

NILS JULES BAKKE
and the
COLORED MISSIONS of the SOUTH

by: Clair S. Hollerup

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary
Senior Church History Paper
Prof. E.C. Fredrich
18 April 1984

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library
11831 N. Seminary Drive. 65W
Mequon, Wisconsin

- PREFACE -

"About the last of August [1619] came in a Dutch man-a-Warre, and sold us twenty negars."¹ With these words, Master John Rolfe records the landing of the first African slaves on the North American continent at the small seaport of Jamestown, Virginia. Soon slave trading and slave transporting became a thriving business. It wasn't until two hundred and forty-three years later that a slaver unloaded the last human cargo of slaves from Africa at Mobile, Alabama, in 1862. A great number of slaves was brought into this country. By the outbreak of the Civil War in 1860, the slave population in America numbered almost four million.²

For more than two centuries life in bondage was to be the lot of these uprooted Africans and their descendants. And yet, God in His mercy and wisdom brought much good out of this very evil. Like, Joseph, who was sold into slavery by his brothers, the Lord caused a great blessing to come from it. With Joseph, many of these slaves could say of their situation, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good"(Gen.50:20). In their homeland they had been living as pagans in the darkest kind of heathenism. But as slaves in America, they had the opportunity to hear about the Savior and to be called "out of darkness into his wonderful light"(1Pt.2:9).

The end of the Civil War brought freedom to all slaves. However, they were not prepared for this sudden liberty and didn't know what to do with it. After they had tried their freedom for a time, some, especially the older slaves, returned to their former homes and worked for their former owners.

Emancipation also affected their spiritual life. As slaves, their religious life was controlled by their master. A part of their new found freedom was understood by many to include freedom from their master's church. Now they were on their own. But they could not read or write, and they had no trained pastors or teachers to guide them. They were truly like straying sheep without a shepherd.

The purpose of this paper is to tell the story of God's love in bringing many of these former slaves to faith in Christ Jesus. How, through the efforts of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, mission work was begun among the black population of the South. Special emphasis is given to the labors of Missionary Nils Jules Bakke, under whose care and guidance Black Lutheranism began its slow but steady growth.

A word of gratitude is due to Mr. Guy R. Purdue, who spent many hours translating the German Synodical Conference minutes referred to in this manuscript, and to my wife, Patricia, for typing it.

C.S.H.

- TABLE OF CONTENTS -

	Page
PREFACE	iii
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	vi
INTRODUCTION	1
I. THE BEGINNINGS	4
II. THE FIRST MISSIONARY	7
III. THE REAL PIONEER	14
IV. NEW FRONTIERS	22
North Carolina	22
Alabama	29
V. CONCLUSION	37
END NOTES	40
BIBLIOGRAPHY	44

- LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS -

Figure	Page
1. Rev. J.F. Doescher	8
2. "Sailors' Home"	12
3. Rev. N.J. Bakke in 1918	14
4. Mount Zion Church and School	18
5. Scenes from the Old South	20
6. Immanuel College, Greensboro, N.C.	28
7. Rosa J. Young	32
8. James Spencer	39

NILS JULES BAKKE
and the
COLORED MISSIONS of the SOUTH

- INTRODUCTION -

The responsibility of the religious life of the slave was upon the master, and all masters monitored the religious aspects of their slaves in order that they might know and determine the religious teachings to which they were exposed. This led to a form of integrated worship in the master-slave society of the South. It became common practice to mark a certain section of pews where the Black members were supposed to sit. In some instances, separate churches were built for slaves where white pastors, or approved colored preachers, were in charge. In many white churches of the South, there were long galleries set apart for the use of the slaves; in others, there were pews screened off for them.

Most Lutheran slave-holders lived in the states of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Tennessee.

At its 12th convention in 1815, the North Carolina Synod of the Lutheran Church adopted the following resolution:

Resolved, that it is our duty to preach the Gospel to Negroes, and after proper instruction, to admit them to all the means of grace of the church, and for this purpose to make room for them in our churches.³

It was further declared that:

Masters are, in love, to grant liberty to their slaves for this purpose, and herewith it is placed on record that it is the duty of masters to have them instructed in Christianity.⁴

For several years thereafter, the number of slave accessions into the church increased.

After the Civil War, however, there was a mass exodus of Negroes out of the churches of their former masters. The Black Lutherans were no exception to this rule. The Black confirmed constituency had declined an unbelievable 85 per cent from 1862 to 1868, or from slavery to freedom.⁵ Several reasons have been given for the mass exodus of Blacks from the Lutheran churches of their former masters, and the apparent disregard of the Lutheran churches for a soul conservation program to retain, or regain, their fallen Black members. One Southern Lutheran writer said:

One reason was the disorganized condition of the Southern Lutheran Church after the war. Another was the paucity of her ministers and the poverty of her members. A third, he states, was the urgent need for looking after and caring for her white members, who were relatively in the majority and were widely dispersed. These groups of scattered sheep demanded her pastoral care, and

they were wanting the men and the means to raise up suddenly a colored ministry for the colored people.⁶

Another writer said:

The poverty of the white people made it scarcely possible at this time to support churches for themselves, and all missionary work was relatively suspended; and this was at the very time when the Negroes temptation was greatest to break away from all religious restraints and indulge in sinful excesses.⁷

Although several of the Southern Synods attempted to serve its Black constituency, the majority of the Black people, in the words of Dr. Christopher Drewes, "fell prey to noisy revivalists."⁸

I

THE BEGINNINGS

Such was the situation when on July 10, 1872, representatives of the following synods assembled at St. John's Ev. Lutheran Church in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to discuss the organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America: the Synod of Ohio and Other States; the Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States; the Synod of Illinois; and the Synod of Minnesota. The opening sermon was delivered by the Rev. Prof. C.F.W. Walther, president of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

Among the objectives of the Synodical Conference there was listed, as last, but not of least importance, the purpose "to conduct conjointly a mission among the heathen, particularly a mission among the colored people of this country."¹⁰ But it wasn't until the sixth convention of the Synodical Conference, held in 1877 (July 18-24), at Emmanuel Church in Fort Wayne, Indiana that this proposal first received official consideration. The Rev. H.A. Pruess, President of the Norwegian Lutheran Synod, directed the attention of the convention members to the proposal and the question of, "whether it wasn't time for the Synodical Conference to earnestly consider mission work among the heathen and to establish a mission among the negroes and Indians of this country."¹¹

It wasn't necessary to have a lengthy discussion about this matter, since all the delegates were very enthusiastic to participate in the blessed mission work among the heathen. The main questions of the conference now were these: How should they begin their work? Among which people should they begin first? These questions were referred to a special committee, which reported favorably on the issues.

