

**“TO PROCLAIM LIBERTY TO THE CAPTIVES”:
THE PAN AFRICAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHURCH AND ITS
RELATIONSHIP TO BLACK LIBERATION THEOLOGY**

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By
Weldon Merial McWilliams, IV
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Dr. Nilgun Anadolu-Okur, Major Advisor, Department of African American Studies
Dr. Maxwell Stanford, Jr., Department of African American Studies
Dr. Lewis Gordon, Department of Philosophy
Dr. Wilbert Jenkins, Department of History

ABSTRACT

“To Proclaim Liberty to the Captives”: The Pan African Orthodox Christian Church and its Relationship to Black Liberation Theology.

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While examining the theology of Black Liberation and its contemporary relevance there are several questions that must be explained. Is there still a need for Black Liberation Theology within Christianity? What makes Black Liberation theology different from other Christian theologies? In recent years Christianity has had to dispute the notion that it is the “White Man’s religion” and that Black People cannot benefit from the faith. How is this so if the majority of Black people in the United States identify Christianity as their faith? How have Black people benefited from this religion in the past and present?

My research is two-fold. The first part of my research will focus on the history of Black Liberation Theology, its concepts and the historical and contemporary relevance. Black Liberation Theology, as an intellectual enterprise began in the late 1960’s. Many credit James Cone with bringing a theology of Black Liberation into the forefront of intellectual discussions at educational institutions. Black Liberation theology seeks to answer the question “What does it mean to be Black and Christian in America?” James Cone posed the question and attempted to answer it in his first two books, Black Theology and Black Power, (1969), and A Black Theology of Liberation, (1970). Although Cone is often times seen as one of the pioneers of the Black Theology of Liberation, in actuality this movement has a very long history and its beginnings can be found in the freedom acts of Black people and the Black Religious experience in America from the time of enslavement (David Walker, Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey, Gabriel Prosser to name a

few), through the abolitionist movements (James Forten, Henry Highland Garnett, William Wells Brown, Harriet Tubman, Richard Allen, Absalom Jones), continuing through the early to mid 1900's (Noble Drew Ali of the Moorish Science Temple, Elijah Muhammad of the Nation of Islam and Malcolm X of the Muslim Mosque Incorporated), the Civil Rights Era (Martin Luther King, Vernon Jones, Fred Shuttlesworth, Pastors of Baptist Churches in the American South), the Black Power/Black Arts Movements (Albert Cleage, Jr. of the Shrine of the Black Madonna). It stills functions in contemporary times with the recent resurgence of interest in the subject matter through the media's emphasis on the rhetoric of Rev. Jeremiah Wright and his congregation at Trinity United Church of Christ in the south side of Chicago, whose remarks were seen as controversial and almost jeopardized the candidacy of Senator Barack Obama to the Presidency.

Black Liberation Theology holds the position that one's faith should encourage one to fight injustice and oppression on behalf of those who are oppressed and downtrodden. Christianity must be examined holistically which means that the religion carries a socio-political component as well as a spiritual one. Black Liberation Theologians believe that one cannot be concerned with reaching a "heavenly ever after" if he/she has not worked to heal his/her society from the social ills that exist. Working toward freedom and liberation is Christian work. These two must be seen as one and the same; you can't have one without the other.

The second part of this study aims to examine a church that has made claims to preaching and putting Black Liberation Theology into practice. The Pan African Orthodox Christian Church (PAOCC) is a Christian denomination that seeks to utilize its religious

institution as a tool to implement social change. Followers of this denomination believe the Black Church must utilize its resources and take advantage of its independent position, in order to bring forth freedom and liberation for people of African descent, and they attempt to do this within their place of worship. Dr. Martin Luther King best summarized the mission of the PAOCC best when he stated:

[A]ny religion that professes concern for the souls of men and is not equally concerned about the slums that damn them, the economic conditions that strangle them, and the social conditions that cripple them is a spiritually moribund religion only waiting for the day to be buried. It well has been said: "A religion that ends with the individual ends (Clayborne, 18).

My research aims to indicate that there is still a need for a theology of Black Liberation in the United States. Through careful analysis of Black Liberation Theology and the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church (PAOCC) this research will demonstrate how Black Liberation Theology has been the way that most men and women of African descent have traditionally accepted Christianity on those terms until two important events in African American history occurred: the end of the institution of enslavement; and the end of the Civil Rights Era. My research demonstrates how the PAOCC exemplifies a Black Liberation Theology. Lastly my research will also show that it is possible to be Christian and Afrocentric, which goes against the prevailing dictation of Afrocentric thought. There are Afrocentric scholars who make the claim that one cannot be both Afrocentric and Christian. My research ultimately intends to state that Afrocentricity should not antagonize the faith, but the Western practice of Christianity and its dominant theology as well as its practice.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	
A History of Black Theology of Liberation.....	1
The historical efficiency of the Black Church and its activism.....	9
The effectiveness of a Black Theology of Liberation	10
CHAPTER 2: FROM CIVIL RIGHTS TO BLACK POWER: AFRICAN-AMEIRCAN ACTIVISM AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO BLACK LIBERATION THEOLOGY.....	13
A Theological Shift from European Christian Thought.....	13
A Return to the Tradition of Spiritual Communalism	22
The Pan African Orthodox Christian Church.....	29
CHAPTER 3: HISTORICAL APPRECIATION OF BLACK LIBERATION THEOLOGY.....	31
Coptic Roots of Christianity.....	31
Enslavement and Liberation Theology.....	36
Christianity as accepted by the enslaved African.....	39
CHAPTER 4: A DENOMINATION OF OUR OWN.....	49
The Creation and Institutionalization of the Black Church and Black Denominations.....	49
Rev. Cleage and the creation of a New Denomination	57
CHAPTER 5: BLACK CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM.....	67
An overview.....	67
Black Christian Nationalism and the Building Blocks of Black Liberation Theology.....	72
The Implementation and Institutionalization of Black Christian Nationalism.....	77
The Theology of the Shrine of the Black Madonna.....	79
A Theology of a Revolutionary Jesus and Strategic Separation.....	79
Psychological benefits of a Revolutionary Jesus on Black Men.....	85
Sacraments of the Shrines of the Black Madonna.....	89
The Community of the Holy Spirit.....	90
The Components of Black Christian Nationalism and the Shrines of the Black Madonna.....	93
Current Institutions.....	93
Membership.....	95

CHAPTER 6: THE PAN-AFRICAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN THE 21 ST CENTURY.....	98
Period of Transition.....	98
The Duties of the Holy Patriarch and the Installation of a New Leader	99
Beulah Land.....	101
Liberation Academy.....	105
Theological Distinctions of the PAOCC and the Worship Service/ Religious Experience.....	106
Sunday Morning Worship.....	110
Thoughts from The Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church Membership.....	115
Is the PAOCC A Black Liberation Theology in Praxis?.....	116
Is The PAOCC Afrocentric?.....	120
CONCLUSION.....	127
WORKS CITED.....	129
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	136
APPENDIX.....	139

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

A History of Black Theology of Liberation

Liberation Theology seeks to interpret God's message in regards to how one should liberate his/herself and others from the evils of oppression and exploitation. Black Liberation Theology seeks to interpret the same message but its concern is with those who are classified as Black in society. The very term Black has many negative connotations in most societies, therefore a Black Theology of Liberation , or as it is commonly called, Black Liberation Theology, is concerned with how members in a society who have been negatively stereotyped, unfairly oppressed and unjustly exploited are actively working to alleviate those stereotypes, and work diligently to alter their negative influences.

In 1966 while in the midst of James Meredith's "One Man's March Against Fear" across the state of Mississippi members of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), began to chant the phrase, "Black Power." With this chant SNCC and its supporters ushered in a new era in the history of America. This was the time period many historians denote as the Black Power/Black Arts Movement. Black people no longer were satisfied with being integrated into the society but they wanted to be able to have a say about the affairs of their communities. Integration, in the eyes of many, wasn't even beneficial to and for Black people anymore. Power was now seen as the liberating activity for those who promoted Black Power. The criterion that Black people were judged by was whether or not the work being done was liberating for the masses of people. Does the way one lives his/her life help liberate Black people? Anything and everything was now open to criticism, and religion was no exception. There were many

who felt that the religious faith that most people of African descent adhered to, Christianity, was also a tool of oppression. Within the Black Nationalist community, Christianity began to take on the nickname, “white man’s religion.” Those who practiced the faith regularly disputed this notion. Many Africans in America felt that it was because of their faith in Christianity, that many of the social burdens that they had to carry had been removed. Those who took this position used the victories during the civil rights era such as desegregation, and the Voter Rights Act as evidence. Despite this counter point many of the youth who were now playing an active role within this movement became more and more disillusioned with Christianity. Many Black Power advocates saw Christianity as a tool of oppression during enslavement, and felt that it was continuing to serve that same purpose in the late 1960’s. During the institution of enslavement Europeans had frequently used Christianity as the measure of civilization. During the period of enslavement many Africans were not seen as “human” first until they were “converted” to Christianity, it is almost widely known that even this conversion didn’t change the white man’s view of the African; they were still viewed as sub-human. Many Africans who practiced this religion did not practice it in the same fashion as their white counterparts. There is much that would indicate that Africans always looked at and practiced their Christianity in a way that would make liberation not only an influential part of Christianity, but a necessity which they would fight for or even die to achieve.

As stated earlier, Liberation theology has always been a part of the religious experience for African people in the America. This was quite evident during enslavement. When white missionaries would tell the Africans about the Bible, the

Africans would gravitate and emphasize their viewpoint with stories like the Exodus of the Israelites out of Egypt in the Old Testament and the oppression and exploitation of the Hebrews under the Roman Empire in the New Testament. These two stories were essential to the Christian faith and the link between liberation and Christianity was made clear and substantiated by the Almighty God. Many European missionaries tried to teach Christianity to the Africans by promoting a theology of obedience to their master and a promotion of docility and servitude. “American slaves, with few exceptions, rejected this version of Christianity. Their God was the God who delivered the Israelites,” (Bennett 99). There are several examples of Africans using Christianity as a tool of liberation from social degradation. Many used Christianity in the manner that it was used by Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey, and Nat Turner to name a few.

Gabriel Prosser was one among many who used his faith as a liberating instrument. “Gabriel was a deeply religious man. The Old Testament, particularly the blood and doom passages, fascinated him. In the dying days of the eighteenth century, Gabriel meditated on the Bible and dreamed dreams of a Black state...” (Bennett 125). Gabriel Prosser had planned an uprising in Richmond Virginia that he hoped would lead to seize the town. His plans eventually failed due to two associates betraying Gabriel and reporting the plan to their slave masters.

Denmark Vesey’s story is very similar to Gabriel Prosser’s. Vesey purchased his freedom around 1800, yet he risked everything to make sure that his African brothers and sisters could relieve themselves from the injustices of enslavement. He laid out extensive plans that took him years to create. It is rumored that members of the Emmanuel AME Church worked very closely with Vesey in an effort to free enslaved Africans of

Charleston, South Carolina. “He would read to the slaves ‘from the Bible how the children of Israel were delivered out of Egypt from bondage.’ But he warned that God helped those who helped themselves,” (Bennett 127). Vesey and his organizational skill were described in the following manner:

Many slaves feared him more than they feared their masters. One man said he feared Vesey more than her feared God....Vesey switched from the role of agitator to the role of organizer. Around Christmas in 1821, he chose lieutenants and created an organization. He was then in his fifties, a vigorous, big-bodied man with a keen insight into human nature. “In the selection of his leaders,” said the judges, “Vesey showed great penetration and sound judgment.” In this effort he relied heavily on slave artisans and class leaders in the Methodist church (Bennett 128).

Vesey and his chief lieutenant, Peter Poyas created a ... “cell like organization. Each leader had a list of recruits and an assignment. Only the leaders knew the details of the plot; the average recruit knew nothing except the name of his leader and vague outlines of the plan (Bennett 129).

