christ had come! God's word had changed the hearts and lives of these people. It's interesting to note that a relative of the Thompson family was responsible for the Lutheran church coming to Mansura. Apparently this relative was visiting Mansura to do some bird watching. As he spent time in the community, he found that there were many families with children who had not attended school or church. He persuaded the Lutheran pastors in New Orleans to establish a mission in Mansura. On March 10, 1898, Dr. F. J. Lankenau and an assistant came from St. Paul's Lutheran Church in New Orleans, and held the first Lutheran service in the home of Scott Normand. Pastor Lankenau quickly organized a school in the church building. The German pastor soon realized that young Thompson was a likely candidate for the Lutheran clergy. Calvin Thompson learned rapidly. He eventually began to learn Greek and German at night in order to prepare him to enter the Missouri Synod seminary in Missouri before entering high school in New Orleans. (Eakin Interview, 3/16/97)

Things rapidly began to fall into place for Calvin Peter. He had gone from one who had fallen into the ignorance and superstition of his elders, to one who was rapidly becoming an accomplished preacher of the gospel. This young man's life was beginning to turn around. It was very fortunate that a Lutheran school had been established. Louisiana did not have a public education system until the beginning of the twentieth century. There was very little money in school funds to cover two school systems, which was caused by the segregation of blacks and whites. The blacks received less and less of the funds for schooling. An elite group of white farmers maintained private academies for themselves. An elite black group were similarly educated through private black academies mostly sponsored and funded by Baptist churches. (Eakin Interview, 4/6/97)

The secret behind the school in Mansura was the fact that the gospel was being preached in its purity. The Lutheran Pioneer describes the mission in Mansura in this way:

"The secret of this modest little chapel's beauty is this: within its crude walls is preached and confessed the Gospel of Jesus Christ pure and simple, to-wit, that there is salvation in none other, 'for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved, ' Acts 4:12. The rough wooden cross which faces the road from the top of the church belfry is, as it were, an emblem of the invincible beauty and riches of the place, proclaiming to all that in this building Christ Jesus, the crucified Savior, is preached and confessed to the glory of a merciful God for the salvation of lost and condemned mankind (Vol. 31 Aug. 1909, #6).

The mission periodical goes on to describe the worship atmosphere as well:

"On Pentecost Sunday, before a large congregation, two adults and three children were confirmed. It was a most glorious service and one long to be remembered by our dear Mansura Christians. After the usual beautiful and inspiring liturgy, collect, and Gospel lesson, there followed a baptism of four converts, the examination of eight catechumens, an address based on Rev. 3:11 by the missionary, confirmation, confession, and partaking of the Lord's Supper by the catechumens as well as by many other members, interspersed with singing by the congregation, the class of catechumens and mixed choir, under the able leadership of Student Calvin Thompson" (Vol. 31 Aug. 1909, #6).

These two citations are good examples of the evangelical, gospel-centered background Calvin Thompson had received. He was definitely being exposed to solid confessional Lutheranism. It is with this background that he enrolled at Luther Preparatory School in New Orleans, La. He went on to graduate in 1907. (O. Thompson Interview, 3/25/97)

After receiving his high school diploma, he intended to go to the seminary in St. Louis. When he arrived in New Orleans in order to travel by rail to St. Louis, he was told that he would not be going. Plans had changed. The Missouri Synod determined that the Northern climate would be too cold for the Negroes. (Eakin Interview, 4/17/97) Instead, it was resolved to open a school in New Orleans for colored students of both sexes. The school was named Luther College. This school would offer preparatory courses for men intending to study for the ministry as well as normal (educational) and academic courses. (Vol. 28, Aug. 1906, #8)

Some people might find this decision of the Missouri Synod to be fueled by prejudice. With the Civil War just ended and slavery abolished, it was time for the country

to begin to heal its wounds. Reconstruction government sought to replace the old policy of exclusion with one that claimed, "separate but equal."

Yet, much of the country was suffering with the plague of segregation. And the state of Missouri was no exception. Why the Missouri Synod didn't allow Calvin Thompson to attend its seminary isn't known for sure. It seems that it could have been a resolution motivated by racism. The country as a whole was struggling with this issue, and still is for that matter.

It's understandable if the Missouri Synod came to this conclusion as it determined what was best for its African American congregations in the South, potential students, and the church as a whole. And it wouldn't be of any benefit if one organization was singled out and painted as a sole villain. In one way or another, there were no innocent parties. Society as a whole was just learning to live together after the Civil War. Whatever the situation, racial or bureaucratic, the Lord still used time and circumstance to accomplish his will. The Mission Board for the Synodical Conference had this glowing report about the success of Negro missions in the South:

"From this report it was seen that God has richly blessed the labors of the missionaries in church and school, and that the mission has been specially strengthened and more firmly established for the future by the opening of Luther College in New Orleans and of Immanuel College in Greensboro, N.C., for the training of colored laborers for mission work among their own people" (Vol. 28, Oct. 1906, #9).

At the time Calvin Peter was able to attend Luther College, Louisiana was just beginning to see the roots of the Public School System taking hold. Yet, as was mentioned earlier, the majority of schools in the South were privately operated. This was a tremendous blessing for Calvin Peter. It allowed him to study God's word in a setting free from many distractions. He was able to prepare himself for the public ministry.

It is amazing to see the hand of the Lord at work in Calvin's life. He took this young man who once dreamed of being a desperado and was fashioning him into a minister of the Gospel. What Dr. Eakin stated is true, "The Lutheran church saved Calvin Peter Thompson." Of course it was the message of the gospel that saved this man. But

that message came to him through the Lutheran church. To God goes all the glory!

(Eaken Interview, 4/17/97)

And so on June 27, 1910, Calvin Peter Thompson graduated from Luther College as the Valedictorian of his class. He was also the only theological student of his class. It is interesting to note that Calvin's future wife, Miss Edna Thomas, was also a member of the graduating class that year. She sang a vocal solo for the commencement exercises as well. (F. Wegner, Vol. 32, June 1910, #6)

After graduating from Luther College Rev. Thompson was sent to Merigold, Miss. in order to found a mission. He remained there for only five months. By February, 1911, he was sent as an assistant to Bethlehem School in New Orleans, La. He was also frequently asked to deliver sermons in the local congregations. (Seeberry, Vol. 33, Feb. 1911, #2)

On the evening of Wednesday, February 22, 1911, Rev. Thompson married his former classmate, Edna Thomas. She was also assigned to Bethlehem School in New Orleans. They were united to each other in St. Paul's Chapel. And the church was filled to its capacity. (Wiley, Vol. 33, Apr. 1911, #4)

This was a busy year for Rev. Thompson. Shortly after his marriage, on March 28, he was called to serve as an assistant pastor and teacher in Charlotte, N.C. He was also asked to serve at Bethel Lutheran Church in Greenville and the Bethlehem Lutheran Church of Monroe, both in North Carolina. (Wiley, Vol. 33, Sept. 1911, #9)

The Lord blessed Rev. Thompson's work in North Carolina from the very beginning. The work was challenging, but rewarding. Rev. Thompson brings this point out in his own words:

"The 21st of April was a day of joy to the Lutheran Christians and pastor of Greenville; for on that day the preaching station which hitherto had been carried on by holding divine services in Greenville, was organized into a permanent Lutheran congregation. Three children received the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, and one boy, after having received the Sacrament of Baptism, and one adult were given the hand of fellowship and received as members, after a public confession of their faith. Indeed, the members and pastor of our Greenville mission have much reason to rejoice and to give thanks to God for the blessing which has attended the preaching of his Word."

Pastor Thompson also goes on to explain the true Christian zeal and mission-advertence he and his congregation have for the gospel:

"They [congregation and pastor] labored, trusting in the Lord's promise that where His Word is preached it will not return void. It is the voice of the Good Shepherd who seeks that lost sheep and brings them to the fold. Christ says: 'And other sheep have I, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice,' John 10,16. The congregation looks forward to another harvest of souls in the near future which will be added to its number. May God continue to hear the prayer of this congregation and pastor, that many be brought to the saving knowledge of the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ!" (Vol. 34, July, 1912, #7 --brackets added)

While in North Carolina, Pastor Thompson made quite an impression on the people. He had a caring, pastoral heart. And the people picked up on that quickly. They saw the Lord working through this faithful, young minister. Yet, his ministry was not without its share of struggles.