The Rev. Nils J. Bakke, for many years missionary and finally field secretary of the mission, in his Illustrated Historical Sketch of our Colored Mission, writes regarding the matter:

Under the invocation of God and with great enthusiasm the Conference unanimously resolved to begin and carry on a mission among the neglected and forsaken negroes of the land.¹²

Rev. J.F. Buenger, pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church, St. Louis, especially urged this mission work, and together with G.F.H. Meiser and J.G. Thieme, was chosen to constitute a committee "to work out and submit plans for beginning the mission."¹³

The report of this committee was so favorable, and its directions were so well planned and practical, that the convention at once elected a Missionary Board, into whose hands the management of the new mission was placed. The first board members were: Rev. J.F. Buenger; Rev. C.F.W. Sapper, pastor of St. Trinity Church in South

St. Louis; and Mr. John Umbach, a member of Pastor Buenger's congregation. The three members served as chairman, secretary, and treasurer, respectively.¹⁴

The Rev. C.F. Drewes, later Director of Negro Missions, writes, "As soon as the first board had been chosen, it took steps to inaugurate the good work."¹⁵ They made one significant blunder in their first order of business. Their selection for the official name and title of the board, the name which had to be placed on all legal documents, was much too long. Its official and legal title was, "The Missionary Board of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, for Mission Work Among the Heathen and the Negro."¹⁶ Not surprisingly, this was later shortened to read, "The Missionary Board."

II

THE FIRST MISSIONARY

A month prior to the Fort Wayne gathering of the Synodical Conference (July 18-24, 1877), Prof. Walther had praised the mission zeal of a circuit preacher in the Dakota Territory by the name of John F. Doescher. Although his health was not good, he was highly recommended by Walther, and became the choice of the Missionary Board. John Frederick Doescher was installed as missionary to the Negroes on October 16, 1877, at Altenburg, Perry County, Missouri, by Rev. Buenger. He began his work immediately.¹⁷ Director Drewes writes: "At Wittenberg Landing [Mo.] our missionary boarded a Mississippi steamboat for Memphis [Tenn]."¹⁸

Having preached to the colored people six times in four different areas of the city of Memphis, Doescher then left for Little Rock, Arkansas, where he arrived on November 7, 1877. Many parents here asked whether he would also teach the children. Since the Missionary Board had advised him to remain in Little Rock for the time being, he opened a Sunday School on December 2nd, with two children present. The enrollment had climbed to over forty by the end of the month.¹⁹

In early January, 1878, Missionary Doescher began his tour of observation, while Pastor Obermeyer, pastor

of the white Lutheran church, continued the work among the Negro people of Little Rock. Doescher returned to Memphis and then traveled through Mississippi to New Orleans, where he stopped to do some prospecting. From New Orleans he went on through Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia and Tennessee, preaching in many large cities and on many large plantations.



Rev. J. F. Doescher,

fig. 1

Alabama; Chattahoochee, Quincy and Tallahassee, Florida. During the month of June, he preached in Atlanta, Georgia; and in Chattanooga and Nashville, Tennessee.

He arrived in New Orleans again on March 8, 1878, and was welcomed by members of the Lutheran Mission Society of that city, which had been organized to assist him in his work. On April 7th, he began a Sunday School in a structure called the "Sailors' Home." In mid-April he left again, going through Mosspoint, Mississippi; Mobile, Alabama; Pensacola and Milton, Florida; Montgomery,

On July 4th, Missionary Doescher was in Altenburg, Missouri again, and then traveled by way of St. Louis to Fort Wayne, Indiana to see his family and to report to the Synodical Conference, which was meeting there. His report created great interest, but before the convention was over, Doescher became seriously ill. After his recovery, he needed a long rest. Missionary Doescher's report, with recommendations, signaled the end of the beginning of the Synodical Conference's deepening involvement in mission outreach to Negroes in this country and in Africa.²⁰

Although this was the age of the pioneer, the explorer and the adventurer, it was a difficult age for any person of the white race, with a Northern or Midwestern accent, and above all, unfamiliar with Southern customs and traditions, to try to work among the Negroes of the South. Since the South could not beat the North, the decision was to beat the "niggers," and they were not about to let some Northerner stand in their way.²¹

The South was a tense powder keg of racial bitterness and strife, and Missionary Doescher, in his first tour of the South, may have found that the race problem was too difficult in the rural areas and on the plantations for a white man to work among the Black population effectively. It was commonly held in those days that white pastors could work with Blacks in the city more

easily than in the countryside. This, no doubt, was the chief reason for recommending the cities of New Orleans, Mobile and Little Rock.

History proved Doescher's recommendation to have been a wise one. A white pastor, substituting for the Rev. George Schmidt, was to learn of these dangers when in Kingslanding, Alabama one night, he was given some good Southern advice by members of the Ku Klux Klan. The Rev. Antonio Gianvittorio, in the small town of Oak Hill, Alabama, after sustaining a severe beating, was glad to get out alive. Rev. Bakke also had to be spirited out of a small town in Mississippi to avoid a greeting party of Ku Klux Klanners waiting for him at the railroad station.²²

The missionary might sing, "If you cannot cross the ocean, And some heathen land explore, You can find a heathen nearer, You can help him at your door."²³ After a few months in the rural South, he probably would conclude that it was much safer to cross the ocean, for Southerners in those days took their segregation straight and were determined that nobody or nothing would be permitted to pollute it, dilute it, or in any way confuse it.

The oldest Black Lutheran congregation in continuous existence in the United States is Mount Zion congregation, in New Orleans. It is the congregation begun by Missionary Doescher on April 7, 1878 and was established

in the dreaded structure called "Sailors' Home."

When Doescher returned to New Orleans in December of 1878, he found the Sunday School flourishing under the leadership of two young ladies from Zion congregation, Miss E. Wendt and Miss E. Smul. They must have been courageous young women to work in that dilapidated structure. Rev. Sapper gave this report following his visit to the "Sailors' Home":

The whole structure is a dark, spooky-looking ruin. The doors and windows are demolished: even some of the door and window frames have been torn out, and along with them went parts of the wall. Here and there the walls have fallen into the rooms, crashing through the floor and ceiling of the rooms below. The whole is a labyrinth of half-demolished rooms, halls, and stairways, filled with filth and refuse, which afford hiding places for all kinds of vermin, homeless cats and dogs, and the lowest riffraff, who wish to commit sin and shame, for the latter in particular, for the whole neighborhood is fearfully degraded.

In one of the wings of this horrible building our mission has its home. Not without a secret shudder did I enter, climbing up the staircase, which has been slightly repaired with rough boards (the original staircase has disappeared long ago), and going up to the second story, where a large hall, which is in a somewhat better state of preservation and is divided into two parts by means of a partition, has been put in order for our mission; but even here one may use an umbrella to good advantage when it is raining.²⁴

When asked why he selected so degraded a section of the city, Doescher replied: "I feel convinced that this neighborhood will furnish the poor and the maimed and the halt and the blind for God's feast."²⁵ The

missionary called his place of worship, Mount Zion Evangelical Lutheran Mission Hall.