Vesey’s well-planned and thorough plot included four or five months of recruiting participants, the construction of weapons, and the creation of Caucasian disguises. Participants in Vesey’s plot included members in high positions within the Methodist Church, and this is evidence of how many of the enslaved and even free Africans, like Vesey, viewed Christianity as a liberating religion and a tool against oppression.

Perhaps there has been no rebellion on American soil that matches the results of Nat Turner’s. Nat Turner’s rebellion can be identified as a further depiction of Christianity being expressed through liberating activity. Nat Turner, born in 1800 in Southampton County, Virginia, was a Christian preacher.

Early in life Turner came to the view that God had sent him aside for some great purpose. To accomplish that purpose, he avoided crowds and close companionships and wrapped himself in

mystery...By the time the black rebel reached maturity...Slaves in the neighborhood, were told, looked to him for advice and direction...Like Gabriel, like Denmark Vesey, Turner found food for insurrection in the Bible (Bennett 134).

Turner, who preached the Christian message to other enslaved Africans and even baptized his overseer, could not make oppression and exploitation synonymous with the Christian religion. The preacher said that God gave him signs. One sign was a vision of drops of blood on the corn while plowing the fields. Another came while he was walking in the woods and "...he found hieroglyphic characters and blood on the leaves. He concluded from all this that the Day of Judgment for slaveholders was nigh" (Bennett 134). Nat Turner's rebellion, which began in August, lasted for months until he was captured, tried and executed in November of 1831. Turner's rebellion left over 50 whites and slave owners dead and as a result it was "...the forerunner of the great slave debates, which resulted in the abolition of slavery in the United States....," (Bennett 139).

Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey, and Nat Turner believed that God played a major role in their liberating activity of organizing and carrying out insurrections. The Christian religion that was, in all probability, introduced to them through their European enslavers, was interpreted differently based on their position as members of the oppressed and exploited group in society. But this interpretation was not unique to just these three men; many enslaved Africans felt that Christianity should serve the same purpose.

In 1830 David Walker published and distributed David Walker's Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World. Walker was born in 1785 in North Carolina. His father was enslaved and his mother had free status, and according to North Carolina state law the child took on the status of the mother, which made David Walker a free child.

Despite this status Walker grew up with a disdain for the institution of enslavement. As he grew and traveled the country, Walker would observe the conditions of Africans throughout society. His published work, Appeal, was a result of what he observed during his travels. Walker's work encouraged enslaved Africans to do God's will, which was to rebel against enslavement, and rebel in the name of Jesus Christ. He states in his appeal:

The man who would not fight under our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, in the glorious and heavenly cause for freedom and of God—to be delivered from the most wretched, abject and servile slavery, that ever a people was afflicted with since the foundation of the world, to the present day- ought to be kept with all his children or family, in slavery, or in chains, to be butchered by his cruel enemies (Walker 32).

It becomes more evident that there was a relationship between their Christian faith and a call to action that these men put forth to combat the institution of enslavement. This trend even took place in the early Black Church; perhaps this was due to how the Black church was initially created. There was a continuous trend of Blacks being mistreated in racially mixed but White-led churches. This initiated the creation of many Black denominations and many all-black congregations. In November 1787 at the St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, black members were pulled from their knees in church and told to go back to the designated colored section of the church and be seated.

This incident precipitated the formation of the first two African congregations in the city in 1794, St. Thomas Episcopal Church and Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church. Richard Allen, one of the key figures in this episode, would later help found the first national black denomination, the African Methodist Episcopal Church. This moment, in some ways, is paradigmatic of the formation of separate African churches (Glaude 24-25).

There was a similar disdain for the actions of the White leadership in multiracial churches of other denominations. In New York City Black Methodists James Varick and Abraham Thompson, formed the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church due to conflict over the ordination of Black preachers. Black Baptists created the African Baptist Church in 1805 (Glaude 25). As it became more evident that it would be nearly impossible to do within the confines of the White led churches, Black clergy and Black laity took it upon themselves (after realizing that they were still being viewed as sub-human by white Christians) to create for themselves a space where they could worship and fight the injustices of society.

Virtually every African –American church pulpit was an abolitionist platform, and every preacher, as well as gifted laity, orators for the cause...Nearly every ex-slave in a pulpit in the North was also an effective witness against the diabolical system of slavery....(Mitchell 132).

Africans never accepted Christianity the way the Europeans tried to indoctrinate it to them. Christianity was about liberation. Many Africans who practiced this religion alongside their white counter parts, had to find out through mistreatment and humiliation that their views of Christianity differed from White Christians. While one way to show rejection of the European practice of Christianity was to create other Christian denominations, another strategy was to separate from the Christian religion itself. Several Africans found ways to return to and practice their traditional African religions; some looked towards other religions such as Judaism and Islam. Perhaps no other group was able to speak directly to the shortcomings of European Christian Theology more than the Nation of Islam (NOI). This new interpretation of the Islamic faith, which was formed in the 1930's under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad, preached that if the

Black man and woman in America believed in Allah, then they too could experience some of the pleasures of life that seemed to be available only to members of the dominant cultural group in the United States, the white man. Along with believing in the Divinity of Allah, the Nation of Islam also preached a message of self-determination and self-reliance.

According to the NOI, part of the reason why the Black man and woman suffered in this country was because they were totally dependent on the white man. This message spread like wildfire throughout the Midwest and the Northeast. The organization grew under the tutelage of Malcolm X, who served as the minister of the Nation of Islam's Temple number 7 which was based in Harlem, New York, and who would eventually become the national spokesman for the organization. It was Malcolm, the son of a Baptist preacher (as so was Elijah Muhammad), who possessed the heated and challenging voice to European Christian Theology.

“The White man has taught us to shout and sing and pray until we die, to wait until death, for some dreamy heaven-in –the –hereafter, when we're dead, while this white man has his milk and honey in the streets paved with golden dollars here on this earth,” (Cone viii).

This critique was very shocking for many Black people in America.

A majority of Black people in America identified Christianity as their personal source of faith. The NOI's message came at a time when the Civil Rights Movement was being led in the South by Christian preachers. Many Blacks identified with Christianity and felt that the Civil Rights Leaders in the South (i.e. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.) personified the Christian ethic. However, for every Black person who did not pay attention to the rhetoric of the NOI there was one person who did. Their message was understood by large numbers of Black people, and as a result, the Nation of Islam grew at

an alarming rate and speed under the Leadership of Elijah Muhammad and the tutelage of Malcolm X.

The historical efficiency of Black Church and its activism

Critique of the Black Church was something that was often done privately. Because of all the work that the Black church was doing on a social level and because of what the Black Church meant spiritually to its congregation and for many within the Black community, any dissatisfaction with the church was spoken and discussed behind closed doors. It was very important that the Black clergy and laity would be on one accord with one another in the fight for social justice and spiritual salvation. The Black Church distinguished itself from the White church because it unapologetically critiqued the racist and unjust social acts in American society. It was the Black church, more than any other institution at that time that combined the **spiritual** responsibility with the **social** responsibility. According to Anthony Pinn, the Black church has a long history of connecting the two missions. He remarks:

[B]efore the beginning of the formal Civil Rights Movement, ministers like Reverdy C. Ransom (AME), Walter Hood (AMEZ), and L.K. Williams (Baptist) worked to keep their churches active in the overall development of black communities... Placing their ministries within the framework of the social gospel, they argued that Christianity had social implications that required Christians to work toward the ending of poverty and racial discrimination (Pinn 11).

This was one of the characteristics of the Black Church that seemed to distinguish itself from the White church. Black people in America have a long history with identifying the Black Church as an instrument of liberation. The Black Church was one of the first independent institutions created for and by Black people and the church used its

independence to foster other institutions for Black people. For example in the early 1900's the African Methodist Episcopal church operated schools and colleges, including Allen University in South Carolina and Morris Brown in Atlanta (Mitchell 151). In 1863 Bishop Payne of the A.M.E. Church purchased property and launched Wilberforce University. Livingstone College was opened at Salisbury, North Carolina by the A.M. E. Zion's in 1877, just to name a few (Mitchell 151). The schools mentioned above were put in place by the Black church during the time of Reconstruction. To have members of these churches create schools and other institutions and to have them come out of the Black Church was not an act of self determination but an act that has not been seen from the majority of Black Churches since. Henry Mitchell makes the following statement:

The phenomenal success of the educational crusade of African American Churches during the Reconstruction Era surpasses anything before or since, including the Civil rights campaigns of the 1960's and 1970's. The level of commitment and sacrifice was, and remains, unsurpassed (Mitchell 162).

Because the fight for political and social freedom was linked to spiritual freedom, active participation of the Black Church in the Civil Rights Movement was only a natural progression.

The Black Church established many social institutions; this is why the Black Church easily ascended to leadership during the Civil Rights era. The struggle to fight for integration and the acceptance into the American society was a fight that the Black Church had been fighting since its inception.

The effectiveness of a Black Theology of Liberation

Can Black Liberation Theology affect the socio-political and socio-economic conditions that people of African descent in America find themselves suffering from?

Some examples of socio-economic issues in the Black community are the issues of Black businesses, Black entrepreneurship, and affordable health care. Some examples of socio-political issues in the Black Community are disenfranchisement, alienation from the political process, education and etc. The two concepts are closely related and probably intersect at various points. True Black Liberation Theology is just as concerned with this aspect of life as it is about what happens in the afterlife.

Method

For the purposes of clarity, initially I plan to conduct a historical analysis. This analysis is essential to this part of the study because one must understand the social climate out of which the contemporary meaning of Black Liberation Theology was born and the ongoing conditions which exist that keep the theology alive. Literary resources will also be examined in order to help interpret the conditions and the criteria that make Black Liberation Theology a vital ideology.

The second part of this study will examine an organization that believes it is carrying out the mission of Black Liberation Theology: The Pan African Orthodox Christian Church (PAOCC), which was founded in 1953 by Rev. Albert Cleage, Jr. The PAOCC states that its goal is Black Liberation and it is obtainable through the Black Church but the Black Church must re-orient itself and put forth tangible programs and build other institutions. It is Rev. Cleage's belief that the existence of Black People in America depends entirely upon whether or not it is possible to change the theology of the Black Man. The PAOCC seeks to utilize a communal Christianity where black people are at the center of all phenomena that affects them as African people and Pan-Africanism is its ultimate goal.

Methodology

In this study I will investigate concepts, methods and events of the organization through an Afrocentric perspective. In his book Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change, Molefi K. Asante defines Afrocentricity as the "...mode of thought and action in which the centrality of African interests, values and perspectives predominate. In regards to theory, it is the placing of African people in the center of analysis of African phenomenon" (Asante 2).

I will collect data through interviews and observations and my active participation with the PAOCC. By using a socio-political and socio-economic analysis and examining phenomena through an Afrocentric lens, I will attempt to measure the organizational success and relevance. I will interview the Leadership of the PAOCC, which operates within the following structure: the **Holy Patriarch**, who is the head of the religious denomination; **Cardinals**, who are the heads of the individual churches; and eventually the hierarchal structure that exists within each church that extends from the Church pastor (Cardinal) to the position of **Associate Member**.

CHAPTER TWO

FROM CIVIL RIGHTS TO BLACK POWER: AFRICAN-AMERICAN ACTIVISM AND ITS REALTIONSHIP TO BLACK LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Theological Shift from European Christian Thought

As the Civil Rights Movement Era progressed into the mid to late 1960's its younger advocates began to question the tactics and even the motives of the Civil Rights Movement. This process allowed the younger civil rights to question the validity of the older Civil Right movement leadership. Was the current movement operating in the best interest of the masses of Black People? An ideological shift in the philosophy of the Civil Rights Movement surfaced between its younger and older advocates. This chapter it will show how the ideological shift within the Civil Rights Movement help usher in the theological shift that occurred within Christianity.