Very shortly the Public School System, which Pastor Thompson never dealt with, opened its doors just a few blocks from the Greenville mission school. Both schools opened their doors the same week. Pastor Thompson feared that he would lose students to the public school. And his fears were correct. He did lose several students, but a few always seemed to wander back to the mission school. It always pleased, and often amazed Pastor Thompson to have the opportunity to open the door for a student who had decided to come back to the mission school. He says:

"There was something in the plain, simple little mission school which the children and also their parents missed in the larger fine, and well-equipped public school, and that was the Gospel of Jesus" (Vol. 35, Jan. 1913, #1)

Even this struggle was not insurmountable. The Lord in his grace continued to allow the little mission to thrive and flourish. Though the Public School System threatened to take the children away from a Christian education, the Lord always managed to shepherd his little sheep right back to the gospel. Attendance in the mission steadily grew. Children were flocking to the little mission and to the faithful missionary. And so with one challenge met, Pastor Thompson prepared to face another:

"The school is full. Children are still coming in. All the seats are taken, and some are sitting on the rostrum. I cannot encourage anymore children to come because I have no room for them. What am I to do?" (Vol. 36, Mar. 1914, #3)

The Lord continued to bless the efforts of this congregation year after year. The community of Greenville suddenly began to change. The community began to change into a suburb of both whites and blacks. This seemed to help the black community as a whole. A settlement for whites opened up just a few miles from the church, and it had all the modern conveniences. This also had an impact on the industrious black community that surrounded the mission. As a result both family and mission flourished.

(Vol. 36, Apr. 1914, #4)

Yet, with every success there was a struggle. Five years of serving the Lord in North Carolina came to an end. Rev. Thompson took ill. He came down with what was diagnosed as a bad case of "nervousness". It had become so bad that Calvin was obliged to give up his work for a time. The Bethel congregation took the news hard. The time had come for their faithful minister to bid them farewell. During the five years that Calvin Thompson was in Greenville, he seemed to ^{have} gained quite a reputation. The neighboring churches closed their doors, and their pastors and members went to Bethel to honor Pastor Thompson.

The church was so full that there wasn't even room for people to stand. Pastor Thompson based his farewell sermon on Numbers 6:24-26. In his message he asked the Lord to continue to bless his little flock, and charged them to remain steadfast in the faith. Pastor Thompson wasn't able to speak loudly because of his illness, but the tears on the faces of the worshipers made it obvious that his words were heard. After leaving North Carolina, Pastor Thompson went to Mansura, LA., his hometown, to rest and regain his strength. Little did he know that the Lord had new work with new challenges and victories in mind for him. (Vol. 38, Oct. 1916, #10)

For the time being Pastor Thompson recovered from his illness. In 1917, he was then called to serve as missionary in Napoleonville, LA. This mission had its struggles

from the very beginning. There was a great need for a church cemetery. Many families were being ravaged by an epidemic of Spanish Influenza. This flu not only caused illness, but it also spread a great amount of fear. Most of the families in Napoleonville were once members of the Roman Catholic Church. Even though the majority of the community was Lutheran, it still couldn't divorce itself from the old Catholic superstitions. Many were terrified of dying from the influenza and being buried in a grave that had not been consecrated. Pastor Thompson saw this as tyrannical weapon of Satan:

"It seemed as though Satan was using every means to destroy our work and our congregation. While our members were afflicted with the influenza and were in a serious condition, the devil was busy among them and tempted them to give up their Lutheran faith. One strong and very successful mode of attack used by Satan was that he would say to our people, 'If you die, where will you be buried? You know that the Lutheran Church does not provide its members with a burying place'" (Vol. 41, Jan. 1919, #1).

The problems that Pastor Thompson faced may not seem that troublesome at first glance. Yet, the power of superstitious tradition cannot be overlooked. Pastor Thompson and his congregation were frowned upon by other churches and individuals in the community. To not have a cemetery was a deplorable crime. Rev. Thompson explains:

"In such a region as that of Southern Louisiana, where people are wont to deposit their dead in tombs and vaults that cost more than the houses they lived in when yet in this life, such a charge can do, and actually does, incalculable harm" (Vol. 41, 1919, #1).

There was also great need for a new worship facility in Napoleonville . The chapel building was quite old and storm-damaged. Access to the church itself was also difficult. The church property was actually quite a distance away from any street, and the only way it could be reached was by walking through the lots of other people. At the time the church lot was purchased the city planners were hoping to pave a street to the church. However, a citizen argued that the street would invade his property. Thus, the decision rendered by the city hall left the church property without any real entrance or exit to its property. As a result, conditions made worship quite a challenge in Napoleonville:

"The building still stands unrepaired, at the mercy of wind and rain. In spite of the dangerous condition of the chapel, zeal for the Lord's house urges pastor and members to assemble in their house of worship, though it is not unusual to have the rain come streaming down on altar, pulpit, and pews through the sieve-like roof during services. Love for the Word of God keeps our little flock

regularly wending its ways to the house of God, though no public thoroughfare leads to the church, a passage being gained through the neighbor's yards which gives admission to a dark, muddy, and lightless alley, amidst the haunts of prostitution. A sad state of affairs, is it not, dear reader? But in spite of these obstacles, we say with David, 'I was glad when they said unto me, "Let us go into the house of the Lord"' (Vol. 42, Oct. 1920, #10).

It fills one with awe and humility to hear of the strength of character and faith displayed by that small group of Christians displayed. Even in the face of such adversity, they were able to rise above it all and see what really mattered. They weren't consumed with the desire to have a grand worship building. They didn't even care so much if a clean path led to the front door or not. What did matter, however, was the Word of God. This small group of Christians loved their Lord! And they loved their church. Pastor Thompson echoes the sentiment of love and gratitude his people had for Christ and for the Lutheran Church:

"You have sent us the pure and unadulterated Gospel of salvation, that sweet message of peace which cheers the affrighted heart, gives abiding peace to the sin-wearied soul, affords courage and support against the assaults of Satan, and assures of victory in the hour of death. These priceless treasures you have made ours by your Christian giving. Words cannot express our heartfelt gratitude to you that you have sent us the Gospel, and we praise God for His grace. Surely, when we contemplate our favored lot, that we have a Lutheran church in our midst, we feel indeed blessed" (Vol. 42, Oct. 1920, #10).

The stress and challenges of this new mission must have weighed heavily upon Pastor Thompson, and his health was threatened with recurring bouts of nervousness. And yet, another challenge was placed before this young minister. In the neighboring town of Plaquemine, LA., the Lord opened a mission opportunity for Pastor Thompson. At first glance it would seem as though this would be too much for Calvin to handle. However, a blessing in disguise was sent to Napoleonville. Calvin's brother, John, had just temporarily resigned from a teaching position at St. Paul's in New Orleans because of poor health. When he recovered, John was eventually sent to help plan and take charge of the mission-school in Plaquemine.

The mission in Plaquemine seemed to grow overnight. Work had begun in August 1919, and by Christmas there were 115 children attending both a Lutheran parochial school and Sunday school. Pastor Thompson could not help but marvel at the dramatic

growth of the new mission. The school was by no means top of the line. It was conducted in a rented room of the Colored Odd-Fellows Hall. There weren't any desks for teacher or student. Yet, the room was filled to capacity. Pastor Thompson openly rejoiced and marveled at the power of the gospel. He said:

"What is it that attracts these children to our school? Is it the small tuition which is asked? No, the free public school has its doors opened, and is being conducted with a force of three or four teachers. Is it perhaps the attraction of the room and fine school furniture? No, the best convenience the school affords are old-time chairs, and old doors and rough boards serve as desks. That which appeals to the children and their parents is not the small tuition, not the convenience of the school, but what is taught in the school, viz., Jesus, who came to save their little souls from sin" (Vol. 42, Feb. 1920, #2).