On January 6, 1879, Missionary Doescher opened a Christian Day School in "Sailors' Home" with twenty-six pupils. By the end of the month, the enrollment had increased to one hundred and twenty. On April 20th, seven adults were confirmed. Within one year of Doescher's return, Mount Zion congregation could boast of a thriving day school with an enrollment of 120 pupils, a Sunday School of comparable size, and 14 adults confirmed.²⁶

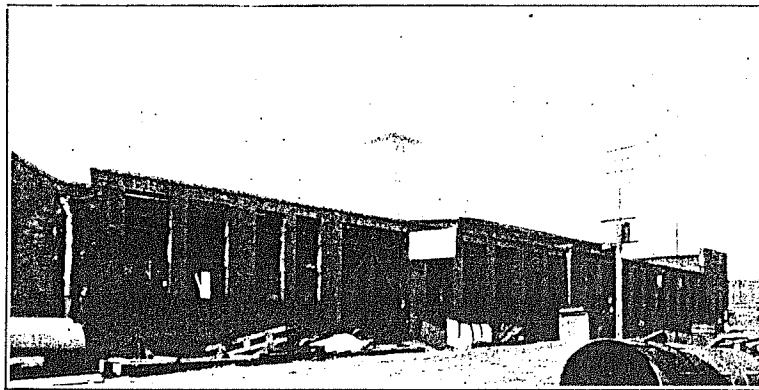


fig. 2 "SAILORS' HOME."

Missionary Doescher had also begun work at another location called "The Greens." He was able to obtain three hundred dollars from a surplus fund, which had been given for the sick and needy during a yellow fever epidemic. With this money, he built a structure of rough lumber, measuring approximately twenty feet by thirty feet, and dedicated it on March 9, 1879. This mission became known as St. Paul's Lutheran Church, but its enemies called it

"The Chicken Coop."

Its progress was slow in the beginning, so it was resolved to start a school. Teacher Charles Berg was transferred from Little Rock to New Orleans, and opened a school on January 26, 1881, with five pupils. In April he had an enrollment of ninety pupils. This man was dedicated to his Lord and Savior, and the work prospered.²⁷

When, on March 16, 1879, St. John's Lutheran Church, New Orleans, a white congregation, extended a Call to Rev. Doescher to become their pastor, he accepted with the understanding that he would be permitted to continue his mission work until another missionary could be found to replace him. The Missionary Board began a search immediately, which led them to a twenty-eight year old recent graduate of Concordia Seminary at St. Louis. He was Candidate Nils Jules Bakke, who accepted the Call and was to spend the rest of his life in the service of the Lord in Negro missions.²⁸

III
THE REAL PIONEER

Nils Bakke was ordained on November 7, 1880, by Rev. J.F. Buenger in Immanuel Church, St. Louis. The



Rev. N. J. Bakke in 1918.

fig. 3

following Tuesday, he and Miss Concordia Guenther were joined in holy wedlock. The very next Sunday, they were in New Orleans, and Rev. Doescher installed the new missionary as his successor.²⁹

Upon his arrival at the mission, Bakke exclaimed, "I found only a few old women, whose house rent the Mission Board was paying, as members of Mount Zion Mission quartered in the Old Sailors' Home."³⁰ A second beginning had to be made.

Shortly after Missionary Bakke took up his duties in New Orleans, a predestination controversy flared up in the Synodical Conference. Because of this controversy, the Rev. Doescher joined the Ohio Synod, and was of no further service to the Synodical Conference and its work.³¹

Still more problems developed. When Doescher left, many of the members who had joined under his leadership left the church. The Mission Commission received a long letter from Miss Louise Watson, a Negro lady, who

was a teacher at Mount Zion. She and others stated that Missionary Bakke was not acceptable to them, and according to the doctrine of the Lutheran Church, they had the right to call their own pastor, and they wanted to be given Pastor Doescher. The answer given them by the commission was that they by all means had the right to choose their own pastor, but they also had the responsibility to take care of him themselves. The commission could not prevent them if they did this. They were reminded, however, that Missionary Bakke was the missionary assigned them by the commission and also that the mission in Sailors' Home had been established by them.

Miss Watson was thereupon released and advised of how wrongly she had acted. She then confessed that she, as well as others, had been misled by someone, and an investigation proved this to be true. The whole movement had originated from secret opposition to the mission. The majority of the Negroes showed that they liked Missionary Bakke, and gladly listened to him. Miss Watson repented of her wrongful conduct and was again installed as teacher.³²

Rev. Bakke immediately made it known that the Sailors' Home was a very unacceptable building for the mission. The purchase of a building site, and the construction of a small church was suggested to the Mission Commission of the Synodical Conference, but they felt

that the success of the mission in New Orleans was still much too doubtful. Bakke labored for two years in the "Sailors' Home" before a more suitable place for worship was found. In December, 1882, Mount Zion Church and School moved into a building recently purchased from the Presbyterians. From this time onward, the mission at Mount Zion prospered.

During Rev. Bakke's first two years however, his church lost more members than it gained. Only two adult confirmands were gained during this time. These two women were Margaret Mosely and Mary C. Wright. The following are excerpts from an article in The Colored Lutherans, 1924, upon the death of Mrs. Mary C. Wright. Although extensive, they are included to illustrate the taxing conditions under which Missionary Bakke had to labor:

Mother Wright, member of Mt. Zion, in New Orleans departed this life on November 22, at the age of 103 years. Being the oldest member of our mission in years as well as church connection . . . Mary Wright, nee Stuart, was a native of the Isle of St. Thomas, being born there on April 24, 1820. Slavery, therefore, was not her lot or experience. (Mother Wright was batized and received into membership in the Lutheran Church in Greencastle, Pennsylvania.) When Mt. Zion was founded in 1879, the congregation consisted of one man and a few poor women, some of them sickly. Rev. Bakke took charge the following year, but when the former missionary (Doescher) withdrew entirely from our church, the few members went with him.

Rev. Bakke worked against great obstacles at that time and could succeed in gaining but two members during the following two years; one of these was

Mrs. Mary Wright . . . that faithful member of this congregation, a true, devoted "Mother" to it, a sincere Christian in every respect.

Among her gifts to the church are the beautiful altar in Mt. Zion Church, with its superb painting of the Ascension of Christ, likewise the large bell, also a bell for Concordia Chapel in Carrollton, and last year, a gift of \$200.00 for repairs on the church building and the replacement of a copper cross on the high tower of Mt. Zion's spacious church edifice.