Youth organizations, such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) were disenchanted with the current actions and leaders of the Civil Rights Movement (predominantly members of the Black Clergy) and they brought forth an ideological shift to the movement. The younger advocates of the Civil Rights Movement were disenchanted with the non-violent philosophy and felt that it limited their ability to defend themselves. This shift that took place gradually found its leadership within the *Black Power* Movement. "Black Power meant a turn from illusionary cooperation with whites, whose liberalism could only promote limited systemic change" (Pinn, 15). Advocates of the Black Power Movement wanted to prove that Black People were self-determined and self-reliant and that they did not have to rely on white liberalism in order to define success or be successful. The advocates of this new movement began to read

and listen to words and commentary of men like Malcolm X and Elijah Muhammad. The advocates also began adhering to the “By any means necessary” philosophy of Malcolm X and the possibility of violent confrontation in which Black people would no longer be shackled by the philosophy of non-violence.

The issue that confronted the Black Christian clergy then was the relevance of Christianity to the Black Power Movement. Many Black Christian ministers were followers of Dr. King and several clergy at that time such as Ralph Abernathy, Jesse Jackson, Kyle Lyles and many more, adhered to his advocacy of non-violent resistance. The Black clergy had to take a deep look and ask themselves if their time or relevancy had passed. Was the strategy of non-violence, as a philosophy and tactic of civil disobedience, still important and relevant to Black people in America and if so, how? As time progressed the Black clergy began to reflect and find other ways of combating injustice.

There were Black Christian Churches that initially denounced the Black Power movement because they felt the message was inflammatory, and extremely dangerous and even impractical. On the other hand, some churches felt that they had a responsibility to try to reconcile the mission of the Black church with the mission of the Black Power movement. Yet with Black Power becoming a growing ideology within the minds of the youth and accepted by the masses of Black People, the Black clergy could no longer attempt to disregard it.

In 1966 the National Council of Negro Churchmen (NCNC) presented a position statement (see appendix) in order to legitimize the cry for Black Power and how that cry would play a role in the Black Church. They explained their goals as follows:

An attempt "...to interpret Black Power in light of the Christian gospel and in this way harness the energy and anger of young people through out the country...The organization depicted riots and other 1960 events as a minor threat to national security, the major threat being a failure of the nation to live in accordance with God's demand for justice and righteousness (Pinn 15).

According to Dwight Hopkins, this manifesto was the "first attempt in U.S. history to relate the gospel of Jesus to the black communities need for power (Hopkins 7). The move to present a position statement by the NCNC brought the advocates and participants of the Black Power movement into the theological discussion. Did the Black Power ideology have theological implications? By writing the position paper on Black Power, clergy members of NCNC helped legitimize the cry for Black Power and usher it into the theological arena.

The central question that Black Liberation Theology seeks to answer is "**What does it mean to be Black and Christian?**" With race being so influential in this society, what role does it play within the Christian entity of the Unites States of America?

Along with the position statement by the NCNC, the publication of James Cone's Black Theology and Black Power, is seen as a seminal text in the shaping of the 20th century Black Liberation Theology. According to Dwight Hopkins in Introducing Black Theology of Liberation, Cone's book sought to combine Dr. Martin Luther King's demand for the church to be a radical institution for individual and social change combined with Malcolm X's call for people of African descent to love their beautiful black selves (8). Cone argues that the ideology of Black Power strives to achieve the following:

[E]ven in its most radical expression, is not the antithesis of Christianity, nor is it a heretical idea to be tolerated with painful forbearance. It is, rather, Christ's central message to twentieth

century America. And unless the empirical denominational church makes a determined effort to recapture the man Jesus through a total identification with the suffering poor as expressed in Black Power, that church will become exactly what Christ is not (Cone 1).

When James Cone authored his book in 1969, the United States was in the midst of racial turmoil. Dr. Martin Luther King had just been assassinated and the concepts of “nonviolence, love and peace” had come to a halt. Over one hundred cities went up in flames as a response to the assassination of the civil rights leader. “Black Power” was the cry from the members of the Black Community who have been kept on the margins of society for so long. Cone had authored his book as “...a word to the oppressor...not in hope that he will listen but in the expectation that my own existence will be clarified,” (Cone 3). According to Cone, Black Power meant, “ black freedom, black self determination, wherein black people no longer view themselves as without human dignity and but as men, human beings, with the ability to carve out their own destiny”(Cone, 6). Cone’s version of Black Liberation Theology placed the liberation of the poor (specifically the Black poor) as the focal point of his ideology. Cone wanted the Black Church to look at the rebellions taking place in the American cities as a wake up call to the failure of a nation to respond to the needs of her citizens and to the failure of the Black church which was no longer (in the opinions of many within the Black community) a radical institution striving for change in the Black community. Cone felt that “Churchmen, laymen, and ministers alike fail to recognize their contribution to the ghetto condition through permissive silence—except for a few resolutions which they usually pass once a year or immediately following a riot...”(Cone 2). The church had to break

away from the notion that the church had to be admittedly opposed to violent self-defense.

Cone and many other Black Liberation Theologians felt that the Black church had lost its influence upon the Black community after “de jure” integration took place. Anthony Pinn states in his book titled The Black Church in the Post Civil Rights Era, “Black Theology challenged the Black church and it suggested a more aggressive approach to the Gospel of Christ and its implications for human life,” (Pinn 21). After being very active in the Civil Rights Movement and influenced by Dr. Martin Luther King and his philosophy of non-violence, the Black church was not exactly sure if Black Power, as an ideology, was consistent and compatible with the values of Christianity. King and his advocates felt that the ideology of Black Power was a misdirected attempt to promote justice for the Black man. Anthony Pinn remarks:

Beneath all the satisfaction of a gratifying slogan, Black Power was a nihilistic philosophy born out of the conviction that the Negro can't win. It was, at bottom, the view that American society is so hopelessly corrupt and enmeshed in evil that there is no possibility of salvation from within (Pinn 21).

As previously noted, James Cone did not see the ideology and values of Black Power and Christianity as opposites, but rather as the former being the most radical expression of the latter.

Violence was the most critical issue for Black Christians who could not readily accept this new liberation theology. The Black Power advocates spoke openly about the possibility of violent self-defense. Black Liberation Theologians felt that having an undying allegiance to non-violence was a trap and it limited the actions of those who were subjected to violence. In the opinions of the Black Liberation theologians and their

advocates, King's philosophy of non-violence was "[M]yopic in that it failed to recognize the intimate relationship between violence and the development of the United States,"

(Pinn 22). Cone on the other hand stated his position on violence as follows:

[V]iolence already exists. The Christian does not decide between violence and non-violence, evil and good. He decides between the less and greater evil. He must ponder whether revolutionary violence is less or more deplorable than the violence perpetuated by the system...If he decides to take the "nonviolent" way, then he is saying that revolutionary violence is more detrimental to man in the long run than systemic violence. But if the system is evil, then revolutionary violence is both justified and necessary (Cone 143).

In 1970 James Cone sought to provide a deeper analysis of Black Liberation Theology in his book A Black Theology of Liberation. In this book Cone stated that his goal was to offer "...a deeper analysis of Christian doctrine, using traditional theological concepts," (Cone "Liberation" xi). At the time of Cone's first book, Black Theology and Black Power, was not seen as theological work and this is precisely the reason James Cone felt the need to follow up his views with A Black Theology of Liberation.

In this second book he made the case for Black Theology using Christian theological connotations. Cone states that theology is "contextual language...defined by the human situation that gives birth to it" (ix). Theology is given birth by humans and human situations. Cone emphasizes this point so that he can easily define the differences that exist between Black theology which he seeks to promote and White theology which he is critiquing. By looking through Christian lenses, Cone believes that Black theology is more concerned with the downtrodden and the oppressed, than White theology is, he states:

Christian Theology is a theology of Liberation. It is a rational study of the being of God in the world in light of the existential

situation of an oppressed community, relating the forces of liberation to the essence of the gospel, which is Jesus Christ (Cone “Liberation” 1).

According to Cone, a Christian theology fails to be a Christian theology if it is not concerned with those who are oppressed and exploited. He asserts that White theology has failed to acknowledge this point and that is why Christianity seemed irrelevant to the Black community. Black churches, although extremely organized and active within the Black Community during the Civil Rights Movement, seemingly failed to stay relevant to it after the “de jure” segregation was eliminated. When the Black Power movement was launched, the Black Church didn’t seem to organize itself to address the issues of power and self-determination. Vitaly important issues such as housing, employment, and education were not principles that the Black church organized themselves around although these were pressing matters in the Black community during the 1960’s and 70’s. Many Black theologians felt that in the post-Civil Rights era there was basically no difference between the Black church and the White church, as far as their relationship to the Black Community was concerned. The isolation of the Black community from and by the church was a result of a similar theology that both the Black and White church had possessed. Cone claimed that,

American white theology has been ‘patriotic,’ either by defining the theological task independently of black suffering (the liberal northern approach) or by defining Christianity as compatible with white racism (the conservative southern approach). In both cases theology becomes a servant of the state and that can only mean death to Blacks, (Cone, A Black Theology of Liberation, 4).

It is all but common knowledge that the political government of the United States of America and the masses of Black people has had a troubled relationship. As

mentioned earlier, the Christian Church in America initially had a tumultuous relationship with its Black members, and this led to the creation of the Black Christian Church as it is evident in Richard Allen's and Absalom Jones' decision to establish their own Episcopal Churches. White theology fails to concern itself with the oppressed members of the society. According to Cone, "...there can be no theology of the gospel that does not arise from an oppressed community" (Cone "Liberation" 5).

According to Dwight N. Hopkins there are "...four basic building blocks that were used to construct a black theology of liberation..." (Hopkins 15). Hopkins amongst others believes that while Africans were being enslaved they had to formulate another religion that differed from the religion of the European missionaries and slave masters who were promoting them. Africans were forced to come to the "New World"; during that process they had their culture and the spiritual practices taken away from them. As enslaved Africans, who were of different cultural backgrounds, they had to find a way to formulate new spiritual practices which were unique to their own experiences, and they did.

Hopkins states that the *first building block* of a Black Theology of Liberation is the examination of ***Black Religion during enslavement***. This was unique by itself because the Africans had a different way of identifying with religion. Religion practiced by Africans during enslavement was heavily affected by their memory of African beliefs. The European Slave invaders and traders interfered with the African's way of life. Not only was this connection disrupted but over time the memory of their ethical, moral and spiritual worldview weakened. "...traders and missionaries forced speakers of different African languages to commingle, which weakened the memory of Africans as succeeding

generations distanced themselves from their ancestral homelands and traditions” (Hopkins 17). On the other hand in Africa, Africans did not isolate their spiritual practices and worship from their everyday life. In African Religions and Philosophy, John Mbiti states, “Religion permeates into all departments of life so fully that it is not easy or possible to isolate it” (1). There was no separation of the secular from the sacred. The two concepts co-existed and interacted as one. Mbiti might have said it best when he stated:

Wherever the African is, there is his religion: he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony; and if he is educated, he takes his religion with him to the examination room at school or the university; if he is a politician he takes it to the house of parliament. Although many African languages do not have a word for religion as such, it nevertheless accompanies the individual from long before his birth to long after his physical death (Mbiti 2).

According to Hopkins, the African High God was a God that “...ruled all creation with Justice and compassion for the weak,” (Hopkins 17). Africans believed in a Supreme Being, or what Hopkins calls the “High God,” that carried out universal laws. They also believe in other deities that help carry out specific duties on behalf of the Supreme Being. Those who just departed from the physical world and had become a part of the spiritual world by joining the ancestors, were now part of the special group of deities that help the Supreme Being carry out duties.

The memory of the African belief system is very important in understanding how religion was practiced amongst Africans during enslavement. Perhaps it wasn't religion at all but rather spirituality. There was a spiritual connection that Africans had to the land (both old and new), to the Supreme Being, and to each other. To be separated from

one's family, to be relegated to property, and to be degraded and not even looked at as a member of the human family took not only a physical toll but a spiritual one as well and it affected the African's everyday life. Even the Africans conception of death was an event not of "termination" but of continuity in which the individual who died still had a role in the lives of his/her family, and community. Since there was virtually no difference between the physical and the spiritual world, Africans still interacted with the deceased individual in a way that perhaps the Europeans and their worldview could not grasp.