That same year the mission in Plaquemine was able to have a special Christmas Eve service. The people in the small community gathered for the worship service in a rented hall, which was filled to capacity. The service began with singing, prayer, and a Christmas sermon. After the sermon the children's service began. This service seemed to have a profound effect on all of the people. Again, Pastor Thompson marveled at the power and beauty of the gospel message as he described this service:

"The little tree, well decorated with candles, tinsel, and trinkets, made no show under the bright lights of the hall, but when the lights were turned down, and the little candles emitted their tiny lights, it became quite an imposing feature. The audience was struck into solemn silence at the sight. 'Come Hither, Ye, Children,' 'Sing We Merry Christmas,' 'Silent Night,' and 'Let Us All With Gladsome Voice' were sung, recitations were given, questions and answers on the story of the Babe of Bethlehem were recited. The service made a deep impression upon the people. Now and then a groan was heard in the audience, and the remark, 'These people should have come here twenty years ago.' Children who attended other schools were heard saying, 'I am going to quit that old school, and I am coming to this school next month.' It was with a feeling of great joy that one listened to those children telling the story of the Savior born in a stable for you and for me" (Vol. 42, Feb. 1920, #2).

Plaquemine wasn't the only site of growth and action. The congregation in Napoleonville also saw many positive changes. As the congregation grew, the need for a newer and better worship facility grew as well. The church building in Napoleonville had received little help over the years. Both the parsonage and church were in desperate need of repair. The Mission Board had originally decided to postpone any building attempts

until after the Jubilee collection, but the current conditions of both buildings called for immediate action.

A breathe of fresh air blew into Napoleonville. In the summer of 1919, plans were made to erect a new chapel. The old building was to be torn down, and the lot was to be laid out into a cemetery plot. The parsonage was to be moved to the rear of the newly purchased lot, and the new chapel was to be built on the corner where the parsonage originally stood. (Vol. 44 June, 1922, #6)

This was a busy summer for Pastor Thompson. Not only did he begin the new mission in Plaquemine, but he was also in the midst of a major building project. The need in Plaquemine was too great to go unnoticed either. There was an urgent need for a chapel as well. The Sunday school had been meeting in the local Odd-Fellows Hall. This building seemed to be the meeting place for various organizations. It also had an infamous reputation. It was not uncommon to have many activities going on at the same time in the hall. Various lodges met in the building, one for every night of the week. It was not unusual to have a Lutheran service, a lodge meeting, and a dance going on at the same time. (Vol 43, June 1921, #6)

The situation had gotten to the point where it was too much to handle. The Sunday school was constantly being interrupted. The worship services weren't spared from the constant noise and clatter either. Pastor Thompson recalls one particularly noisy service:

"Several months ago a stranger attended our services. We noticed that he took an active part in the singing and also recited the Creed with us. On that day the people in the lodge-room were particularly noisy. In the midst of the sermon there came an almost deafening burst of laughter from that part of the building, greatly disturbing the preacher and his hearers. After the service the undersigned went up to the stranger and sought his acquaintance. His name was Seymour, and years ago he attended our mission-school at Napoleonville under Mr. Eberhardt. Among other things he told us: 'Some time ago I heard that there was a Lutheran church in town, but I looked in vain for it. Several days ago I was informed that the services were conducted in this hall. When I first heard it, I could hardly believe it, for you must know that this place has a very bad name. It seemed impossible that the Lutherans would have services in such a place as this. But I like the Lutheran Church, and I'll come back to services even here. But do try to get a better place.' Mr. Seymour had been a regular attendant since that Sunday, and he and his family in all probability would become members if a decent place of worship could be provided"

Others felt the same way. Parents who sent their children to the school were determined not to let their children be confirmed until the church had a permanent home.

(Vol 43, June 1921, #6)

The pleas of the mission did not go unheard. The word had gotten out across the nation concerning the poor situation in Plaquemine. As a result several freewill gifts were donated to the mission. There was enough money raised in just a few months for a building project to be considered. (Vol 43, Oct. 1921, #10)

Things went smoothly for the next few months. The congregation in Naploeenville seemed to flourish, as did the mission in Plaquemine. Yet, a sad end came to the mission in Plaquemine. In less than a year it was discontinued. For all of the success, the mission wasn't able to stand on its own. There were too many established congregations that needed help. So, the mission was closed. With his work apparently completed in those areas, the Lord placed a new challenging opportunity before Pastor Thompson. In 1925, he accepted the call to serve as pastor in Mansura, LA., his home congregation.

St. Paul's Lutheran Church lies in the district of Avoyelles Parish. The community was once called Cocoville, but later named Lutherville because of the influence the Lutheran church had on the area. People loved their church, and did almost anything to support it. It was from this background that Calvin Peter received his Christian education. And now he would return to that background and serve as the Christian educator.

St. Paul's grew steadily under the leadership of Pastor Thompson. None of the members seemed to mind having a son of their congregation as their pastor. In fact, the people grew to love Pastor Thompson dearly. They also loved their church. St. Paul's members were wholly devoted to their church and its mission. Whenever any work needed to be done, the members gladly volunteered to do what they could. And they were always determined to pay for whatever improvements were needed. This is amazing because St. Paul's was not self-supporting. Yet, that seemed to be their one dream; to become a self-supporting congregation. This dream was put on hold for several years, because of the

Great Depression and the World Wars. This would also add a new twist to Calvin's work in the community. (Vol. 48, Oct. 1926, #10)

The Great Depression threatened the community of Lutherville. This community made its living by raising cotton crops. As Pastor Thompson explains, "In the South, cotton was king." But the farmers were in trouble even before the Depression. They had a serious problem; they didn't know how to be frugal planners. The Lutherville farmers would make good money on their cotton crops, but didn't give any thought as to how they would raise their food or feed supply. When winter came, the people exhausted all of their savings on food for their families and animals. Being a concerned leader in that community, Rev. Thompson knew that something needed to be done. The community was slowly going broke! Calvin had grown up on a farm, and his father was a successful farmer. He knew the basics of good farming; he also knew that the Lutherville farmers didn't. So he decided that he needed to intervene:

"I gathered them together and discussed the matter with them. The result of the meeting was fruitful, for they agreed that they needed some professional advice about farming, even though, like Peter who told the Lord he knew all about fishing, they told me that they knew all about farming" (C. Thompson, 5).

Rev. Thompson had another plan in mind. He knew that his people needed more advice than he could give them. They also needed more encouragement as well. So he decided to contact the Agricultural Department of the State of Louisiana. A State Agricultural Agent came to Lutherville to work with the people. The Agricultural Agent had several meetings with the people, and taught them various farming techniques. He basically taught them to be smarter farmers. He taught them how to maintain a year-round farm. They learned how to grow better crops, to rotate, and diversify crops. All in all the community prospered. (C. Thompson, 5)

When the Depression finally hit, it looked as though the bottom might fall out from underneath Lutherville. The price of cotton dropped 80 percent. Yet, everything that the farming agent taught Pastor Thompson and the others seemed to help. The community

didn't suffer from the effects of the Depression as greatly as other areas. Some of it had to do with the fact that the people were used to scrimping. The newly learned farming techniques were an added blessing as well. Pastor Thompson recalls what life was like during the Great Depression:

"Since I had an all Negro congregation, living through the Depression was no special experience to them. We had come through the era of the "left overs," such as: pig feet, hog guts, soup bones, collard and mustard greens, and such other things that our white brethren never ate. My people began to concentrate on planting the things that they needed to survive. Happily they were never in the bread line, even though they took advantage of the surplus food products that the government gave to all of us" (C. Thompson, 5).