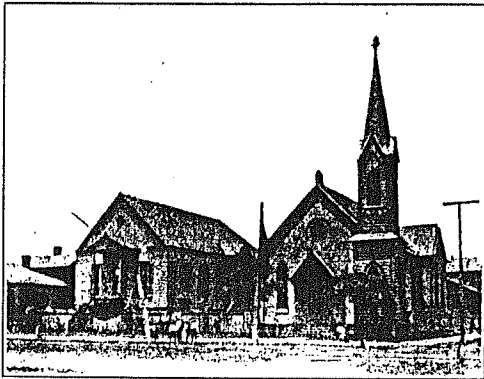
Mother Wright was active to the very end, one of the most regular and devoted attendants at service; though she lived at a distance, she would make her way to church on foot, always refused to ride the cars in order to save whatever she could to give bountifully to the Lord, even as she denied herself many comforts and the necessities which she truly had need of.³³

Rev. Bakke's experience in his ministry at St. Paul's, "The Chicken Coop," was equally trying. After completing the instruction of the first junior confirmation class in the school, the children, at first, refused to join. Later, three of them changed their minds.³⁴ Rev. E.H. Wildgrube, who was later pastor of St. Paul's, wrote in a letter to Director Christopher Drewes:

It may be of interest to you to hear of the opposition which our first missionaries and the newly confirmed had to face. In those days, the Baptists and Methodists had a strong hold on the colored people here, and they did all in their power to keep the Lutherans from making headway. The Baptist and the Methodist preachers formed an alliance, had posters printed and posted which informed the colored people that the Lutheran church was the "devil's church" and the Lutheran school the "devil's synagog." When the first class was ready for confirmation, the news was brought to the relatives of the children, who then tried to scare the children, telling them that they would become the "devil's children" by confirmation. And when the newly con-

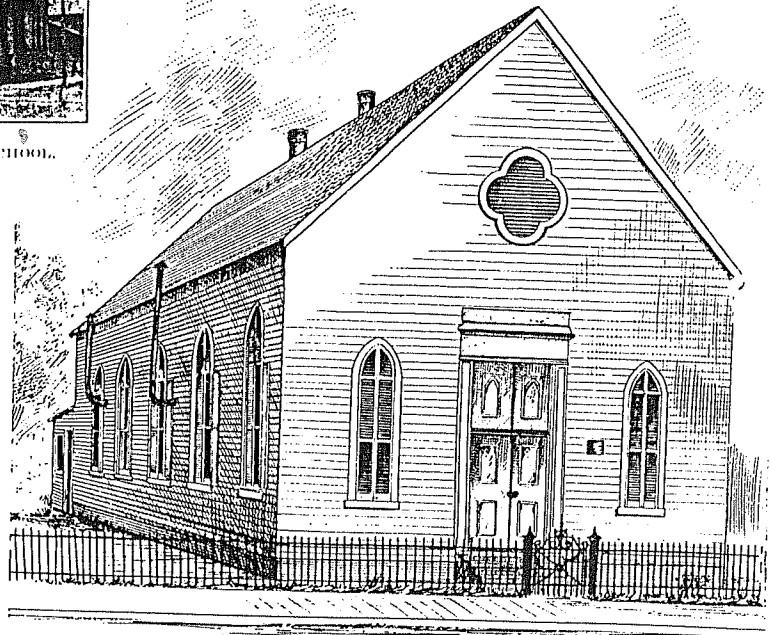
firmed wanted to go to the Lord's Supper, they were told that they would surely be lost. The poor children did not know what to believe. However, three of the children were moved by the Spirit of God to come through and to confess their Savior before men by confirmation.³⁵

These three children were Josephine Williams, who later broke her confirmation vow, and had to be excommunicated; Frank Royal (Francois), who died in fellowship with the Lutheran Church two years later; and Louis Thomas, who, by the grace of God, remained a member in good standing, and even succeeded in winning his parents and other relatives for Christ and His true visible church on earth.³⁶



PRESENT MOUNT ZION CHURCH AND SCHOOL.

fig. 4



OLD MOUNT ZION CHURCH.

On May 1, 1883, the Mission Board bought a lot on Annette St., and during the summer vacation the "Chicken Coop" was moved from the rented place to this new place and repaired. There were so many children that wanted to attend the school that it became necessary to provide larger quarters; but it took several years before funds were available for this purpose. The new chapel was dedicated September 23, 1888, and the two-story new school was dedicated March 8, 1891. Later the school moved into Luther College, which adjoined St. Paul's Station.

Five months after the dedication of the school Rev. Bakke followed the instructions of the Board, and left for the new field in North Carolina. He left New Orleans on August 10, 1891, going via St. Louis to Concord, N.C.. Even though Pastor Doescher had influenced a number of Negro members to follow him into the Ohio Synod, and even though other denominations were opposed to the establishment of Lutheran missions among the Negroes, there were substantial membership additions at both Mt. Zion and St. Paul's. When Bakke left, Mt. Zion had about two hundred forty baptized members, and St. Paul's had about one hundred thirty-six.³⁷

The members of these Lutheran missions were, to a large extent, very, very poor. Among them were wash-women, cooks, maids, and common laborers. A few of them

were domestics in some of the most aristocratic families in New Orleans. The first members of the missions were illiterates, but through the work of the Lutheran school, more and more of them became capable of reading and writ-

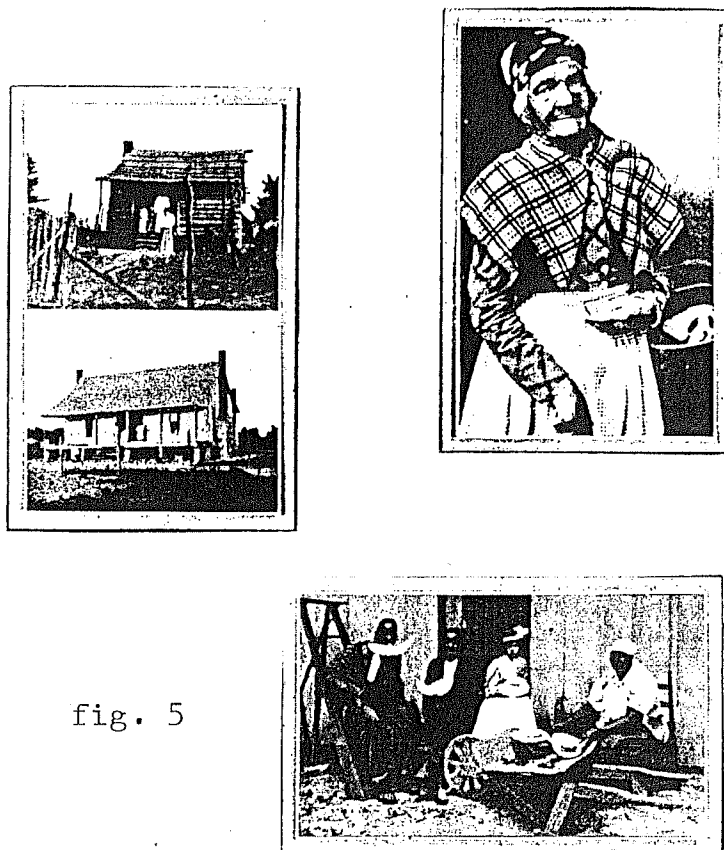


fig. 5

ing. Some became merchants, and although there were no professional men or women among them, a Mrs. Wilson became a highly respected midwife. Their home furnishings and dwellings were often in a state of utter disrepair, and love of food was general among them.