When "conversion" to Christianity took place, the messages that Africans took from the Christian faith stemmed from where they could find relevance in it. For example, it was and still is easy for Africans on the continent and in the "New World" to identify with the Exodus story of the Bible, and the people of Israel. They could relate to the injustices perpetuated among the people of Israel by the Pharaoh of Egypt, because they too were victims of injustice by the European "pharaohs".

A Return to the Tradition of Spiritual Communalism

Traditional African religions had a communal focus rather than an individualistic or a personal one.

To be human is to belong to the whole community, and to do so involve participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of that community. A person cannot detach himself from the religion of his group, for to do so is to be severed from his roots, his foundations, his context of security, his kinships and the entire group of those who make him aware of his own existence...Therefore to be without religion amounts to a self excommunication from the entire life of society, and African peoples do not know how to exist without religion (Mbiti 2).

In Africa religion was a communal activity as well as communal responsibility. The community made sure that the necessary spiritual activities were carried out and it was through those ceremonies and rituals that the relationship with the spiritual realm was emphasized. In her book entitled, And Still We Rise: An Introduction to Black Liberation Theology, Diana L. Hayes states, that it was the “...communitarian, holistic, family-based, religious understanding that provided the African slave with a basis for encompassing and accepting, in a somehow richer and more freeing way, the Christianity foisted upon them” (10).

Along with the impact of the memory of African traditions and beliefs, there was a reinterpretation of Christianity during the period of enslavement. Although for the most part Christianity as a religion was something foisted upon enslaved Africans by European slave holders, many Africans did not let European’s interpretation of Christianity limit their worldview. Despite the claim that Christianity was saving the African from their “barbaric” nature, many Africans knew this wasn’t the case and they did not accept Christianity as such however there were some Africans who took on the mindset that Phyllis Wheatley had, as evident in her poem, *On Being Brought from Africa to America*, where she says:

Twas mercy brought me from my Pagan Land
Taught my benighted soul to understand
That there’s a God, that there’s a Saviour too
Once I redemption neither sought nor knew
Some view our sable race with scornful eye,
“Their colour is a diabolic die.”
Remember, Christians, Negroes, black as Cain
May be refin’d and join th’angelic train.

It is clear that Phyllis Wheatley believes that if she had not have been taken from her “pagan land” on the continent of Africa, she would not have been exposed to the religious

faith of Christianity. Her poem depicts a more than grateful attitude for her transplantation.

However not all people of African descent believed that their bondage was blessing in disguise, Black Theologian J. Deotis Roberts states the following in his book

A Black Political Theology:

The Bible speaks existentially to the individual Black Man, but also addresses Black people...the bondage of Israel becomes their bondage and the deliverance of Israel becomes their deliverance...we discover that the Bible holds to a “holistic” view of man . Biblical anthropology conceives of man as a unified being—body, mind, and spirit...It follows that there is no way for an enslaved man to be free. The faulty theology—written into law—which asserted that a slave would remain chained in body and free in spirit is to be condemned as a demonic distortion of the Biblical message. Much paternalism practiced by white would-be Christians in evangelical zeal and parading as home missions among blacks, reds, and browns in this country is informed by the same bogus theology (38-39).

Roberts makes a connection between what he considers the “faulty” Christian theology that was promoted during enslavement and the “faulty” Christian theology that is promoted in contemporary times. What that faulty theology is saying is that it is possible and acceptable for one to deal with the suffering and bondage here on earth because redemption and freedom is guaranteed in the afterlife. The notion that one should settle for whatever ills have been bestowed upon them in physical life is a problematic and in essence an unchristian claim. Roberts is stating that in order to be free, man and woman have to experience freedom holistically—mind, body, and spirit, and if any of these components are in bondage and not totally free then it affects the other components from ultimately becoming free also.

According to Hopkins, the *second building block* of Black Liberation theology is the interpretation, or rather the **reinterpretation of the Bible** as an important foundation of the Black Liberation Theology. The Bible is interpreted from the viewpoint of the poor, exploited and oppressed. Black liberation theology believes that God is in favor of liberating the oppressed. Black Liberation Theology distinguishes itself from the dominant Christian theology, which would have one believe that God is impartial and does not choose sides. Black Liberation Theology stands firmly on the notion that God is on the side of Black people in America, who seek economic and political liberation from an oppressive society. The positioning of God on the side of the marginalized becomes clear in the Biblical story of Exodus, and even in the story of the birth of Jesus. “...out of various options and possibilities God (Yahweh) made a conscious decision to appear in a specific social location...and chose a setting for the birth of the one chosen to offer full humanity for all” (Hopkins 25). That specific social location was a manger, which was the only place Mary and Joseph could stay after being denied a room in the inn. “God revealed the divine self to humanity not by accident but with purpose and plan—that is, to give birth to the new humanity out of the surroundings of dirt, dung, and oppression. This is the first scandal of the Jesus story” (Hopkins 25).

Jesus was not born into a rich and prosperous family; on the contrary His family was being oppressed and exploited by a ruthless legal system perpetuated by the Roman Empire. If Christians desire to know God’s position on poor versus the rich, or the have’s versus the have not’s, one does not need to look any further than where God placed His only begotten son, Jesus Christ. Jesus was born in a stable amongst animals. God placed Jesus, the Messiah, in a family that was deprived socially and economically,

and it was from this circumstance that God believed Jesus could be appointed Redeemer to the World.

Black Liberation Theology believes that in America the revelation of Jesus could be found among the Black poor, and based on the scriptures such as Isaiah 61 and Matthew 25, God's position is always on the side of the poor. Diana L. Hayes states that in reinterpreting the reading of the Bible, Africans "...were able somehow to differentiate between the piety of those around them and what they saw as the true virtues of the Christian religion" (Hayes 35). Within these true virtues of Christianity, Black Liberation Theology upholds the belief that the rich minority is obligated to share their wealth with the masses of the people (who are not members of the rich or elite class). The rich/elite class can receive salvation through helping the poor and deprived. How one treats his/her fellow man and woman, and how one treats those who are not as socially and economically well off, determines if one is doing the work and will of Jesus Christ.

Hopkins feels that the *third building block* in establishing a Black Theology of Liberation is having **knowledge of Black American life in the 1950's, 1960's and 1970's.**

The civil rights movement was a radical and militant chapter in the history of the African American struggle for liberation and the practice of freedom. It propelled the black church into direct mass action which broke laws. The movement emptied the pews of churches and enabled members to shut down the normal functions of local governments by disrupting the business-as-usual attitudes and practices of whites with power (Hopkins 33)

Not only did the Civil Rights movement put the church into action, but it wills the Black Christianity into action. When one is faced with racism, economic exploitation, and social degradation, what *is* the Christian going to do? The response from the

Southern Black Churches was direct action. The Civil Rights Movement redefined what it meant to be a member of a church. Being a member of the Black Church in the south was much more than just being in a place to worship on a specific day of the week, but it was about taking one's faith outside the building and applying one's faith to the community.

The 1960's ushered in a more militant confrontation of Blacks with the United States status quo. In 1966 during a march in Mississippi a call for Black Power was made by Willie Ricks, Stokely Carmichael and members of the student organization Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). The Black Power Movement had become a part of the agenda for people of African descent in America. This movement wanted to speak to more than just social integration it wanted to address the accumulation of economic and political power within the Black Community. The Black Power Movement wanted tangible results and this movement grew directly out of the Civil Rights Movement. The Black Power movement also brought about a renewed sense of Blackness to accompany the cry for Black Power. "...black power revealed the resurrection of the spirit of Malcolm X, the contemporary father of Black nationalism" (Hopkins 36). Through the teachings of the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X exposed the hypocrisy of America and even how integration was being played out in the United States in various public statements, speeches and interviews. Malcolm in speeches such as "*The Ballot or the Bullet*," and "*Message to the Grassroots*" he explained that the integration taking place in America did not help transfer political and economic power from the White power structure. "Malcolm sought to shatter the myth in the black person's mind that equated value and all positive norms with whiteness..." (Hopkins 37). Because this

assumption was still ingrained in the minds of many people of African descent, it allowed the social policy of integration to be practiced incorrectly. Many people of African descent used the social policy of integration as a pathway to become participants of White controlled organizations and institutions, such as integrating into white schools and white businesses, which inevitably led to the eventual disintegration of institutions and organizations that were controlled by Blacks.

Not only did the Black Power Movement demand tangible political and economic power, but it also sought to achieve these goals by any means necessary, and this did not rule out violence in self-defense either. This is one of the main factors that differentiated the Black Power Movement from the Civil Rights Movement. The Civil Rights Movement clearly stated that its method of direct confrontation would be used through non-violence. Martin Luther King's dual role as a clergyman and leader of the Montgomery Improvement Association, and eventually the Civil Rights Movement itself, made it easier for black churches across the nation to participate in the Movement, but the Black church found itself at a significant crossroad. The Black masses were crying out for Black Power and the Church had to decide how they could stay relevant at this particular time in history. As mentioned earlier in July of 1966 a group of Black clergymen (the National Committee of Negro Churchmen) formulated a positive response to the Black Power initiative in the New York Times on July 31, 1966. The Black Church had to address the Black Power Movement's cry for "power". Those who favored the call believed that Black Power was the call of Jesus Christ, and Jesus was the Liberator of the oppressed and the exploited. To fight for the eradication of both those characteristics is the work of Jesus the Christ and Christians. Jesus' life was about the

elimination of exploitation and oppression of his people. As a result Jesus' life was a life full of work and action, not passiveness. Jesus has to be presented in this light so one can understand that being proactive in the struggle against the evil forces of society can be interpreted as the work of the Christian.

The *fourth building block* of Black Liberation theology according to Hopkins is the **method**. How is Black Theology of Liberation carried out? Hopkins states that the methodology to be followed is as follows:

How do we arrive at our answers in our talk about and practice with God among the poor today? How do we come to our conclusions about relations among God, humanity, and the world? What sources are our starting points? What are our key beliefs? What norm helps us to distinguish between sinful spirits and the divine liberation spirit? What are the consequences of our theology? (Hopkins 41).

The questions posed by Hopkins need to be answered so that the actions of Black Liberation Theology are understood clearly. In order to know the methods of a Black Theology of Liberation, one must first inquire its origins.

The Pan African Orthodox Christian Church

One group continuing in the tradition of using Christianity as a tool for liberation among people of African descent is the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church (PAOCC) and its churches known as the Shrines of the Black Madonna. The PAOCC was founded by the late Reverend Albert Cleage Jr. in 1953. Rev. Cleage believed that the Black Church will play a big role in the eventual liberation of Black people; however he was very critical of the traditional Black Church and felt that the church had to move in a new direction to correctly combat the exploitive and oppressive conditions that Black people were dealing with. In his book, **Black Christian Nationalism** Cleage states:

New Directions for the Black church depend upon a total reevaluation of what the church ought to be doing. If going to heaven is our main concern, then certainly we will not worry about problems of everyday community life. But most Black people have mixed feelings about going to heaven. They want to go, but not soon. So at least in the meantime we ought to be dealing with the problems such as poverty, housing, clothing, and education (Cleage 52).

The PAOCC believes that Jesus was a Black Revolutionary who was committed to making sure his people, the Hebrew people of Israel, were freed from the oppressive conditions that they had to live under the Roman Empire. Jesus' life was a life of action and the PAOCC feel that his life should serve as the model for black people today and especially those who are subjected to harsh living conditions under the Western/American Empire. The PAOCC believes that the church must move from an individualistic focus to a communalistic focus.