It seems that the Great Depression helped to pull this congregational community together. They all worked together with the purpose of helping one another. Edna, Calvin's wife, played an instrumental role in the survival of the community. She helped to organize a canning factory. She knew people in the Welfare Department and they gave her information about surplus food, federal help for those who wanted to help themselves, and federal jobs for those in need. Rev. Thompson explains how this was organized:

"During the few good years in Mansura, I purchased a piece of land across from the church. We came together and decided that we would take advantage of the government's offer to help. My wife told the people that we would set up our own canning plant with federal help. The only thing that we had to do was build a place and the government would supply all the equipment necessary to can all our food. The only requirement was that we gave the government one can for every five we canned. The idea sounded sensible and reasonable to all present. The men came together and decided to go into the woods and cut down trees to build a log cabin for our canning plant. In a few days we had enough logs to build a "shot gun" log cabin where there was enough room for all the people to put away food for the winter and supply the government with food for the bread line" (C. Thompson, 5).

This wasn't the only role Mrs. Thompson played. She also helped to teach the people how to preserve their food by drying, canning, and freezing it. They learned to preserve all types of foods from vegetables to beef. Pastor Thompson half-jokingly says:

"Sometimes I wonder if the frozen foods and TV dinners, the gumbo and dried fish were not patterns stolen from her. No, they were not stolen, she just didn't know what kind of produce she was marketing. Her children tried to tell her but in a rural community and with no funds or legal advice, she lost the opportunity of making a bundle" (C. Thompson, 6).

Pastor Thompson was also instrumental in forming a community butchery. It came to be known as a "Farmer's Butcher." All of the farmers got together and decided to butcher their beef and share it with whoever wanted to participate. Once they knew how

many people wanted to be involved, they knew how many beef cattle to raise each year. Each week they came together to butcher their beef. Everyone involved received what he had given over the course of the year. The program was very systematic. A bookkeeper kept the names of everyone and recorded what each person received or gave. This program was really a blessing because all the participating families had meat every week. The Great Depression came and went. The World Wars began and ended. Yet, the church in Mansura remained, and so did Rev. Thompson. He had seen his congregation through a very difficult period in history. And the church survived. (C. Thompson, 6)

When Pastor Thompson came to Mansura in 1925, he found a healthy church living in a poor community. This bothered him. He didn't like to see his people living on the brink of poverty. He had a strong mission drive to share the gospel, but he also felt compelled to help improve the financial and political situations of his community.

Calvin Thompson has often been described as a small man who talked an awful lot. This characteristic can be evident in his determination to speak up for his community. He wanted to help his people spiritually, physically, and politically. It seems that Calvin Thompson was at odds with his superiors because of his involvement with educational, civil, agricultural, and economic improvements. He was repeatedly told to stick to religious interests only. He couldn't, however. Somehow Pastor Thompson felt that he needed to do more in other areas. This constant struggle made him nervous, unable to relax, and often on the verge of a nervous breakdown. (Eakin Interview, 4/6/97)

Very little has been said about Calvin Thompson's physical problems. It seems that he was constantly battling his nerves. His ministry was a genuine struggle. He faced many challenges. And that added stress could have irritated an already complicated situation. It's been suggested that he was torn up inside. As a pastor, Calvin Thompson realized he had the responsibility as the spiritual leader of his congregation. And it appears that he saw this as an enormous privilege and responsibility. Yet, as a fellow Negro, he desired to help his people in other ways.

He longed for equality in the areas of education and civil rights. Still the fact remains. Pastor Thompson was a torn man. Deep down Pastor Thompson must have known that he, first and foremost, was a pastor of the gospel. He was to serve that gospel; not his own agendas. But he was to be a responsible citizen at the same time. It seems that Pastor Thompson wasn't disturbed so much by the prejudice of the Synodical Conference or the Missouri Synod. There doesn't even seem to be evidence of prejudice in those organizations. Rather Calvin Thompson may have been disturbed by this inner conflict. How does one remain faithful to the public ministry and live as a responsible citizen without intermeshing one with the other?

Pastor Thompson may have felt fear of compromising himself. Yet, he must have also realized that he lived in the reality of both pastor and citizen. Calvin Thompson was a man of action. And he could not sit on his hands. He needed to change what he saw as a miserable situation. So he resolved to help his community in yet another way. He spearheaded an attempt to organize a local chapter of the NAACP, (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People). Pastor Thompson explains the rationale for his political involvement in this organization:

"When I came to Mansura, I found my people living in the 'shadows of darkness.' Farming, the chief occupation of our community, often sold their chief products below value, teachers -- most of whom were seventh grade graduates -- taught for peanuts, and the grandfather clause kept Negroes from voting. Common laborers gave their services for nothing. This disturbed me. I knew about the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, (NAACP). I called my Negro brethren together and discussed this organization with them. In spite of their fears they agreed that we should establish such a chapter in our midst. The NAACP was organized and they elected me as chairman. We struggled for years until after the war between the Allies and the Nazis had begun. After the war we consolidated our forces again and begun to work for better education and voting" (C. Thompson, 6).

Rev. Thompson was always dedicated to the people he served, including the youth. He desired to give them the best Christian education possible. In Mansura, he felt a special obligation to help. He knew the difficulties black children faced. And so he became a very influential factor in establishing a program for continuing education. He petitioned the Synodical Conference's Mission Board to open a high school in New Orleans. He also

pushed for an eighth grade class to be added to St. Paul's parochial school. This became the first eighth grade school in that district of Avoyelles Parish. (C. Thompson, 6)

The turning events in the life of Calvin Peter Thompson should not leave one with the impression that he was a radical who was unfaithful to his Lord. His life was one of faithful service. He was faithful to his call and to the Scriptures. His preaching was often described as simple, but thorough. One pastor described a sermon of Rev. Thompson as follows:

"Rev. C. P. Thompson grouped his thoughts around the theme, 'Why Must We Ministers Preach Chiefly the Gospel and Not Chiefly the Law?' He showed that the Law is a ministration of the letter, while the Gospel is the ministration of the Spirit ... Rev. Thompson clearly showed the distinction between the Law and the Gospel; the great glory of the Gospel which gives us poor sinners salvation by grace, through faith in Christ. This sermon, though simple in language, was doubtlessly the result of much thought and careful study" (Wm. B. Seeberry, Jr. Vol. 41, Apr. 1919, #4).

Faithfulness was a hallmark of Calvin Thompson's life. He was faithful and diligent in all that he did, and the Lord entrusted much to his care. His ministry in Mansura took on many phases. From 1935 to 1939 he served at a mission in Baton Rouge. The years between 1940-1943 saw Pastor Thompson serving as co-missionary in Shreveport, LA. He also spent three months in 1935 traveling to various congregations in the mid-west raising approximately \$75,000.00 for the Synodical Mission Board's mission program to black churches. (Eakin Interview, 3/16/97)

All of this took place while Pastor Thompson was serving St. Paul's congregation. The congregation in Mansura also experienced change over the many years. The congregation saw a dramatic drop in numbers, especially after World War II. Many of its members migrated to other parts of the country. Yet, the members didn't ever lose the desire to become a self-supporting congregation. (Proceedings of Forty-First Convention, 1950, p. 58)

The small, rural church eventually had to compete with the new Southeastern and Alabama fields that were springing into existence. These new mission fields grabbed the attention of the Missionary Board and the Synodical Conference. As a result Louisiana

was pushed into the background and somewhat forgotten. This clouded any dreams of becoming self-supporting. (Supt. G. M. Kramer, Proceedings of the Thirty-Ninth Convention, 1946, p. 18).

The dream eventually became a reality, however. Over time the members were able to save enough money. And, in 1947, the congregation proposed to buy its church property from the Mission Board. In October, 1951, the last note was paid to the Mission Board for the property. (Proceedings of the Forty-Second Convention, 1952, p. 96)

Plans were also made to do some remodeling. Even though St. Paul's had always struggled to become a self-supporting congregation, they still had the courage to take out a loan with the Mission Board to help them do this remodeling. The church steeple needed repairs, and a new parsonage was planned to be built. In 1954, a dedication service was held for the presentation of the new parsonage. This small congregation took on quite a task. It's amazing to read about this remodeling project:

"Under the direction of one main carpenter the members had carefully taken the old parsonage apart, salvaged about two-thirds of the lumber and with additional new lumber erected a neat, modern parsonage for the sum of \$1,500. The old house had always been a sort of problem-child; swayed with the wind; groaned in its joints; air-conditioned 'in reverse' by letting heat escape in winter and the hot air stream in during the summer. Whenever I read of a storm striking that section of the state, I wondered whether the pastor and his family 'had gone with the wind.' What a relief to dedicate that new parsonage! And at that price! This was made possible only by the willing labor of the members" (G.M. Kramer, Vol. 32, Dec. 1954, #12).