Because of their poverty, entertainment was greatly lacking. The church, however, offered them good entertainment in the annual church picnic, occasional

concerts, special children's services where recitations were featured, and the annual Christmas tree celebration. On that occasion clothing and other articles were often distributed among the members. These gifts had come from Northern white Lutherans.³⁸

Candidate F.J. Lankenau, from the Seminary in Springfield, Illinios, accepted the Call as Bakke's successor in New Orleans, and preached his introductory sermon on August 30, 1891. He remained there for seventeen years, working with zeal, energy and success.³⁹

IV
NEW FRONTIERS

Rev. Bakke now went on to a new field in his Black Lutheran ministry. The Lord had abundantly blessed this dedicated worker with the ability to organize, challenge, equip and to inspire those who worked with him. Under his inspiration and guidance, the fields of North Carolina and Alabama were to have phenomenal periods of growth.

North Carolina

North Carolina was the first state in which Black Lutheran pastors established and nurtured Black congregations. It should also be remembered that the North Carolina field was the first field the Synodical Conference entered by invitation from the people whom they were to serve. This invitation came from Lutheran congregations that had been established by the efforts of these Black pastors. The invitation, or request for help, was forwarded to the Missouri Synod in 1891. However, Grace Congregation, Concord, N.C. was established in 1883; St. Paul's Congregation, Charlotte, was established in 1889; and there was a preaching station in Lexington, N.C., all prior to Synodical Conference involvement.⁴⁰

On May 8, 1889, four of these pastors, together with delegates from their Lutheran churches, formed the

synod known as the Alpha Synod. The new synod counted about one hundred eighty baptized members. The names of the four pastors were Rev. David J. Koontz, who preached in Davidson County and in Concord; Rev. Samuel Holt, who had a small congregation at Springdale, Alamance County; Rev. Nathan Clapp, who was a colleague of Rev. Holt, holding services twice a month in a public schoolhouse two miles east of Elon College; and Rev. William Philo Phifer, who was holding services in a lodge hall in Charlotte, North Carolina.⁴¹

Of these, two were able to read and write, while the other two could barely read. Their theological training was very meager. Since Rev. Koontz was the ablest of the four, he was chosen as president of the Alpha Synod. When President Koontz died of poisoning in 1891, the remaining three ministers applied for help to Dr. H. C. Schwan, President of the Missouri Synod. This request was forwarded to the Missionary Board of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference. A committee was sent to North Carolina to investigate this request; it was composed of the following persons: the Rev. Nils J. Bakke and the Rev. A. Burgdorf of New Orleans; and the Rev. D.H. Schoof of the mission station in Maherin, Virginia.⁴²

Late one summer's night in 1891, the committee had a conference with these four Black pastors in a cabin.

which belonged to an acquaintance of Rev. Holt, in Burlington, North Carolina. The conference lasted until the early hours of the morning:

Easy catechetical questions were put to the three preachers, but only a few were correctly answered. The theological examination was not satisfactory to the committee; but it saw in the field a door which the Lord had opened, hoped that in the course of time the preachers might be utilized, and advised the Board to take charge of the field, provided a man could be found who would instruct the preachers and superintend the mission.⁴³

Originally, the board for missions had planned to use two graduates for the work in North Carolina, but there were no graduates assigned to the Synodical Conference in 1891. The Missionary Board then sent Rev. Bakke to Concord with his family to organize, supervise and expand the work on the North Carolina field. He arrived in Concord on September 18, 1891. The Lutheran Pioneer of 1891 had this item under an article entitled, "The Outlook from the Editor's Window:"

On the seventeenth Sunday after Trinity, the Reverend Bakke was installed by Reverend Phifer as missionary among the colored people at Concord, North Carolina. The church was beautifully decorated for the occasion, and about 20 adults attended the service. On the Sunday following, Reverend Bakke delivered his first sermon before a large audience, some of whom had come some distance from the country.⁴⁴

It is somewhat amusing to note that at that installation service, Rev. Phifer spoke on the rather inappropriate text, Acts 20:29 - "I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare

the flock." However, he did not apply this text to the new Lutheran minister, who now took charge of the large and arduous missionary work in North Carolina.⁴⁵

This was a very fertile field at that time. It quickly surpassed the Louisiana field in terms of organizing congregations, total souls, communicant and baptized, and Black Lutheran workers in the field. The Rev. Bakke was the guiding spirit behind this increased missionary activity. Pastor Phifer later wrote of him to the Mission Board:

Honorable Board, you have sent a missionary among us in the person of Reverend N.J. Bakke, and he is the right man in the right place, if we are able to judge. I am told of his Christ-like action, and he is much loved by the people he came to serve. Success will be ours.⁴⁶

Under the leadership of Rev. Bakke, four congregations were started in 1893: Zion, Gold Hill; Grace, Greensboro; Concordia, Rockwell; and Mount Calvary, at Mt. Pleasant. Another congregation was started in 1895; another in 1896, and so it went, so that by the year 1900, the North Carolina field could boast of twelve mission stations and an additional one in Virginia. The support among the general population in North Carolina was heartwarming. The following is also from The Lutheran Pioneer, 1892:

In North Carolina, our mission work among the colored people is still prospering. In Concord, a congregation has been organized which now numbers twenty communicant members. The day school

is attended by fifty-three; the Sunday school by eighty-four children. Not only in Concord, but also in Reimurstown, and at two other stations, services are regularly held by our missionary, the Reverend N.J. Bakke. In Reverend Phifer's congregation, Charlotte, North Carolina, a church is being built. THE SITE FOR THE CHURCH HAVING BEEN DONATED BY TWO ENGLISH LUTHERAN CONGREGATIONS.⁴⁷

From the earliest days, it was the purpose of the Missionary Board and of the missionaries to educate colored young men for missionary work. Although candidates for the ministerial office were scarce, as were the means to sponsor them, several young men from the New Orleans, North Carolina and Virginia mission fields were sent to Springfield, Illinois to study for the ministry. However, the missionaries of North Carolina and Virginia were fully convinced that the colored workers should be educated in the South, on the mission field. At the first conference of the missionaries, held in Concord, North Carolina, February 2-5, 1900, it was resolved to urgently petition the Mission Board to establish an educational institution in North Carolina and to present this petition to the next convention of the Synodical Conference.⁴⁸