In my study, through interviews and observations, the liberation program of the PAOCC will be described in depth. The PAOCC seeks to help in the liberation struggle for black people through a myriad of programs that were created and initiated by its founder, Rev. Albert Cleage over a period of nearly fifty years. One of the essential questions to be asked is has the PAOCC remained true to its initial mission which is to use the life of Jesus, a Black revolutionary, as an example to combat the social injustices that Black people face on a daily basis? If so, then how is that mission being carried out? What makes the theology of the PAOCC a liberation theology? These are some of the questions that will be examined throughout my research.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL APPRECIATION OF BLACK LIBERATION THEOLOGY

As stated in previous pages, a theology of liberation has existed within the African community at least since the time of enslavement in the Western Hemisphere. This chapter will look at the legacy of Black Liberation Theology and the actors who played a key role in its initiation and development. What made this specific theology attractive to the Africans? Even more importantly, what made this type of theology necessary for those Africans who willingly grasped and took hold of it?

Coptic Roots of Christianity

There is a common perception that continental and dispersed (those who were ultimately kidnapped and placed in bondage) Africans had no previous knowledge of Christianity until they had contact with the European Protestant missionaries during enslavement and colonization. There is no denying that the Protestant missionaries did play a significant role in promoting Christianity, as far as practicing a religion for the African is concerned, however to state that it was European Protestant missionaries who *introduced* the religion of Christianity to Africans might be a bit exaggerated. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Coptic Church of Egypt have existed and, “...antedated all the Christian communions of Europe and America except the Church of Rome,” (Wilmore, 1). In his book, *Black Radicalism and Black Religion*, Gayraud Wilmore states:

The gospel made its first appearance in Africa not in the Delta region, but in the Upper Nile Valley through Judich, the ‘Ethiopian’ eunuch who was baptized at an oasis on a desert road between Jerusalem and Gaza by Phillip, the Evangelist [Acts8:26-40]...African Christianity took root first in Egypt...Records which are solid to Eastern Christians, though generally unknown and if

known, uncertain to most European and American Christians, report that John Mark, the author of the Second Gospel, a Cyrenian Jew and erstwhile companion of the Apostle Paul, established the first African Christian church that we know about as early as A.D. 42. In the year 68 when St. Mark was martyred in Alexandria, the first person he converted, a cobbler named Anianos, had already been named a bishop. (Wilmore,7).

Wilmore claims that it is mainly through these historical incidents that Christianity had spread in the Delta and Upper Egypt before the end of the Second century. The above mentioned incidents and their repercussions are very important because it destroys the notion that all Africans were introduced to the religion of Christianity by European Protestant missionaries. Wilmore powerfully suggests that the introduction of the Christianity in Africa might have been attributed to those people or groups were the first converts and initial missionaries of the new faith themselves.

According to the Encyclopedia Coptica, the word ‘Copt’ is derived from the Greek word ‘*Agyptos*’, which is derived from ‘*Hikaptah*’, one of the names for Memphis, the first capital of the Ancient Egypt. In its modern use “*Coptic*” has been used to describe Egyptian Christians. The Coptic Church was founded by Saint John Mark (the author of the second gospel in the Holy Bible), who brought Christianity to Egypt, in the First century, “...Saint Mark came to Egypt during the first or third year of the Roman Emperor Claudius (in 41-42 A.D. or 43-44 A.D.) and he visited Alexandria again, to preach and evangelize, between 61 and 68A.D.,” (Ascott). Saint Mark had become the first Patriarch of the Coptic Church, and the line of patriarchs has been continuous and unbroken from Saint Mark all the way up to its 117th and its present patriarch, Pope Shenouda, III.

The Coptic Church has had a long history in Africa and more specifically in Egypt and in the Nile Valley. The Coptic Church also has a long and extensive history contributing to Christian theology and other religious studies. Saint Athanasius, who was the Pope of Alexandria between 327 A.D. and 373 A.D., authored the original version of the *Nicene Creed*, which is recited in Christian Church's throughout the world. The first Catechetical School was set up in Alexandria around 190A.D. (www.coptic.net/articles/CoptsThroughTheAges.txt). This school was not just limited to the Christian theological studies but also included study of science, mathematics, and the humanities.

According to the Encyclopedia Coptica, Monasticism was born in Egypt. This was "...instrumental in the formation of the Coptic Church's character of submission and humbleness." These institutions began at the end of the Third century and flourished in the Fourth Century A.D.

The Coptic Church did not limit themselves to just one specific area. There is evidence that the Coptic Church had missionaries to Europe. Saint Maurice (known in some parts of the world as Saint Moritz) and the Theban Legion provide an example.

"Saint Moritz was drafted from Egypt to serve under the Roman flag and ended up teaching Christianity to inhabitants of the Swiss Alps," (www.coptic.net/articles/CoptsThroughTheAges.txt). Maurice was a Coptic that served as an officer in the Roman Legion. 6600 men were under the command of Maurice and they were known as the "Theban Legion". Some accounts state that 6600 men were Christians from Egypt and they helped spread the Christian faith throughout Switzerland. After an uprising of a group called the Gauls, the Roman Emperor Maximian was forced

to march against this group and quell the uprising. After the task was accomplished, Maximian issued an order that all of the army was to offer sacrifices to the Roman gods for their successful mission. Not only did the order include the worship of other gods but as part of the sacrifice, Christians were to be murdered. Under the command of Saint Maurice, only the Theban Legion "...dared to refuse to comply with the orders," (www.coptic.net/synexrion/MauriceofTheba.txt). The men of this legion were "...instructed in the One Eternal God and were ready to suffer extreme penalties rather than do anything contrary to their religion," (www.coptic.net/synexrion/MauriceofTheba.txt). The Theban Legion could not take part in an order that would have them murder other Christians and give praise to other gods.

After hearing that this particular legion refused to take part in the sacrifice, story has it that Maximian ordered the Theban legion to be decimated. The Legion, under the leadership of Maurice, did not even let the possibility of death change their stance.

Upon hearing the plans of the Emperor, the legion replied in the following manner:

Emperor, we are your soldiers but also the soldiers of the true God. We owe you military service and obedience, but we cannot renounce Him who is our Creator and Master, and also yours even though you reject Him. In all things which are not against His law, we most willingly obey you, as we have done hitherto. We readily oppose your enemies whoever they are, but we cannot stain our hands with the blood of innocent people (Christians). We have taken an oath to God before we took one to you, you cannot place any confidence in our second oath if we violate the other (the first). You commanded us to execute Christians, behold we are such. We confess God the Father the Creator of all things and His Son Jesus Christ, God. We have seen our comrades slain with the sword, we do not weep for them but rather rejoice in their honour. Neither this, nor any other provocations have tempted us to revolt. Behold

we have arms in our hands, but we do not resist, because we would rather die innocent than live by any sin. (www.coptic.net/synexrion/MauriceofTheba.txt).

These Coptic Christians made it very clear to the Emperor that they were willing to accept death before they were willing to reject their God and their Savior Jesus the Christ. To take such a stance in which one's individual life is not as important, is the message of Christianity itself, a basic understanding that accompanies Black Liberation Theology. "This St. Maurice has always been portrayed in many European cathedrals and churches with black African features. He is still the patron saint of infantry soldiers and swordsmiths in Savoy, sardine, and Cracow, Poland," (Wilmore, 8).

The history of the Coptic Christian Church is highly important in the sense that it proves that there was a self sufficient, and self sustaining Christian history on the African continent before the European Protestant missionaries came. Although the European missionaries played a role in promoting Christianity, it could be argued that this so-called "new religion" may not have been as new to Africans as Europeans thought. Let us not forget that Mary and Joseph were ordered to flee to Egypt to hide baby Jesus from the wrath of King Herod, who had ordered that all male babies 2 years and younger be murdered(KJV Bible Matthew 2: 13-14). In the King James Version of the Bible it is not as clear how long Jesus stayed in Egypt, most Copts believe this period to be around three years, because many historians and scholars place Herod's death at about 4 A.D. King Herod. The Coptic Church takes great pride in the fact that the Savior of the Christian faith had spent some time in their homeland. "Many Copts believe that even prior to the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus Christ, Egyptians accepted the Divine Child as Lord over their lives," (Meinardus, 13).

The Coptic Church is currently generating a new resurgence of interest. It has not been largely exposed, especially in the West, since its break with the Roman Church at the Council at Chalcedon in 451. This break has yet to be reconciled and the Roman Catholic Church has received more attention in the West and throughout the world than the Christian church of Egypt. However for many theologians, a new interest in the Coptic Church has raised many questions about its history and relevance to early Christianity.

The Coptic Church may very well play an important role in dismaying the belief that Christianity was the “White Man’s Religion.” The foundation of Christianity has African roots and the morals and values that may have influenced the values of Jesus when he spent time in and around Egypt poses strong opposition to the claim that Europeans brought this religion to Africa and her inhabitants. It may in fact also partially explain why Africans throughout the world tend to express their Christianity in a manner that is different than its European version.

Enslavement and Liberation Theology

“The religious beliefs and rituals of a people are inevitably and inseparably bound up with the material and psychological realities of their daily existence,” (Wilmore, 22). The situation and the predicament of the African in the West during the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries played a tremendous role in how Africans accepted and displayed their religion. It should almost be expected that the enslaved Africans, if they accepted the religion of their overseer at all, would accept the religion on terms that were significantly different than that of the Europeans. “...it is a matter of serious debate whether a specific religion of a specific people can be transmitted to another people—even in the same

geographical location—without certain substantive changes due to ethnicity, custom, social structure, and many other factors,”(Wilmore, 25) The social climate, the social structure that allowed the enslavement of Africans, the difference in the value systems between the Europeans and the Africans, and the remnants of the customs that Africans brought and maintained with them, could not allow Christianity to be accepted and displayed in the same manner that Europeans accepted and displayed their Christianity. Africans still recognized God, the Supreme Being, and that concept was not new to them. Africans understood that ones actions were a very good indicator of ones relationship to God and their spirituality. Perhaps this was one of the reasons why Africans did not attempt to practice and display their religion the same way, they saw too much contradiction between what the European preached to the African and how the European acted toward the African.

One of the significant differences in the theology of the African and the theology of the European was the concept of Man/Woman. Man was not looked upon as solely responsible for himself. The Man and Woman had responsibilities to matters that extended beyond their immediate selves. The theologian, J. Deotis Roberts calls this the *Wholeness of Man*. He states:

[E]mphasis is upon collective man summed up in the formula: ‘Because I am, we are.’ There is also a unity of all life. Man is vitally related to nature, God, ancestors, and the like. He enters into the whole being, without dividing life up into parts. The African is fully conscious of the wholeness and cohesiveness of the whole of creation, within which interaction is the only way to exist, (Roberts, 75).

European missionaries and the White church did not look at the African man in this way. Because of the difference of worldviews on humanity, it led to the rising of a

contradiction that white missionaries soon had to address, could Africans be Christians and enslaved? Was it acceptable in God's eyes that a missionary could convert an African and support a legal system that kept a fellow Christian enslaved? Although the question is of theological concern, it is easy to suspect that the answer to the question had an economical base.

“[C]onversion and emancipation do not take place at the same time. Only theological endorsement remained necessary to make this position acceptable to church and state. In law, custom and theology, we have the position that the black man is only partly human. Paul became the theologian par excellence in forgiving an acceptable Bible-based theological stance whereby a slave can be free in the Lord and remained shackled in the chains of physical bondage, (Roberts, 76).

There are some scholars who stated that “slave masters” used the argument that conversion justified enslavement. Albert J. Raboteau writes;

[O]fficers of the society stressed the compatibility of Christianity with slavery. Masters need not fear religion would ruin their slaves. On the contrary, Christianity would make them better slaves by convincing them to obey their owners out of a sense of moral duty instead of out of fear. After all, society pamphlets explained, Christianity does not upset the social order, but supports it, (Raboteau, 19).