The reason the members of St. Paul's were so willing to serve was the fact that they had a faithful, kind pastor. The people loved Pastor Thompson. And it's evident that Pastor Thompson loved his people. He had a pastoral heart. One member recalls fond memories of the annual congregational picnics enjoyed with Pastor Thompson:

"All them young people would play ball ... tug of war, games like that. Us old people we'd sit and talk. Pastor liked to go out in the woods. It was such a nice place out there in the woods, in the shade and everything, and the lake was right there. It was wonderful ... Everybody fixed something ... They near had a tub of fish cut up, and they'd have two wash pots frying with chicken and fish at the same time ... We haven't had a picnic since Pastor passed. We ought to have another to remind us of Pastor" (Eaken, Bunkie Press).

Calvin Thompson had a respectable reputation with everyone who knew him. His congregation loved him and so did the community in general. Pastor Thompson was also a devoted husband and father. His son, Othniel fondly remembers his fathers kindness:

"He was a great provider. He treated all thirteen children alike. He went to and fro trying to bring people to Christ and to get them to enter the ministry" (O. Thompson, Interview, 3/25/97).

The end of Rev. Thompson's ministry was filled with celebration. In 1955, St. Paul's congregation celebrated a double anniversary. It observed the forty-fifth anniversary of Pastor Thompson's ordination and his thirty-fifth anniversary as pastor of St. Paul's. The occasion was rather unique in the history of the church. He was the first member of the congregation to study for the public ministry. And now the church had the opportunity to celebrate his anniversary as pastor. St. Paul's invited Calvin's son, Rev. Othniel Thompson, to preach the festival sermon on this double anniversary. (Sylvan Greenhouse, Vol. 33, Oct. 1955, #10)

In 1959, Rev. Thompson was honored as Pastor of the Year by the Lutheran Women's Missionary League. In 1972, he was honored as the senior pastor of the Southern District. In 1973, at the Missouri Synod's convention held in New Orleans, Rev. Thompson was awarded the honorary doctor of divinity degree by Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. (C. Thompson's obituary)

On December 29, 1974, Rev. Dr. Calvin Peter Thompson died, at the age of 91. Throughout his life, Pastor Thompson was a faithful servant of the Lord. He touched and impacted the lives of so many others. His example and life inspired fourteen men from St. Paul's to enter the pastoral ministry. He was also greatly respected among his colleagues. Over all, he was viewed as a "great but humble man." Dr. Rev. Calvin Thompson lived a life of praise to his Lord. He had genuine joy for the gospel message. And he imitated that joy in every aspect of his life. (The Lutheran Witness, Vol. 94, Jan. 1975, #1)

The following poem was written by Rev. Richard O. Ziehr in 1972 honoring Rev. Thompson, who was the eldest pastor of the Southern District of the LC-MS. It was also read as he received his honorary doctors degree:

A MAN HONORED

He is a little man,
the years have shrunken
and turned him grey
and bent him slightly.

Though small, his love is large,
his kindness evident
his face clearly written
with gentleness.

With slow and slightly uncertain steps
he moved to the front of the chamber,
Applause picked up
the assembly stood
smiling faces turned to him
all around
To honor this man --
who is not hard to honor
and who was surprised to receive it.

His words are
still full of life
speaking eagerness --
after 89 years--
for more to come.

Brothers and sisters sang:
"For all the saints..."
and bathed this man with love
and hugged him warmly.

It was a very good
and happy moment!

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Appendix A

(untitled extracts from Rev. Dr. Thompson's autobiography)

When I was asked by many of my colleagues and the President of the Lutheran Church -- Missouri Synod, Dr. J. A. O. Prues, to set forth for the record some of the struggles and successes, the sweat and satisfactions, the toils and joys that I, and many of my Negro brothers experienced as missionaries to my people, I was a little reluctant to do this. I felt like John must have, when, in the late years of his life, he wrote his letters to the churches. John, the beloved apostle, had the glorious privilege of being endowed by the Holy Spirit to do his work. Though I believe that God gives strength to the weak in times of need, yet, I must say that these things are written with a deep sense of humility and the aging hands and mind of a mortal man. If it serves any purpose, the effort shall not have been in vain.

I was born June 11, 1893, in the rural district of Avoyelles Parish (county). My family lived in the community called Cocoville, later named Lutherville, because the area lay within the vicinity of the Lutheran Church which was founded there.

My grandmother, Amy, my father's mother, was a slave in Wilcox county, Virginia. It is profoundly amazing that I am able to trace my ancestry that far back, since the system of slavery attempted to completely destroy the Negro family and dehumanize black people in general. My grandmother on my father's side was sold to a slave owner named Moreau in Louisiana while my grandfather was kept by the master and trained to be a seaman. While my grandfather was at sea, his wife Amy was auctioned off. Having earned some money as a seaman, my grandfather purchased his freedom and had planned to do the same for his wife. Unfortunately, Amy, had been sold and taken to a place called Morauville, named after her master, near Avoyelles Parish. My grandmother was pregnant when my grandfather left on the trip and soon after coming to Moreauville, gave birth to my father John.

My grandfather made every effort to locate my grandmother before the Civil War began, but after the war between the States had started, it became utterly impossible, because of the difficulty of traveling and the confusion brought on by the war. Consequently, my grandfather gave up trying to locate his family and never saw his son John.

My mother Mary was the daughter of a slave holder living in the Cocoville community. Her mother was of African, Choctaw and Tunica Indian descent. Her father was a slave holder whose name was Normand. His ancestors came from Normandy, France. During subsequent years, the Normand family intermarried with the Spanish and Indians. This mixture of white, Spanish, and French, including African and Indian, was the beginning of a group of people, primarily in Louisiana, called Creoles. Their language was a combination of French, Spanish, Indian, African, and English. Therefore, I was born a Creole. Before the Lutheran Church came to Cocoville, later named Lutherville, I was unable to speak anything but the Creole dialect.

My father John did not take his master's name, Moreau. After the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, my father left his master and took the family name of Thompson.

He and my mother were married and their first child, Harriet, was born in 1864. I am the eighth child of a family of nine.

I was born and reared on a farm that my father owned in Cocoville, Louisiana. The main products of our farm were corn, field peas, potatoes, and cotton. During those days "Cotton was King" since it was the chief money crop of the Parish and throughout the South. By the standards of the South, the Negro's occupational future was confined to farming or menial labor. There were no schools in the immediate parish, so my education was very limited. Neither were there any churches in the community for Negroes. Thus, when I was not working on the farm, my three brothers Alphonse, Ferdinand, John, and I, spent most of our idle time spinning tops, shooting marbles, playing baseball, swimming, fishing, and walking through the woods along with other neighborhood boys.

Life in a rural community, near the turn of the 20th century, for anyone was very dull. This was especially true for Negroes. I grew up in ignorance and superstitions following the life-style of my elders. Being farmers, we had to rise before the sun, and work until our breakfast was sent to the field. That was a pleasant break for us, for we not only filled our starved stomachs, but had a few minutes to relax. I enjoyed picking cotton and considered myself a pretty good hand at it. The most pleasant season on the farm was during the fall when we had to pull up the peanuts, dig sweet potatoes, and harvest the food and pecan crops. I remember very well when we had completed our harvesting. I was hired out to work for less than a dollar a day. The older folks, my father and neighboring men, white and black, spent their time gambling and drinking. Once in a poker game, my dad was said to have lost forty acres of his land that was given over in a gentlemen's agreement. For some time this piece of property was still recorded in his name, even after his death in 1925. When the older folk would discard a deck of cards, my brothers, neighboring boys, and I would go into the barn or the woods to gamble for marbles or pecans, both of which were abundant, especially pecans during the harvesting season.