This matter was submitted to the convention at Cincinnati in 1898, but no action was taken. Two years later, at the meeting of the Conference in Bay City, Michigan, it was resolved to furnish the pastors and congregations of the Conference with information relative

to such an institution through articles in the Missions-taube. In Milwaukee, 1902, the Synodical Conference resolved to establish one or two preparatory schools for the education of colored ministers and teachers.⁴⁹

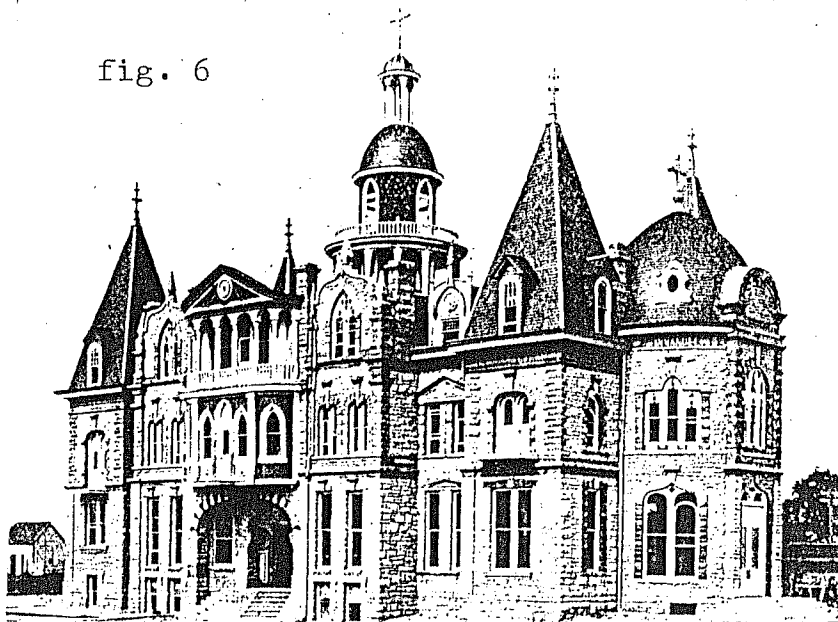
At the beginning of the year 1903, the Mission Board requested Rev. Bakke to establish the first colored Lutheran college in North Carolina. A classroom in the schoolhouse of Grace Church at Concord was transformed into a dormitory, recitation and study. An old dilapidated house in the rear of the church was made into a kitchen and dining room. On March 2nd classes began with eleven boys, and the full school year opened on September 14, 1903. Rev. J.Ph. Schmidt, pastor of the church, and Teacher H.L. Persson were in charge of training the boys. Then in 1904, the Mission Board called a graduate from St. Louis, F. Wahlers, to Immanuel College.

Outside the city limits of Greensboro, a real estate agent donated four acres of land to the college and the Board bought ten more acres from him. Steps were taken to erect a suitable building for the college, for which the Synodical Conference had appropriated money (\$10-15,000) at its convention in Winona, Minnesota, 1904. In the expectation that the new building would be completed during the next school year, the college was reopened in Greensboro in September, 1905. But for two years the college occupied two houses be-

longing to a colored man near the college land. Finally the new building was dedicated to the service of God on June 2. 1907.

At the convention in Chicago, 1906, the Synodical Conference resolved to give those students who desired to prepare themselves for the ministry a complete practical theological course at Immanuel College. And, along with Rev. Schmidt, Pastor Bakke was called to the chair of Professor of Theology, a position he held until 1911.⁵⁰

fig. 6



IMMANUEL COLLEGE, GREENSBORO, N. C.

In January, 1911, the Mission Board chose Bakke for the newly created office of Field Secretary. It appears his health had been adversely affected during his years in the mission fields of the South. It was thought that his condition would improve in this new position. Then on November 8, 1912, he met with an injury in a run-

away and was disabled for seven months.⁵¹ Following his recovery, Rev. Bakke embarked on his new duties as Field Secretary, overseeing all the mission fields of the Synodical Conference. As for the North Carolina field, there were not many new stations added after the first decade of the twentieth century. By 1915, the focus was shifting to the Alabama field.

Alabama

The Alabama field of mission endeavor was the last to be started by the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America. There is a deep Lutheran Heritage among the Black population of Wilcox County. On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Christ Lutheran Church, Rosebud, Alabama, Miss Rosa Jinsey Young recorded the history of Black Lutheranism in Alabama in a program booklet, providing an invaluable record of its early progress, especially in education of the Blacks:

Forty-four years ago there was not a Black Lutheran Church in all of Alabama. Not a single Black person could step forth and proclaim, 'I am a Lutheran.' The operation of Christian day schools for Black children was not heard of by anyone. Even the name Lutheran was unknown among the common people.

The Lutheran Church among the Black people in Alabama had its beginning in a private school. This private school had its beginning on Sunday, July 8, 1912, when Rosa J. Young called a school meeting in the Methodist Church, Rosebud, Alabama, to discuss and make plans to organize a grade school for Black children.⁵²

Eighteen men were present, besides the women and

children. These men pledged to give free labor toward the erection of the school building and to give an annual sum to help support the teachers.

Rosa J. Young opened the Rosebud School on the first Monday in October, 1912, with seven children. The construction of the new building was not completed and a small shed was used where the cattle went for shelter. The school was named The Rosebud Literary and Industrial School.

During the first three terms, the school increased rapidly. The enrollment reached 215.

Beginning with the fourth term, the school met with financial straits. Rosa Young struggled hard to sustain the school, and in her great struggle God directed her to the Lutheran Church through Dr. Booker T. Washington.⁵³

After learning of the Lutheran Church, Rosa Young wrote the following letter to the chairman of the Mission Board, Rev. Christopher Drewes, dated October 27, 1915:

DEAR FRIEND:-

I am writing you concerning a school I have organized. I began teaching here in 1912 with seven pupils in an old hall, where the cattle went for shelter. Since then I have bought (with money collected in the community) five acres of land and erected a four-room school-house thereon beside our chapel, which we are working on now; bought 45 seats, 5 heaters, 1 school bell, 1 sewing machine, 1 piano, a nice collection of useful books, and 150 New Testaments for our Bible-training Department.

I am writing to see if your Conference will take our school under its auspices. If you will take our school under your auspices, we will give you the land, the school-building, and all its contents to start with. If you cannot take our school, I beg the privilege to appeal to you to give us a donation to help us finish our new chapel. No matter how little, any amount will be cheerfully and thankfully received.

This school is located near the center of Wilcox

County, twelve miles from the county-seat, fifty-four miles from Selma, Ala., two miles from the L. and N. Railroad, amid 1,500 colored people. The region is very friendly; both white and colored are interested in this school. I hope you will see your way clear to aid us.