In an effort to keep the enslaved docile and even in an effort to state that the African condition was ordained by God, many Europeans promoted a “Pauline” doctrine. The writings of the Apostle Paul had been used to promote the separation between physical and spiritual bondage. The Apostle Paul's writings have been the foundation of promoting what has been termed as “Slave Christianity.” The doctrine of a slave Christianity is to promote bearing through the earthly suffering because one's reward is giving to him/her in the afterlife. This doctrine promotes docility and an acceptance of a

condition of exploitation and oppression. Messages such as, "...servants obey your masters..." (Ephesians 6:5), and obeying and remaining unchallenging to governmental rulers (Romans 13: 1-7), are only some of the messages that have been taken out of the King James Version of the Bible, promoted by the White missionaries and forced upon the enslaved Africans. But despite the efforts of the White Missionaries to keep the African docile and subservient, many Africans could not accept Christianity on these or other terms.

Christianity as accepted by the enslaved African

As mentioned before, Africans did not accept Christianity on the same terms as the Europeans did. There are many Africans who used their Christian faith to bring forth a life of freedom and liberty, despite their condition of bondage.

Gabriel, who was enslaved under Thomas Prosser, has been identified as a religious man. "Gabriel was also a student of the Bible and was strongly drawn by religious convictions to lead an insurrection," (Wilmore, 77-78). In Aptheker's book, *American Negro Slave Revolts*, it states that Gabriel was 24 years old and six feet and two inches. Some say that Gabriel identified with the biblical hero Samson. Gabriel wore his hair long as Samson, who undertook the Nazarite vow which did not allow one's hair to be cut. Just as Samson was called to destroy the Philistine people, Gabriel believed that he was called to destroy the institution of enslavement.

His plan was to kill all the whites who were encountered, seize arms and ammunition from the Richmond arsenal, loot the state treasury, and, if possible, strike an agreement with the remaining slaveholders for the liberation of all those who were still slaves, (Wilmore, 78).

Gabriel's plan was very thorough and organized. Some reports stated that up to fifty thousand men were prepared to participate in the insurrection. Enslaved Africans prepared for the insurrection by making "...crude swords and bayonets as well as 500 bullets..." and Gabriel made regular trips to Richmond to identify the location of arms and ammunition. Although the secrecy of the plan was well-kept, there are some indications that some may have caught wind of the plan. In a letter dated April 22, 1800, Governor Monroe of VA, wrote a letter to Thomas Jefferson and hinted at the possibility of a slave insurrection, (Aptheker, 220). On the night of the planned insurrection, there was an exceptional storm. The storm brought about confusion among the men who were supposed to participate in the revolt and several men disbanded. However even prior to that night two enslaved Africans had told their slave masters about the plot. "Guards were posted at the penitentiary arsenal and cavalry was dispatched on a patrol of all roads leading from Prosser's farm to the city," (Wilmore, 79). After weeks of running Gabriel was captured on September 24, and was executed October 7, 1800.

A lawyer had stated that at his trial, when asked if he had anything to say with regards to his actions Gabriel said:

I have nothing more to offer than what General Washington would have to offer, had he been taken by the British and put to trial by them. I have adventured my life in endeavoring to obtain the liberty of my countrymen, and am a willing sacrifice to their cause: and I beg, as a favor that I may be immediately led to execution. I know that you have pre-determined to shed my blood, why then all this mockery of a trial," (Aptheker, 223-224).

Although the revolt was unsuccessful, it was one of the most organized revolts here on the mainland. Samson's religious faith is what led Gabriel to organize the revolt. He used the story of Samson in the Bible, as the foundation for his revolt. Gabriel was

able to organize thousands of followers who believed in his convictions and believed in his religious sincerity. It was made clear through Gabriel's actions that he believed that God was on the side of those who were oppressed. Gabriel compared the relationship between the oppressive white slave master's and the oppressed enslaved Africans, to the relationship between the oppressive Philistine's and the oppressed people of Israel.

Denmark Vesey, whose birth is unknown, is another African who believed that it was his Christian obligation to obtain freedom for his people. Vesey purchased his own freedom in 1800, the same year that Gabriel was killed. Vesey settled in Charleston as a carpenter. He gained respect in that community and was seen as a community leader. "Vesey had an absorbing interest in black religion...he was engrossed in the study of the scriptures and brought to his investigations some interpretations that were decidedly unorthodox and possibly African or West Indian in origin," (Wilmore, 82). Vesey saw similarities between the children of Israel and the enslaved African. Gayraud Wilmore states that Denmark Vesey saw similarities in the story of the nation of Israel up against the Walls of Jericho and the Africans against the walls that were built and maintained by the institution of enslavement. In regards to the book of Joshua in the Bible, Wilmore states that "Vesey was fascinated by it and often used it in addresses when he was recruiting followers," (Wilmore, 83). Denmark Vesey believed that it was his duty to free the Africans from bondage. Vesey would conduct planning meetings after and even during religious meeting. In planning the conspiracy, Vesey selected Gullah Jack, an African priest, as his chief lieutenant. It was Vesey's theology of liberation and Gullah Jacks mysticism that seemed to capture the imagination and possibilities of freedom for the followers. Vesey was a member of a Black Methodist church that just broke way

from the white denomination. It has been rumored that the Black Methodists help Vesey with his plot. The only explanation for this is that there was a close relation between Vesey's religious views and the views of the Black Methodists. "Reverend Morris Brown, who later became a bishop of the African Methodist Church, was a secret counselor to the group," (Wilmore, 84). Some accounts have as much as nine thousand men ready to move at the signal given by Vesey. The date was set for June 16 1800, and despite dissent from some of his followers Vesey did not want one white person's life spared other than the whites whose position on enslavement was identical to the enslaved Africans. These whites would play the role of Rahab in the book of Joshua in the Bible:

Vesey insisted that the Lord had commanded that not a soul was to be spared, with the exception of the whites already mentioned. All other whites were to be destroyed and the city set on fire in several places simultaneously...As for the killing, not only did they have a biblical precedent before them and believed themselves to be instruments of God's terrible wrath, but they also knew...that once they began, only total extermination, as lamentable as it may seem, could hope to succeed in such an impossible situation. They could expect no mercy if they failed, (Wilmore, 85).

Vesey's plan was also foiled by the betrayal of an enslaved African and on the night of June 16, Charleston was surrounded by a strong police militia. Denmark Vesey was put to death on July 2. However, once again we see the merging of liberation in the revolt of Vesey and the Biblical story of Joshua's battle of Jericho as the foundation of the action in this case. Historical consciousness of African people had made them ready to rebel in the face of oppression.

Nat Turner is another enslaved African whose 1831 revolt was heavily influenced by a Liberation Theology. Turner was a Baptist preacher and he lived in the Southampton

Virginia. Nat Turner grew up on a plantation in which his family could worship with their masters. “The slaves were included in these meetings and it was in such an atmosphere of evangelical piety that Nat came into knowledge of the faith,” (Wilmore, 89). Nat Turner believed that God was preparing him for a mission, and that he was ordained by Him for a special task. Wilmore states:

The most important thing to know about Turner is that he was a representative of an important group of slave preachers who discovered something that white Christians have attempted to conceal from slaves for more than 200 years. Nat Turner, like others whose names are buried under the debris of the citadel of American slavery, discovered that the God of the Bible demanded justice, and to know God’s Son, Jesus Christ, was to be set free from every power that dehumanizes and oppresses. Turner discovered his manhood in the conception of the Christian God as one who liberates, (Wilmore, 88).

This understanding of Jesus is the context in which Jesus must be viewed within Black Liberation Theology. Maintaining a system of enslavement and calling oneself a Christian did not merge with the view of Nat Turner and many other enslaved Africans. Jesus was not accepted as the meek and mild mannered gentleman, as he was presented to the Africans by the Europeans and how he continues to be presented today around the world, but instead Jesus was an activist, an agent for radical social and political change. Nat Turner knew that his destiny was not to remain a slave. Initially Turner decided to run away, however, after about 30 days Nat Turner, being led by the Holy Spirit, returned. After receiving a number of signs that Nat Turner interpreted as being from the Lord, it wasn’t until the sign of a solar eclipse in February of 1831 at which time Turner thought it was time to organize his revolt against the system of enslavement.

The revolt began on Sunday afternoon, August 21. “By Tuesday, August 23, at least seventy slaves had killed fifty-seven whites within a twenty mile radius of Southampton, Virginia.

The plan was to ultimately take the county seat, Jerusalem (now Courtland, Virginia), and there to furnish themselves with weapons and ammunition. Somewhere on the main road between Cross Keys and Jerusalem, in a field in front of the residence of prosperous planter named James W. Parker, Nat and his men met their first resistances...After first forcing the whites to retreat, the poorly armed blacks were dispersed. During the night and throughout the next day, Nat was unable to regroup his men in sufficient numbers to engage the alarmed whites who were being reinforced by militia from neighboring communities, not to mention soldiers from Fort Monroe, (Wilmore, 95).

After hiding out for six weeks Nat Turner was eventually caught, tried and sentenced to death. “His body was delivered to doctors, who skinned it and made grease of his flesh,” (Wilmore, 96). Despite the eventual loss of life, Nat Turner operated with the belief that if you stand up and fight for justice on earth, even if it is not accomplished, you will receive your reward from God in heaven. The key to receiving this reward is that one must take a position on justice, during one’s earthly life. And this is consistent with Black liberation Theology. One must take a position on the side of justice, in earthly form. There is neither neutrality, nor compromise on the position.

David Walker’s Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World, was full of Biblical language. After reading Walker’s Appeal to the Coloured Citizens if the World, it becomes very apparent that Walker believed that God was a God that stood on the side of Justice and in opposition to oppression. In his Appeal, Walker states:

Does the Lord condescend to hear the cries and see their tears in consequence of oppression? Will he let the oppressors rest comfortably and happy always? Will he not cause the very children of the oppressors to rise up against them, and oftentimes put

them to death? ‘God works in many ways his wonders to perform,’ (Walker, 23).

Walker was sure that God was a God of justice and was going to redeem those who were suppressed by the system of enslavement. Walker even critiqued the European Christian preachers. Walker goes on to say the following in his Appeal:

But how far the American preachers are from preaching against slavery and oppression, which have carried their country to the brink of a precipice...I fixed myself in a complete position to hear the word of my Savior and to receive such as I thought was authenticated by the Holy Scriptures; but to my ordinary astonishment, our Reverend gentleman got up and told us (coloured people) that slaves must be obedient to their masters-must do their duty to their masters or be whipped-the whip was made for the backs of fools. Here I pause for a moment, to give the world time to consider what was my surprise, to hear such preaching from a minister of my Master, whose very gospel is that of peace and not of blood and whips, as this pretended preacher tried to make us believe (Walker, 23).

Walker as well as many other Africans took this European ideology as false. This was not a Christian theology. It was a Eurocentric ideology that really didn’t consider the position of God, but rather emphasized the importance of the white man and his corrupt system.

It was a theology of liberation that convinced Harriet Tubman that her God-given responsibility was to go back and forth between the South and the North and lead up to three hundred enslaved Africans to freedom on the Underground Railroad. Legend has it that Tubman travelled back and forth 19 times and after escaping to her freedom and she risked her freedom to return and to rescue her family. For these actions Tubman was appropriately nicknamed “Moses”.

Tubman also guided her groups of fugitives by singing spirituals and other songs with coded messages. If danger lurked nearby, Tubman would sing an appropriate spiritual to warn her party of an

impending threat to their safety. When the road was clear, she would change the words or the tempo of the song and guide them on to the next safe place, (Larson, 101).

Harriet Tubman also understood that a leader of good quality had to be uncharacteristically strong. Larson in her book Harriet Tubman: Bound for the Promise Land, continues in her description of Harriet Tubman's leadership capabilities by stating the following:

Tubman carried a pistol, not only as protection from pursuers but added encouragement to weary and frightened runaways who wanted to turn back. A dead fugitive could not inform on those who helped him or her, (Larson, 101).

This is probably why the nickname of Moses was given to Tubman, even Moses of the Bible, at certain points of the journey to the promise land, had to deal with the Hebrew people complaints and questions pertaining to why he would lead them out of Egypt where they were an enslaved people, into the wilderness on their journey to the Promised Land. As a result of their frequent impatience and complaints God either destroyed or threaten to destroy those Israelites who opposed Moses. Tubman was not going to make complaints, or turning around and option and she gave her followers the options of moving toward freedom or dying. Harriet Tubman presents another example of using Christian faith as a tool of liberation.