I suppose I was fortunate in many ways, for my father owned his own farm which was about one-hundred acres before he lost the forth. At the turn of the century if a Negro owned property of any kind, especially a tract of land, he was considered an important Negro by both white and black in the community. In Louisiana, if one owned land, he could easily purchase the things that he needed for the next year's crops or borrow enough money to get him through until harvest time. He did not have to go through the pain and degrading experience of either a renter or share-cropper. He was not easily swindled by the "man" who owned the country store.

Because of our fair circumstances, my father was able to send my oldest brother, Ferdinand (born 1877 and died 1925), to Francis Xavier Catholic School in Alexandria. The school was taught by nuns. While at the school, Ferdinand entered an instruction class to become a catholic and make his first communion. Since he could not remain until the class was completed and had to return home, he was transferred to the Catholic Church in Mansura to complete his instruction and become a member there. Now, Negroes were not permitted to worship in the Roman Catholic Church on Sunday, but they were allowed to make their first communion in church with the whites on Sunday.

Cocoville, now called Lutherville, was a community of whites and blacks before the Civil War. According to hearsay, long before the Civil War, some Catholic Missionaries came to this community. Some people say the missionaries came from Opelousas,

Louisiana, and others say that they came from New Orleans, Louisiana, and started a mission about five blocks from my house. Whites and blacks attended the Catholic Mission Post. After the Civil War was over, the white membership increased and gained control of the church. When this happened, the whites moved the church from its former location to the little town of Mansura, about 3 miles from Cocoville. Mansura is a little town named after the first family who settled there by the name of Mansui. After the church moved to Mansura, Negroes still remained as members, but the Indians left the church because they felt the hand of oppression from the whites. Negroes remained in the church, but they knew that the lines of segregation and oppression were drawn, and things in the Catholic church in Mansura, Louisiana would never be the same again.

The day before making his first communion, my brother, Ferdinand, took me along with him to see how those who were making their first communion must behave. He did this in order to encourage me to take instruction and make my first communion. The old priest began drilling the class on what they should do when coming to the altar. He told the class, "When I tap the book in my hand twice, you stand up and when I tap the book once, you come up to the altar rail." One of the Negroes in the class ran up to the altar followed single file by the other Negroes in the class, and knelt at the altar ahead of everyone else. When the old priest saw that none of the whites came to the altar rail, he was furious. My brother and some other blacks remained behind. As the old priest's face turned red and his head rocked back and forth in outraged anger, he turned to the altar and said to the Negroes kneeling there, "Did you not see that the whites had not come to the altar? What is the matter with you donkeys, you brutes. Get up from there. Go back to your seats!" When the boys returned to their seats and things were calm again, the priest repeated the drill. When he tapped the book in his hand twice, the class stood up, when he tapped it once, all the whites went and knelt at the altar. Then the priest nodded his head to the Negroes and they came to the altar and knelt.

I had been sitting in a seat in the back and saw all that was going on. When the class was dismissed and we were on our way home, my brother asked, "Did you see what must be done to make your first communion?" The whole experience was so offensive to me that I wondered how could this exist in the church. It haunted me to the point that I asked myself if that was the church of God, and if God really existed, how could he let this happen. If God was really responsible for this "happening" then I felt that I could no longer believe in God. As for the priests, I decided that they were fooling and frightening the people to beat them out of their money. Talking to my brother, he became alarmed and asked me, "Well, with that attitude what do you plan to do?"

This was the period in our history when there was a deliberate plan to intimidate and oppress the black man. It was accepted and sanctioned in the church and all other segments of life; the plan was put into action. The Negro had to live in constant fear of servitude to preserve his life. The smallest infraction against the system of servitude, segregation and injustice, perpetrated the Negro or conjured up by the white man might mean brutal treatment or lynching to any Negro. Sitting and talking with my brother about my plans for the future I told him I wanted to follow in the footsteps of Jesse James. I said to him, "When I grow up, I want to rob banks, hold up trains and live a life of glory." My brother told me that this would only get me shot or hanged. I said to him, "It does not matter if you commit a crime or not, the white man will hang you just the same. So why not be another Jesse James, get plenty of money and live it up while it lasts."

My eight sisters and brothers, and I, along with my mother, were all baptized in the Catholic Church. My father never did accept the faith, and at that time belonged to no church. When my mother was about to die, she called all of her children to her bedside and told us, "Children you see all these medals, prayer beads, scapulas, and holy water decorating me and my room? They are man-made. They cannot save you. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved" Though a catholic and forbidden to read the Bible by the priest, my mother still secretly kept her Bible and read it.

The Lutheran Church came to our community when I was 15 years old. Before, that, I was determined when I grew up, I would be a Jesse James. I was not satisfied with the Catholic Religion because it had not reached my mind or my heart.

When the Lutheran Church came with the Gospel, the whole community was in spiritual ignorance. It was the Gospel of Jesus Christ that changed all this. Before this no one went to church because the Catholic Church had become the church for whites only. There was no church to go to on Sunday. The grown-ups spent their time gambling and drinking and the children followed in their steps. The Lutheran Church came with the saving Gospel and this changed the whole character of the community. Instead of swearing and cursing which formerly prevailed, prayer and singing were heard in the homes, at church and in the streets. Since this was a small community and still is, most of the people surrounding the church became members of the Lutheran Church.

During that time I was to have an experience that set my feet upon the pathways of the ministry. I was riding on the top of a wagon loaded with eighteen hundred pounds of cotton, when I fell under the wheels of the wagon going down hill. As the wagon went rolling down hill, something caused it to stop long enough for me to pull myself from under the wheels. When I came to myself, I said aloud, "No Lord, I do not want to be a Jesse James anymore." Thus having been miraculously saved from death, I vowed that I would become a minister of the Gospel.

This vow having been fulfilled I had the privilege of seeing St. Paul's Lutheran Church move through many years of its history. Had not the people moved away in search of better employment and opportunities for their families after the 1st and 2nd World Wars, St. Paul's would number her membership in the thousands. Very few who joined her ranks and made a commitment to their Lord Jesus fell away from the faith and were lost to the church. Those who moved away from this community over the years are active members in our Negro Lutheran Churches and other integrated congregations from New York to California. Others have been founders and organizers of congregations in Alexandria, Baton Rouge and Shreveport, Louisiana, Kansas City, Mo., Oklahoma City, Houston, Texas, Port Arthus, Texas, Philadelphia and most important of all, St. Paul's has sent 17 young men and women to prepare themselves for ministry in the church.

I went to Mansura, Louisiana in 1925. Those were the days of the T -- Model Ford and the Surrey. I was blessed with a very frugal wife who knew how to stretch a dollar so that we could purchase a car. During those days my wife, Edna, could take a free soup bone and make the best meal in town. She knew how to sew and maintain her family in good clothing, such that our cost of living was at a minimum. I was fortunate to have a car to transport and move my family. We had to travel on dirt and gravel roads at a speed of less than 25 miles an hour. When we came to a bayou or river we crossed, not by bridge, but by way of a Ferry Boat. This crossing took about four to five hours. When we came to a crossing we prayed and kept our fingers crossed that it would not rain, because

the incline was about 45 degrees. If it rained everyone in the car had to get out to hold the car so that it did not slip into the water. Going uphill everybody had to push so that the car did not slide back.

Mansura is a rural community, and farming the chief occupation of its population, both white and Negro. Cotton was the chief money of the people. For many years most of the people concentrated on the money crop, with no thought of raising their own food and feed supply. They made good money on cotton, but when the winter came, they had to purchase food for their families and animals. By the time they were ready to plant their new crop, all their funds were exhausted in feed for family and stock. Seeing that this was not a healthy situation for the people, the church, or community, I gathered them together and discussed the matter with them. The result of the meeting was fruitful, for they agreed that they needed some professional advice about farming, even though, like Peter who told the Lord he knew all about fishing, they told me that they knew all about farming.