Yours humbly,

Rosa J. Young

The letter sounded different from other letters of the kind that came to the desk of Rev. Drewes from time to time. He writes that he was reminded of Paul's vision at Troas (Acts 16:9) of the man from Macedonia calling to him for help.⁵⁵ In reply to Miss Young's letter, the Mission Board sent Nils Bakke to investigate the needs in Alabama. Missionary Bakke arrived in Alabama on Friday, December 17, 1915. He held a school board meeting on Saturday, the 18th. In this meeting it was agreed to offer the school to the Lutheran Church. On Sunday Rev. Bakke preached his first sermon in Alabama. Monday he visited the school, addressed the pupils and took some pictures of them and of the building and grounds. The next day, he left for St. Louis.

Based on Rev. Bakke's report to the Mission Board, which was meeting in special session to consider the question of entering the new field in Alabama, it was decided to accept the Rosebud School and to retain Miss Young as a teacher.⁵⁶

The Board also instructed Rev. Bakke to return to Alabama and remain until the work was well organized.



Rosa J. Young.

fig. 7

was sent to assist Rev. Bakke in his labors, arriving in Rosebud on February 6, 1916. He taught school and did some of the preaching. Rev. Bakke remained in Rosebud for three and a half months, working endlessly to spread the Gospel of Christ.

Miss Young's record continues:

In the face of combined forces, adverse circumstances and threats and false reports, he continued to preach Christ crucified, the Son of God and the Savior of the world. He preached the pure Gospel. The Lord worked through Missionary N.J. Bakke. On Palm Sunday, April 16, 1916, this missionary, who had sown in tears came forward rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him. On this day, 70 were confirmed and 12 were baptized. On the Easter Sunday following, 49 were baptized. Reverend Bakke then organized the first Lutheran Church in Alabama for Blacks and called it Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church.

On July 2, 1916, 14 were baptized and 43 were confirmed. The mother church now consisted of 75 baptized and 113 confirmed members, making

So, on January 13, 1916, Missionary Bakke arrived his second time in Alabama. He changed the school from a secular school to a wholly Christian Day School and formed classes for baptism and for confirmation. Rev. William Harrison Lane, assistant missionary in St. Louis,

a total of 188 souls. There were 22 voters. Mr. Marmaduke N. Carter came to the Alabama Field as professor in October, 1916, and took charge of the school. Professor Carter studied theology privately and was ordained in May 1917. He was then installed as the first pastor of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church, Rosebud, Alabama.⁵⁷

Before the Synodical Conference entered the Alabama field these people in the Black Belt were lost in spiritual darkness. Rev. Bakke wrote to Director Drewes: "The ignorance here in all matters is simply beyond measure."⁵⁸ Most of the so-called preachers were blind leaders of the blind. Mr. J. Lee Bonner, of Rosebud, said: "Those who belong to the church are not better than those who are without; the ignorant preachers are to blame."⁵⁹ And Rosa Young wrote: "The people are poor, very, very ignorant, rough and untrained. They are superstitious and immoral. The present deplorable condition of my race is due largely to their former training and immoral leaders."⁶⁰

The following are excerpts from a statement that was made to Director Drewes by a member of the Lutheran Church in Kingslanding, Alabama, and applied to most of the preachers in the Black Belt:

The preachers only preached to get a little salary. This particular preacher charged \$10 a sermon. First of all the collection was taken. If it was small, he gave a short sermon. That was good fortune. They did not preach the truth to the people. We were in darkness and would have remained in darkness till death. None of them ever told us: "Christ is your Savior, who

died for your sins. Believe in Him, then you are saved." On the contrary, they said: "Go into the swamp or into the cemetery or into the woods at night and pray to get religion." The children grew up like weeds in the field. The sick and the aged were not visited. I was discouraged and wouldn't want to have anything to do with them any more. I stayed at home on Sundays, prayed, and read the Bible to my family We thank God and the Lutheran Mission for having brought us out of this darkness. The Mission has done great things here, wonderfully great things.⁶¹

The statement of this man agrees with what Booker

T. Washington wrote some years prior to this, saying:

Three-fourths of the Baptist ministers and two-thirds of the Methodists are unfit, either mentally or morally, or both, to preach the Gospel to any one or to attempt to lead any one. With few exceptions, the preaching of the colored ministry is emotional in the highest degree, and the minister considers himself successful in proportion as he is able to set the people in all parts of the congregation to groaning, uttering wild screams, and jumping, finally going into a trance. One of the principal ends sought by most of these ministers is their salary, and to this everything else is made subservient. A large proportion of the church-members are just as ignorant of true Christianity as taught by Christ as any people in Africa or Japan and just as much in need of missionary effort as those in foreign lands.⁶²

It is small wonder that the people welcomed and truly appreciated the efforts of the missionaries sent to work among them. The Christian Day School served as the chief model for mission outreach, and the growth of the work was phenomenal. In 1916, congregations with Christian Day Schools were started in the villages of Rosebud, Oak Hill, Possum Bend, Midway, Tinela, Buena

Vista, Vrendenburg and Tilden. Six of these were located in Wilcox County.⁶³

Rev. Bakke left Alabama in May, 1916. However, the Mission Board could see that the Lord was opening the door of missionary opportunities in Alabama wider and wider, and therefore resolved on August 10, 1916, to call Field Secretary Bakke as superintendent of the new and promising field. He accepted the call and arrived with his family in Oak Hill, Alabama on September 25th. He remained in the Black Belt until October 3, 1920.⁶⁴

During those years, the pace of mission starts varied greatly. In 1917, only one new station was opened, and was located in Joffre, Alabama. In 1919 again only one new station was opened, this one in Wilcox County. Two things in particular can be attributed to this reduced activity in establishing new stations. The migrations to industrial areas and the turmoil resulting from national mobilization for World War I were having noticeable effect on such places as Wilcox County, Alabama. During this time also, Rev. Bakke was not as active in the field. He spent much time in studying and evaluating the progress of this period.⁶⁵

Due to the early rapid growth of the Colored Missions in Alabama, Superintendent Bakke was required to do a great deal of speaking, traveling, buying of building sites and building material, supervision of construction

and so forth, all of which was becoming increasingly difficult for him. He did not have enough strength or time and needed help. So the Mission Board transferred Rev. George A. Schmidt from St. Louis to Alabama, and made him superintendent of mission schools and mission property. Rev. Schmidt graduated from Concordia Theological Seminary in St. Louis in June of 1914, and went on to work in the Colored Missions in St. Louis and Springfield, where he proved to be a very capable worker in the Lord's vineyard. He arrived in the Black Belt on October 1, 1917, and within six months, he supervised the erection of five buildings, besides visiting the schools and serving two congregations. By God's grace, and the tireless efforts of Missionary Schmidt, the field of Alabama continued to bring forth rich harvests.⁶⁶