Some would even argue that it was a Liberation theology that provoked the actions of white abolitionist John Brown. John Brown was born in Connecticut in 1800. He was against slavery and a very religious man. It was his interpretation of Christianity that prompted his actions on Harpers Ferry.

Brown had planned to raid Harpers Ferry, seize the federal armory complex and take the weaponry and ammunition and distribute them to enslaved Africans in the area. Brown, the 21 men who followed his lead, and they who Brown and his followers captured, were set to raid the federal arsenal building in Virginia on October 16, 1859. It was not long after the raid began that violence followed.

Brown and his men reached the armory but while confiscating weaponry, “Brown’s sentinels had just fired at a relief watchman... with his head bleeding from a flesh wound,” (Oates, 292). It was not too long after this that the word that got around was that there was a slave revolt taking place at Harpers Ferry. A plan that commenced on Sunday morning at Harpers Ferry, had by Monday morning, become a battle in which “...armed farmers and militiamen poured into the town and laid down a blistering fire on both the rifle works and the fire-engine house of the armory where Brown and a dozen of his men were gathered,” (Oates, 293). Outsiders quickly gathered and mobilized to combat the episode that was occurring at Harpers Ferry.

Brown’s raid lasted about 36 hours. Some have called Brown’s attempt a dismal failure. The raid was criticized for lacking organization and lacking the participation of enslaved Africans. Stephen Oates states in his book, To Purge This Land With Blood: A Biography of John Brown, says “Not a single slave had come to Harpers Ferry of his own volition; and the handful Brown had forcibly liberated had refused to fight back once the shooting began around the armory,” (301). Oates also states the fatalities of the Raid.

The raid cost a total of seventeen lives (including the two slaves who had died). Three townsmen, a slaveholder, and one Marine had been killed, and nine men had been wounded. Ten of Brown’s own recruits, including two of his sons, had been killed or fatally injured. Five raiders had been captured and the rest had escaped into the mountains, (302).

John Brown was captured and eventually tried. The jury found Brown guilty of treason against the state of Virginia. After finding out his fate John Brown said the following:

I see a book kissed...which I suppose to be the Bible or at least the New Testament, which teaches me that all things whatsoever I would that men should do to me, I should do to them. I endeavored to act up to that instruction. I say I am yet too young to understand that God is any respecter of persons. I believe that to have interfered as I have done in behalf of His despised poor, is not wrong, but right. Now if it is deemed necessary that I should forfeit my life for the furtherance of the ends of justice, and mingle my blood of millions in this slave country whose rights are disregarded by wicked, cruel, and unjust enactments, I say let it be done, (Oates, 327).

John Brown was hung on December 2, 1859. One can see by the previous quote that John Brown felt it was his religious duty to free the enslaved African. His actions were the actions of a true Christian according to many advocates of Liberation Theology.

Although John Brown was a man of European descent it can be argued that he adopted a Black Liberation Theology. The color of the individual doing the acting is not as important as who the acting is on behalf of. Brown clearly took a position where he was working on behalf of the oppressed and the exploited. His actions were selfless and it was carried out as a statement against the injustice of enslavement. In this sense Brown can be listed alongside the martyred Africans who made the ultimate sacrifice in the process of fighting against enslavement.

CHAPTER FOUR

A DENOMINATION OF OUR OWN

The Creation and Institutionalization of the Black Church and Black Denominations

When one looks at the practices of the African individuals discussed in the last chapter, it is very clear that many Africans who practiced Christianity practiced and displayed their faith in a manner that was different than Europeans. These differences that existed were manifested in their actions and attitudes. Eventually, the differences that existed would not only cause conflict in secular social life but it would eventually cause problems within sacred places of worship. This chapter will show that not only were the interpretations of Christianity different between Africans and Europeans, but the way the two groups went about expressing their appreciation for the religion also posed a sharp contrast, which would eventually lead to Africans creating denominations of their own.

Africans tended to be more expressive when involved in worship. This was something that was brought with Africans when they arrived on the shores of North America. In his book Black Church Beginnings, Henry Mitchell states:

In African traditional religion there were several sub-deity/spirits, now conflated to become the one Holy Spirit. The creative adjustment of titles was easy. The shouts and possessions...validated Christianity in African eyes at least as much as it validated African emotional expression in white eyes, especially at this point (36).

The First and Second Great Awakenings (which was a period of heightened Christian religious activity in the UK and in the colonies of the United States during the 18 Century), through its highly expressive worship style, did a lot to bring Africans into protestant congregations. The Great Awakening brought religious revivals throughout

the US colonies. The style in which the revivals were performed may have provided comfort among Africans.

This was bound to generate additional desire among whites and blacks for separate worship in separate congregations. White church members were not nearly as happy as their black colleagues were with the spontaneity and free expressiveness of Great Awakening-style worship, (Mitchell, 46).

These differences would eventually pose a visible conflict within the worship services. Gayraud Wilmore states in his book titled, Black Religion and Black Radicalism: “From 1750 to 1861 there were more Black and White Christians worshipping in the same congregation, proportionate to their numbers as baptized Christians than there are today,”(Wilmore, 99). But it should be noted that although this took place, there was not any ecclesiastical equality that existed within these “integrated” congregations. In the book Black Church Beginnings, Mitchell gives an example of the co-existence of white and black worshipers that proportioned their numbers.

Founded in 1780, the First Baptist Church of Richmond had the following proportions of black and white in the following years: 1800, 150 black and 50 white; 1838, 1,600 black and 350 white. In 1841 the 387 white members sold their building to the 1,708 black members (mostly slaves) for \$6,500 half the appraised value. Thus was renamed First African Baptist Church set apart. However, behind this neat division of members and manifestly fair transaction of business was a complex set of considerations that raised many issues affecting the early formation of all African American Christian churches (Mitchell, 47).

It was very rare that even dominate Black congregations had the outright control of the everyday happenings of the church. Some of the “complex considerations” that were put into place for the First African Baptist Church and others like it included practices such as having only white members holding the position of trustees, having an all-white Supervising Committee which had duties such as selecting the Pastor and other officers

of the new established churches. It became clear that even when Africans outnumbered whites within the congregation, the executive power and decision-making was held by the white congregation members. It was blatantly clear that the prejudice within the society and the racial divide had found its way into the congregation of the white church. These policies reiterated the point that people of African descent were not seen as equal to their counterparts. This reality was not only relevant to worship but it extended to matters of business and policies of the church as well. The prevailing view about people of African descent as “less-than-white” was one of the main reasons why Africans felt they had to create their own places of worship. This was probably best illustrated in the incident at St. George’s United Methodist Church in Philadelphia, PA in 1787.

St. George’s United Methodist church was a racially integrated congregation in the 1780’s. However Blacks that attended worship service had to sit in the balcony and could not sit next to the white members of the church. One particular Sunday, in 1787, while in the midst of prayer, Richard Allen, Absalom Jones and other members of the black congregation, were forced off of their knees and removed from the worship service. This incident proved to be the final strike, and it led to Richard Allen’s and Absalom Jones’ and other Black member’s departure from that particular church. Richard Allen and Absalom Jones were not just ordinary members of St. George’s; they were licensed as members of the clergy at the first Methodist conference in 1784. They were very instrumental in increasing and maintaining a black congregation within the church. Due to its abolitionist reputation, Philadelphia had a favorable attitude in the minds of many enslaved and recently freed Africans. However when Allen arrived at St. George’s Church in 1786, “there were five African Americans there...according to Allen, black

Philadelphians were ‘long forgotten’ by white clerics,” (Newman, 59). In Freedom’s Prophet, Richard Newman notes the following about Richard Allen:

He preached up to “five times a day”—in St. George’s, on street corners, ‘wherever I could find an opening,’ as he put it. The eager Allen also created prayer meetings for black congregants. His incessant activity paid off. Within a year of coming to Philadelphia, he had built “a society of forty-two [black] members” at St. George’s, (Newman, 59).

In an effort to try to describe the emotion of that fateful Sunday in 1787, Newman remarks:

What must have been going through the minds of white ministers and parishioners as this phalanx of blacks marched en masse out of St. George’s? ‘It raised a great excitement and inquiry among the citizens,’ Allen commented. But white responses mattered little to him. As far as he was concerned, black parishioners now saw that they would never be treated equally unless they formed their own congregation. In Allen’s words, whites ‘were no more plagued with us in [their] church, (Newman, 64).

Surprisingly it was the actions of the Black parishioners and not of the white officials that received criticism. Allen soon began having service for the black former members of St. George’s at a storefront; as a result the Methodist Church threatened to disown them. Officials from the Methodist Church were determined to prevent Allen from starting a church for Africans. He was even threatened to be removed from the Methodist Church. An elder of the Church exclaimed to Allen, “I have the charge given to me by the [Methodist] Conference...and unless you submit, I will read you publicly out of the Meeting,” (Newman, 69). Not only was it made clear that the elder did not believe a church just for Africans in Philadelphia was necessary, but by telling Allen that he had to *submit* to the white Methodists, it also said that Africans were subordinate to the whites.

However, Allen was determined to create a church in Philadelphia where Africans could worship amongst themselves freely and without further subordination.

The place of worship that Allen was preparing for his African congregation “...took root on land he had originally purchased in 1791, thus giving Bethelites legitimate claim to holding the ‘oldest plot of land continuously owned by blacks’ in Philadelphia: the lot at Sixth and Lombard streets,” (Newman, 71). In just a few years an edifice was completed and set up. Allen had converted what was a former blacksmith shop into a new church for his African congregants that followed his lead out of St. George. The official dedication of the church took place on July 29, 1794. Within a year Mother Bethel (as his church would be called) had over 100 members. On September 12, 1796, state officials granted corporate status to Bethel AME church. By the time of Allen’s death in 1831 Bethel AME had over three thousand parishioners.

Later, Richard Allen’s good friend Absalom Jones, who was among the leaders who walked out of St. George’s Methodist Church, accepted an offer to head the St. Thomas’s Methodist Episcopal Church. It must be noted that this church did not claim complete independence from the white Episcopal hierarchal establishment. Although Mother Bethel’s story of independence is one of the most popular ones, there are similar stories that occurred among denominations outside the Methodist Church, which led to the establishment of African independence during services and worshipping.

Other racially integrated congregations began to experience problems at the same time. While Philadelphia was a free state and slavery was not necessarily an issue for the people who lived there. Virginia was a slave state where racial hierarchy was still the order of the day for people of African descent. Dr. Robert Ryland, a white pastor of

Richmond's First African Baptist Church described the racially integrated congregations in this way: "...the instructions of the pulpit could not be always adapted especially to their [blacks'] wants...The interests of both, therefore, imperatively demanded their separation," (Mitchell, 46). Dr. Robert Ryland, at the time was the president of Richmond College and he was chosen by an all white "Supervising Committee" of the Baptist Association to be the pastor of the First African Baptist Church of Richmond.

Henry Mitchell states that Ryland "...carefully avoided preaching openly against slavery and having his pastorate terminated by law. He was equally careful not to preach for slavery," (Mitchell, 48). The black members of the congregation had to deal with a practice of worship that separated their physical life experiences from their spiritual ones. By having a pastor that never addressed publicly whether he was for or against slavery, communicated to the Black congregants that he could not even attempt to speak to their condition and to their concerns. To prevent Africans from attempting to accomplish what Africans accomplished in Philadelphia, in 1838 Virginia Legislature denied permission for any independent Black church (Mitchell, 48).

To establish a Black church in the South during enslavement took a lot of dedication and often times when one was established setbacks followed. Henry Mitchell, in his book titled Black Church Beginnings, discusses the First African Baptist Church of New Orleans, Louisiana. This Church was founded in 1817, and was a racially mixed church, however gradually the African population outgrew the European population and the church received their first pastor of African descent in 1826. At this time in New Orleans it was against the law for Africans to hold public gatherings. The church fought to continue to worship as an integrated church but when it was finally granted

permission, they were under much scrutiny. Mitchell states: "...They could only meet two hours 3:00 to 5:00 P.M. on Sundays, and that under the watchful eye of a white police, whom they had to pay the exorbitant fee of two dollars per hour. They could be jailed if their service overran the rule by one minute," (Mitchell, 49).