Through the Agricultural Department of the State of Louisiana, I invited a State Agricultural Agent to come and work with my people. He came and had several meetings with those who were interested. In his discussion, he explained diversified farming and how to maintain a year-round farm. Farming is a hard job and many of my people were not interested in working at it year-round. Even though I was not a farmer, I learned how to make a better cotton crop, cotton that brought better prices, strip farming, and crop rotation, and how to diversify crops. These were important to the farmers who lived in an area where the climate permitted farming most of the year. When people are making money, they are not concerned about the bare needs of life.

When the Depression came, the price of cotton dropped 80 per-cent and many of my people were in great distress. All the things that I learned from the farming demonstration agent about better crops, year-round farming, and growing home food, I tried to pass on to my parishioners. I believe that it paid off in the long run. People must have the necessities of life, house, food, clothing, and a sense of security. Since I had an all Negro congregation, living through the Depression was no special experience to them. We had come through the era of the "left overs," such as: pig feet, hog guts, soup bones, collard and mustard greens, and such other things that our white brethren never ate. My people began to concentrate on planting the things that they needed to survive. Happily they were never in the bread line, even though they took advantage of the surplus food products that the government gave to all of us.

How did we survive without getting into a bread line, even though we were very poor? The first thing we did was build a "Canning Factory" for the community. My wife knew the people in the Welfare Department and they gave her all the information about surplus foods, federal help for those who wanted to help themselves, and federal jobs for those in need. During the few good years in Mansura, I purchased a piece of land across from the church. We came together and decided that we would take advantage of the government's offer to help. My wife told the people that we would set up our own canning plant with federal help. The only thing that we had to do was build a place and the government would supply all the equipment necessary to can all our food. The only requirement was that we gave the government one can for every five we canned. The idea sounded sensible and reasonable to all present.

The men came together and decided to go into the woods and cut down trees to build a log cabin for our canning plant. In a few days we had enough logs to build a "shot

gun" log cabin where there was enough room for all the people to put away food for the winter and supply the government with food for the bread line. This program went on until the approaching rumbles of World War II. During that time my wife had taught people how to preserve food by drying it, canning it, and freezing it. They learned how to keep all types of food from field peas to beef steaks. Sometimes I wonder if the frozen foods and TV dinners, the gumbo and dried fish were not patterns stolen from her. No, they were not stolen, she just didn't know what kind of produce she was marketing. Her children tried to tell her but in a rural community and with no funds or legal advice, she lost the opportunity of making a bundle.

Are you still wondering how we survived as Negroes without getting in a bread line during those depression days? Well, we came together and established a "Farmer's Butcher". What was a Farmer's Butcher? All the farmers got together and decided to butcher their own beef and share it with all who wanted to participate. Once it was decided how many wanted to participate we knew how many beef cattle we had to raise for the year for food. Each week we all came together and butchered our beef. All persons in the association received what he had given when he butchered during the fifty-two weeks of the year. This program was systematically worked out by the bookkeeper who kept every name and what he received or gave. Normally, everyone received an equal share of the beef each week. What a blessing! For this meant that all participating families had meat to eat every week from soup bone to steak.

When I came to Mansura, I found my people living in the "shadows of darkness". Farming, the chief occupation of our community, often sold their chief products below value, teachers -- most of whom were seventh grade graduates -- taught for peanuts, and the grandfather clause kept Negroes from voting. Common laborers gave their services for nothing. This disturbed me. I knew about the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, (NAACP). I called my Negro brethren together and discussed this organization with them. In spite of their fears they agreed that we should establish such a chapter in our midst. The NAACP was organized and they elected me as chairman. We struggled for years until after the war between the Allies and the Nazis had begun. After the war we consolidated our forces again and begun to work for better education and voting.

Mansura, Louisiana in Avoyelles Parish, had no school that went beyond the seventh grade for Negroes when I went there. One of the reasons that the church survived, both Lutheran and Catholic for Negroes, was the parochial school. I believed, as I do today, that education was the only hope for the Negro people and still is. When our boys and girls reached the seventh grade there was no place for them to continue their education in our parish unless they went miles away from home. Even then, they had to go to some secular school where there was no supervision over their tender lives.

During my years as pastor of St. Paul's, the school grew to overflowing capacity. Recognizing that our boys and girls, who had potential, had no place to further their education, I petitioned the Missionary Board at a Synodical Conference to open the high school in New Orleans. We added the eighth grade to our school. This was the first eighth grade school in our section of Avoyelles Parish. To my joy, all of the boys and girls who went on from Mansura to Luther College in New Orleans and other places, I can point with pride to the fact that they succeeded. All of them are in professions from doctors to humble workers.

During my sixty-two years in the ministry I have preached over three thousand five hundred and seventy sermons, baptized over four hundred persons, and confirmed about five hundred and twenty individuals. I have had the joy of preaching the Gospel in over twenty-three states of the union, including most of the largest cities in our country. Even in my late years I am grateful to God that I am able to teach Bible classes for the resident pastor and preach for him and others who call on me for this service.

Back-Tracking

Warm Memories of 'The Pastor'

By Sue Eakin

LSUA History Professor

The highlight of each semester's work is the time when Louisiana history students turn in the results of their own back-tracking projects, and this year was no exception. Always there are surprises and delightful discoveries of local people whose distinguished careers right here in our midst have been unknown to most of us in the Central Louisiana area.

Such is the moving and poignant story of a black Lutheran pastor, the Rev. Doctor Calvin P. Thompson of Avoyelles Parish. His story was prepared by Janet C. Delgehausen, wife of the late L.E. Delgehausen of Redeemer Lutheran Church in Alexandria where Dr. Thompson once preached.

Thompson, born of parents who had been slaves in 1833, lived to be 93 years old. He died in 1974, having served as pastor 64 years, most of the time at the church where he was confirmed in 1900: St. Paul Lutheran Church near

Intense Racial Prejudice

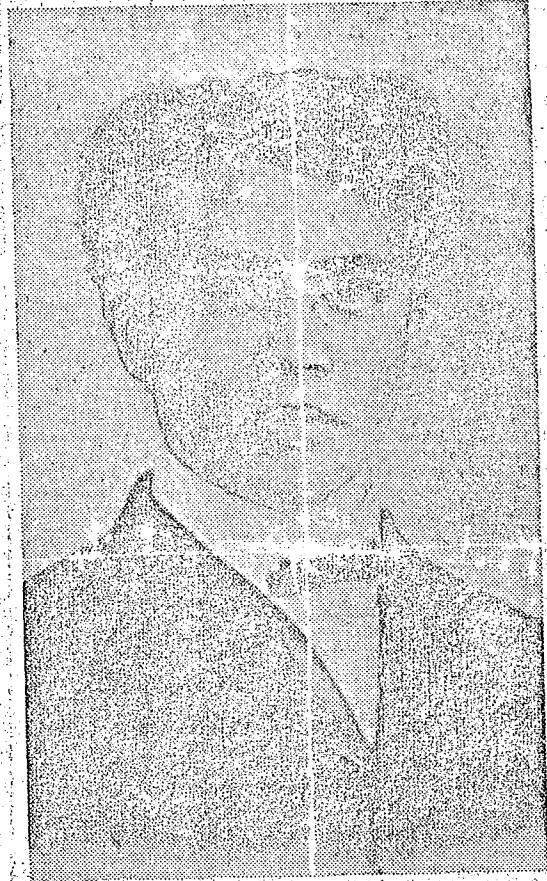
The church itself came into being as a result of the tragedy of Reconstruction; when racial prejudice was so intense that black Catholics in that area found themselves without a church to attend and unable to send their children to the Catholic school. On March 10, 1898, Dr. F. J. Ankenau and an assistant came from St. Paul's in New Orleans and held the first Lutheran service in the home of Scott Normand. It was in his school where young Thompson received his basic education.