Toward the end of 1919, the pace of new mission starts began to increase again. In 1920, there were three starts, and in 1922, there were three more. There were no new starts in 1921. In 1923, one new station was begun and in 1924, there were five. In 1931, at the time of the 15th anniversary of the beginning of the work in the Alabama field, there were 34 congregations and preaching places. The statistical summary for 1932 lists 2,684 souls, 1,464 voting[communicant?] members, 348 voting members, 1,558 Sunday School students, and 1,182 day school students.⁶⁷

V

CONCLUSION

In October of 1920, Rev. Schmidt succeeded Rev. Bakke as Superintendent of Colored Missions for the Conference. Due to Rev. Bakke's health and age, the Synodical Conference relieved him of the arduous duties of that position and created for him the more pleasant office of General Publicity Agent. Upon leaving Alabama, Bakke moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Then on May 3, 1921, he became seriously ill and passed to his eternal reward on May 8th, at 9:30 A.M., at the age of 68 years and 8 months. He was buried in Wanderers' Rest Cemetery, Milwaukee. Rev. Bakke had employed his gifts of both body and mind in the Colored Missions of the Synodical Conference for more than forty years. His former parishioners and students called his memory blessed.⁶⁸

The missionaries of the Synodical Conference continued to work among the Black population of the South for many years after the death of Rev. Nils Bakke. After a time conferences were created on the different fields, which gave the work among the Blacks a sense of unity. These conferences were the Alabama Field Conference; the Luther Conference on the Louisiana Field; and the Immanuel Conference on the Eastern Field, which included North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia and the District

of Columbia.⁶⁹

Many lost souls were brought to faith in Christ Jesus as a result of the faithful work of missionaries such as Rev. Bakke. There are many wonderful stories of members of mission stations who held together despite the inadequacy of their place of worship, the ridicule of friends and neighbors, and at times, a forlorn hope of ever obtaining a chapel. They clung to the confession of the Lutheran Church with a tenacity born of faith and a true love for God and His pure Word.

An example of such faith was found in the person of "Uncle" James Spencer. He was probably the oldest Lutheran in the world, having reached the remarkable age of at least 123 years. He was a member of Grace Church in Concord, North Carolina, but he had a harsh master and was not permitted to attend divine services. So he stood near the church windows in the darkness of night, listening to the singing and learning many hymns. He remained a Lutheran to his dying day. Shortly before his death, he said to the pastor of Grace Church, Melvin Holsten: "I am afraid I have forgotten all I once knew. But I know that Jesus is my Savior; and if I believe in Him, I am saved."⁷⁰ He fell asleep in Jesus early on Monday morning, February 9, 1925.

God wants all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth(1Tm.2:4). That is why he chose

such a man as the Rev. Nils Jules Bakke to bring the truth of His Word to the Colored missions of the South.



James Spencer.
Died aged 123 years.

fig. 8

- END NOTES -

1. Drewes, Christopher F., Half Century of Lutheranism Among Our Colored People. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1927), p.5.
2. Board of Education-Wisconsin Synod, Our Synod and Its Work. (Milwaukee: NPH, 1947), p.96.
3. Dickinson, Richard C., Roses and Thorns. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1977), p.20.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., p.21.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., p.22.
9. Mueller, J. Theodore, "The Mission-Work of the Ev. Luth. Synodical Conference of North America among the Negroes in the United States and in Africa" Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, Vol.X, No.4 (January, 1938), p.97.
10. Ibid., p.98.
11. Purdue, Guy R.(tr.), Synodical Conference Minutes-1877.
12. Bakke, Nils J., Illustrated Historical Sketch of our Colored Mission. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1914), p.13.
13. Mueller, loc.cit., p.98.
14. Ibid.
15. Dickinson, loc.cit., p.40.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid., p.41.
18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.
20. Ibid., p.42f.
21. Ibid., p.44.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Drewes, loc.cit., p.23.
25. Ibid.
26. Dickinson, loc.cit., p.46.
27. Ibid., p.47.
28. Ibid.
29. Drewes, loc.cit., p.25.
30. Nau, John F., "The Lutheran Church in Louisiana"
Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, Vol.XXV,
No.1 (April,1952), p.32.
31. Dickinson, loc.cit., p.47.
32. Purdue, Guy R.(tr.), Third Report of the Mission
Commission of the Ev. Luth. Synodical Conference
of North America, encompassing the period from
July 1879 to October 1882.
33. Dickinson, loc.cit., p.48.
34. Ibid.
35. Mueller, loc.cit., p.109.
36. Drewes, loc.cit., p.27.
37. Ibid., p.28.
38. Nau, loc.cit., p.33.
39. Drewes, loc.cit.
40. Dickinson, loc.cit., p.54.

41. Drewes, loc.cit., p.44.
42. Mueller, loc.cit., p.110.
43. Drewes, loc.cit., p.45.
44. Dickinson, loc.cit., p.55.
45. Mueller, loc.cit.
46. Dickinson, loc.cit., p.56.
47. Ibid.
48. Bakke, loc.cit., p.77.
49. Ibid., p.78.
50. Ibid., p.82.
51. Drewes, loc.cit., p.78.
52. Dickinson, loc.cit., p.65.
53. Ibid., p.66.
54. Drewes, loc.cit., p.56.
55. Ibid.
56. Dickinson, loc.cit., p.67.
57. Ibid.
58. Drewes, loc.cit., p.57.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid.
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid., p.58.
63. Dickinson, loc.cit., p.68.
64. Drewes, loc.cit., p.63.
65. Dickinson, loc.cit.
66. Drewes, loc.cit., p.65f.

67. Dickinson, loc.cit.
68. Drewes, loc.cit., p.78.
69. Dickinson, loc.cit., p.184.
70. Drewes, loc.cit., p.48.

- BIBLIOGRAPHY -

- Bakke, Nils J., Illustrated Historical Sketch of our Colored Mission. St. Louis: Concordia, 1914.
- Board of Education - Wisconsin Synod, Our Synod and Its Work. Milwaukee: NPH, 1947.
- Dickinson, Richard C., Roses and Thorns. St. Louis: Concordia, 1977.
- Drewes, Christopher F., Half Century of Lutheranism Among Our Colored People. St. Louis: Concordia, 1927.
- Mueller, J. Theodore, "The Mission-Work of the Ev. Luth. Synodical Conference of North America among the Negroes in the United States and in Africa" Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, Vol.X, No.4 (January, 1938).
- Nau, John F., "The Lutheran Church in Louisiana" Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, Vol.XXV, No.1 (April, 1952).
- Purdue, Guy R.(tr.), Synodical Minutes - 1877.
_____, Third Report of the Mission Commission of the Ev. Luth. Synodical Conference of North America, encompassing the period from July 1879 to October 1882.