Memories of him are warm and loving at Lutherville," the place he made his own and which is now called for the church there. It is located between Cocoville and Mansura and identified by the white frame church with the cemetery in the back, and the cluster of houses, including the parsonage, some of which are the homes of the pastor's children.

"He was a small fellow — not too small and not near my size," Sam Boyer remembered him fondly. "He liked to go fish, but he never could catch nothing hardly. Oh, he liked fishing — that and hunting. He was a real good hunter. He hardly missed a bird, but to catch a fish — oh, he just wasn't no fisherman, but he loved it!"

"He was a really good man ... a fine man. He had a lot of people," his former parishoner

member of his flock painted a vivid picture of him with her words. "He couldn't be anything but a very good pastor. You had to be smart to be Doctor Pastor. You graduated that. You didn't see his picture doing like that, of course, but he was, Doctor Par. Now tell me who else was Doctor Par. He was pastor for years and years and



Rev. Calvin P. Thompson: Served as a minister for 64 years, most of it at St. Paul Lutheran Church in Mansura.

Her recollections mostly revolve around the wonderful annual picnics the congregation enjoyed with the pastor: "All them young people would play ball ... tug of war, games like that. Us old people we'd sit and talk. Pastor liked to go out in the woods; it was such a nice place out there in the woods, in the shade and everything, and the lake was right there. It was wonderful ... Everybody fixed something ... They near had a tub of fish cut up, and they'd have two wash-pots frying chicken and fish at the same time ... We haven't had a picnic since Pastor passed. We ought to have another to remind us of Pastor."

Thompson published his autobiography in 1973, "Dawn of a Better Day," which contains some lost history of the area. He received his doctorate from Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, the largest Lutheran Seminary in the world, as an honorary degree for "Outstanding work in encouraging young black men to enter the Lutheran ministry," and a building was named for him at Alabama Lutheran Junior College and

Academy in Selma, Ala., in May, 1975.

After receiving his theological training in New Orleans, he served in North Carolina, Mississippi before returning to Louisiana in 1920. He spent five years at Napoleonville, coming to Avoyelles in 1925. He wrote of his trip home: "Those were the days of the T-Ford and the surrey. I was blessed with a wife who knew how to stretch a dollar so that I could purchase a car. During those days my wife, Edna, could take a free soup bowl and make the best meal in town. She knew how to sew and maintain her family in good clothing ... That she needed to do, for she and the Lord had a family of 13 children.

"The travel from Napoleonville to Mansura involved travel on dirt and gravel roads at a speed of less than 25 miles an hour. When we came to a bayou or river, we crossed, by bridge, but by way of a ferry boat. The crossing took four to five hours ..." he wrote.

He wrote of Mansura: "The chief occupation of its population, both white and Negro, was farming. Cotton was the chief money crop. Cotton was king. Most of the people contracted on the money crop with no thought of raising their own food and feed supply. They made money on cotton, but when the time came they had to purchase food for their families and their animals. By the time they were ready to plant their new crop, all their money was exhausted ... Seeing this was not a good situation for the people, the church, or the community, I gathered them together and discussed the matter with them.

Fruitful Meeting

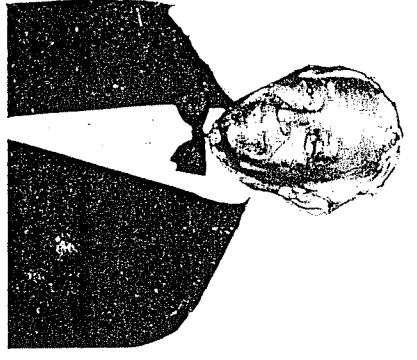
The result of the meeting was fruitful. They agreed that they needed some professional advice about farming even though, like me, they told me they knew all about farming.

The story of how Pastor Thompson ministered to his congregation's spiritual needs and worked to see that black children were educated but worked to see that the black whom he worked stayed off the bread line during the Depression is an incredible story called in the State Agricultural Department send representatives, and he and Edna had a group froze, canned, and dried food. He had a garden, and he showed by example what could be done. He organized and led an NAACP and encouraged his people to vote. At the time he was encouraging more education for the young. An amazing number of pastors became interested in following Thompson's footsteps.

As Janet Delgehausen writes: "Little by little, he lives on as a 'giant' in the hearts of the black people and especially in the hearts of the black Lutherans."

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OBITUARY

Calvin Peter Thompson was born in Cocoville (renamed Lutherville) Louisiana in 1883. He attended Luther Preparatory School in New Orleans, Louisiana from 1903 to 1907 where he received a High School Diploma. He then went on to Luther College (New Orleans) from 1908 to 1910 for certification in the ministry of the Lutheran Church.

After serving as at-large missionary in Merigold, Mississippi for a brief period in 1910, he married the former Miss Edna Thomas who was a teacher at Bethlehem Lutheran School in New Orleans in 1911.

From 1911 to 1925, Rev. Thompson served as an assistant pastor and teacher at Bethel and Bethlehem Lutheran Churches in Greenville and Mongrè, North Carolina, and as missionary to Napoleonville, Louisiana (1917 to 1925).

Rev. Thompson was called to the pastorate of his home congregation, St. Paul, in 1925 and served until 1963. He was called out of retirement to serve the congregation again during a period of vacancy from 1969 to 1971. He also briefly served as vacancy pastor of St. John Lutheran Church in Kansas City, Missouri from 1964 to 1965.

His pastorate at St. Paul was fruitful and St. Paul grew to a highwater mark of 187 souls before economic conditions forced many to leave the area in search of employment and financial security. But this in itself was a blessing because the influence of Pastor Thompson's ministry can be traced to black congregations initiated in Port Arthur, Texas; Kansas City, Missouri; Memphis, Tennessee; Jamaica, New York; Somerset, New Jersey and California.

During his ministry in Central Louisiana, Rev. Thompson also established congregations and preaching stations at Hickory Hill, Baton Rouge, Shreveport, and Plaquemine, Louisiana.

Rev. Thompson was recently conferred an honorary Doctor of Divinity Degree by the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, meeting in convention at New Orleans, Louisiana in July of 1973; for outstanding work in encouraging young black men into the pastorate of the Lutheran Church. In May of 1973 the autobiography of Pastor Thompson, The Dawn of a Better Day, was published.

In his 63 year ministry it is estimated that Rev. Thompson baptised over 500 and confirmed over 350 individuals. He was also honored as Pastor of the Year by the Lutheran Women's Missionary League in 1959 and senior Pastor of the Southern District in 1972.

Rev. Thompson is survived by and the father of thirteen children: Mrs. Adine Greenhouse, Mrs. Priscilla Price, Mr. Julius Thompson and Mrs. Margie Cooper of Mansura, Louisiana; Mr. Helvius Thompson of Baton Rouge; Rev. Orhneil Thompson of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Mrs. Doris Harris of Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Mrs. Dorothy Coezy and Mr. Herbert Thompson of Kansas City, Missouri; Mr. Calvin Thompson, Jr. of New Orleans; Mrs. Edith Patterson of Jamaica, New York; Mrs. Lydia Armstrong of Somerset, New Jersey; and Mrs. Edna Malveaux of Port Arthur, Texas; forty-six grandchildren and ten great grandchildren. Mrs. Edna Thompson preceeded him in death in June of 1973.

MISSOURI LUTHERAN SEMINARY LIBRARY

A Service of Thanksgiving to God

for the life of

THE REVEREND DOCTOR CALVIN PETER THOMPSON

June 11, 1883 - December 30, 1974

ST. PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH
RR 1 Box 29 Lutherville
Mansura, Louisiana 71350

Friday, January 3, 1975 A.D.
2:00 P.M.

"Thanks be to God who gives us the victory
through Christ, our Lord." I Cor. 15:57

The chief purpose of this funeral service, as of any worship service, is to glorify God. This service does not direct our attention to the dead or to those mourning the dead, but rather to God, who speaks to us as the event of this or any death. For it is our loving and merciful God who has given meaning to this death, for in Jesus Christ, He has offered us forgiveness of sin, comfort, hope, and the promise of resurrection.