When the congregations were racially segregated, the black congregation usually had to have their church legitimized by members of the white congregation. The "class" issue and the "control" issue also played central roles when racially mixed congregations were on the verge of break-ups. Many times due to the social status of people of African descent in America, the mixed congregation's economic strength was held by those of European descent. White members used this as a means to determine the direction of the church. There were many decisions made in this manner among mixed congregations and due to their lack of economic power, and lack of control, many times black members of the congregation did not have a say in majority of matters. The black congregation found themselves conceding a lot more than their white counterparts. This was the trend across all Christian denominations.

The African Methodist Episcopal (AME), the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AME Zion), and the Christian Methodist were denominations that started as a result of black congregants desire to establish independent churches. Blacks deciding to establish a place where they could worship amongst themselves is very important to the concept of Black Liberation Theology. After a separation between black and white Methodists at John Street Church in New York City, blacks seeking their own place of worship had trouble establishing a place of worship of their own. Peter Williams, who was a former slave and a respectable member of the John Street Church, sought to organize an African

house of worship that could more effectively minister to the Black congregation. “A cabinetmaker’s shop was secured for the first meeting place and the chapel was incorporated as the Zion Church over the signatures of Peter Williams and Francis Jacob on September 8, 1800,” (Wilmore, 110). When these members decided to break completely from the predominately white denomination the New York Methodist Conference declined to ordain their ministers.

By the year 1820, blacks made a crucial decision to break away completely from the Methodist church and “...in a meeting on August 11, 1820 it was agreed to form the African Methodist Episcopal Church in America which later became the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church,” (Wilmore, 110). James Varick was installed as the first Bishop of this new denomination and under his leadership the Zion Church grew and provided an alternative for blacks in the North.

It must be noted that the Presbyterians and the Episcopalians attempted to hold on to their black members without establishing a separate Black church within the denominations. In 1870, however, the church released forty thousand black members and they established the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church which became the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, (Wilmore, 117).

In the racially mixed congregations, Blacks often times were made to feel subordinate and they did not have a say in decisions that were taken within these churches. Blacks needed someone of their own and an institution of their own to be able to speak to their needs. The white controlled racially mixed congregations either did not or could not speak to the needs of their black membership. The Black membership had enough self determination to stand up and speak up and create for their needs. This is

precisely what Black Liberation Theology professes; those who are oppressed and exploited must be active in trying to alleviate the oppression and exploitation.

Oppression of Black society was the social order of the United States during these movements. It is obvious that the social order also affected the sacred places of worship as well. Blacks were held as subordinates in white and racially mixed congregations. This racial dominance perpetuated by white “Christians” affected the Christian church by leading to creation of Black created denominations. Perhaps this was the most crumbling the Christian church had undergone since the Protestant Reformation.

Rev. Cleage and the making of a New Denomination

The need to establish a new denomination was something that Reverend Albert Cleage, Jr. took on as he became the first leader of the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church (PAOCC). The PAOCC proclaims to operate out of a theology of Black Liberation. This Christian denomination initiated in a manner similar to that of the AME and the AME Zion Churches.

Not much is written publicly about the founder of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church, but through interviews and various primary documents of the Christian denomination I was able to find out substantial information about him. Rev. Albert Cleage, Jr. was born on June 13, 1911 in Indianapolis, Indiana, to Dr. Albert Cleage, Sr. and Pearl Reed Cleage in Indianapolis Indiana, and was the oldest of seven children. Rev. Cleage believed that young people were the catalyst in revolutionizing the church. The youth was that element in the Church that could translate the Radical message of Jesus into action. For Cleage, the Church had to make the social, political, and economic issues of the community an integral component of its mission.

Primary documents of the PAOCC state that Cleage was very active as a youth in the Christian church. In 1928 the young Cleage was named chairman of the St. Cyprian Episcopal Church Youth Group while he attended Northwest High School in the city of Detroit. And as a college student at Wayne State University he became the unofficial youth pastor at Plymouth Congregational Church. As he continued to grow in age and in ministry it became clear that activism was going to be influential to his ministry.

Albert Cleage, Jr. had his activism shaped and molded by his father, Dr. Albert Cleage, Sr. Dr. Cleage was very active in the black community of Detroit, MI and he was considered a “race man”. To be considered a “race man” meant that the individual never put anything before the race and sought to do things that would uplift the race. “Dr. Cleage participated in the local politics of the city and was very influential in gaining concessions for the local black community. Dr. Cleage, Sr., believed in self-help and building of institutions in the Black community and this was the driving force in the elder Cleage as he became one of the founders of Dunbar Hospital, the first black hospital in Detroit.

Primary sources of the PAOCC show that Rev. Charles Hill and Dr. Horace White were also very influential in the life of Rev. Albert Cleage’s development. Rev. Hill had established an informal school for young socially radical minds out of the Hartford Avenue Baptist Church. The young Albert Cleage was very active and participated in many discussions. Rev. Hill established this informal school to guide young people to apply the principles of Christianity to help the conditions of Black people in the Detroit community.

Dr. Horace White, who was the pastor of the Plymouth Congregational Church, made Albert Cleage the director of the Plymouth Youth League of Young Adults. It was in this capacity that Dr. White saw the ability that Cleage had to connect with the youth. Dr. White was the one who suggested ministry as a profession. However Cleage would initially try his hands at social work.

Albert Cleage received his Bachelors Degree in Social Work from Wayne State University then enrolled into the Oberlin Graduate School of Theology in Oberlin, Ohio in 1938. It was at Oberlin where he worked as a student pastor at Union Congregational Church in Painesville, OH. It was here that Rev. Cleage created a successful youth ministry and it rapidly increased the youth population and shifted the church into a newer more socially radical direction.

He graduated from seminary in 1943 and the Rev. Albert Cleage, Jr. accepted a call to become the interim pastor at The Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples, which was an experimental integrated church in San Francisco. This church stayed away from the ever changing political scene. They came to quickly distance themselves from the social agenda that Cleage would often try to get the church to participate in. Eventually Rev. Cleage's radical Christian vision clashed with the mindsets of the integrated congregation.

In 1945 Rev. Cleage was called to pastor the St. John's Congregational Church. This Springfield, Massachusetts church was one of the most prestigious churches in New England. While heading that church Cleage remained very active socially and politically within the Black Community. He was the chairman of the NAACP Redress Committee, and was very instrumental in the hiring of the first Black principle at East Union School.

Cleage had a reputation of being a youth advocate and that reputation followed him to St. John's. Documents of the PAOCC show that while at St. John's he had established a junior and senior drama program, established numerous youth conferences and he also created a highly successful athletic league. Cleage loved the youth and knew that if they were going to be the vanguard of radicalizing the Christian message he would have to organize programs to develop them mentally, physically and spiritually.

Cleage was also aggressive in adult affairs. As Chairman of the NAACP Housing committee he worked tirelessly to make sure that Blacks received decent housing. Cleage was becoming a popular figure in Springfield, Massachusetts. At the same time this young minister was becoming a controversial figure. One of his greatest controversies in Springfield came from a conflict within the Black Community involving a past pastor of St. John's Congregational Church, Dr. William DeBerry. DeBerry served as pastor of St. John's from 1899 to 1930. Documents within the PAOCC show that DeBerry established the St. John's Institutional Services, the largest and ambitious social program in Springfield. It included housing for working girls, a Boy's Club Men's Services League, night school, employment bureau, residential complexes and a farm. In 1924, Dr. DeBerry separated the Institution from the St. John's Church so it could receive federal funding. Later he resigned as pastor so he could manage the Institution. Eventually Dr. DeBerry had some financial difficulty with the institution and decided to sell some of the property and Rev. Cleage the current pastor of the time, was interested in buying some property and was interested in having St. John's Church purchase some of the property. Documents show that Rev. Cleage had found out that DeBerry had secretly deeded the Institution property to the church in an effort to avoid tax liabilities. Rev.

Cleage initiated a legal battle that lasted three years and in a settlement it allowed St. John's to purchase 12 properties for \$11,000. With the new property Cleage and the church built a gymnasium, athletic fields and a school.

However, this battle between Cleage and DeBerry caused a split within the Black community and also within the church itself. Many members still had loyalty toward their former pastor. Dr. DeBerry was considered one of the major leaders of the Black Community. Seeing that this split existed, Rev. Cleage decided to leave St. John's Congregational Church in 1950 and accepted a call to pastor at St. Mark's Presbyterian Church in Detroit, Michigan.

Upon Rev. Cleage's return to the city of Detroit, the black population grew about 25%. This can be contributed to the migration to the city after World War II and Union labor struggles to unionize the auto industry, membership in the Union gave Blacks in Detroit greater earning power. Also along with the increase in the black population in Detroit, it also was a place where police brutality, unemployment, and housing discrimination were commonplace. As more blacks in Detroit tried to correct the social problems that existed, whites increasingly showed a resistance to change. As a result Detroit was becoming home to constant racial conflict. Under the leadership of Rev. Cleage the Detroit branch of the NAACP became the largest and the richest branch in the country, and he was elected to the executive board of the NAACP. This solidified Rev. Cleage's role as one of the top leadership figures in the Detroit community.

Rev. Cleage's activities became more radical and his messages became more focused on the Black Struggle and how to improve the plight of the Black community. This caused concern for some of the older members of the church. They were becoming

increasingly restless with the “political” direction that the church was taking. The hierarchy of the Presbytery was trying to discourage Rev. Cleage from participating in social-political activities. A sharp divide existed between the sermons of Rev. Cleage; which focused on improving black plight and connecting the upliftment of Blacks to the teachings of Jesus, and the traditional message of the church which focused on those receiving a just reward in heaven after they leave this troubled world.

After a few years of conflict, in March of 1953 the St. Mark’s Presbytery board informed him that the following Sunday would be his last day as pastor of the Church. According to the primary records of the PAOCC, they describe Rev. Cleage’s last message in front of a packed St. Marks Presbyterian Church this way:

He delivered a scathing condemnation of the old-time, otherworldly church and its close-minded, do-nothing Christians that were betraying their people by refusing to use the church as a tool for social change. He then outlined an inspiring vision of a fresh new relevant church, a church with the courage to be truly Christian and applied its faith to the real problems of their communities. He explained that this was a new age and it needed a new church. With some in the congregation inspired and others enraged, Rev. Cleage finished his message, walked out the pulpit, down the center aisle and out the front doors of the church. 300 members walked out with him, (Jubilee Celebration booklet 36-37).

Those who followed Rev. Cleage broke away from St. Mark’s Presbyterian Church and founded the St. Mark’s Congregational Church in 1953, which was re-named Central Congregational Church. The congregation rented out an auditorium of a School for \$50 a week. The church services were described as being really fired up. And Reverend Cleage was bringing up issues and saying things that everybody thought but nobody had the nerve to say. This display of courage and bluntness made the worship experience a unique one as it tied in the social with the spiritual.

Eventually Rev. Cleage and the new Central Congregational Church purchased a church building in 1957 and Rev. Cleage wanted to make sure that his new church would have a relationship with the community that inhabited it. Rev. Cleage estimated that there were about a half a million Black people within a half-mile radius of his church. This area now constituted Rev. Cleage's and the Central Congregational Church's parish.

The relationship between the Central Congregational Church and the Detroit community gradually grew. As he did in the past, Rev. Cleage established youth ministries, established athletic leagues, dances, cotillion balls, scout troops, drama clubs and writing workshops, as stated in PAOCC records. His relationship with the youth evidently led him to get involved with the Detroit Public School system. The Public school was becoming increasingly Black and the administration was overwhelmingly White. Cleage felt that the administration made decisions that unfairly allocated more money to the predominately white public schools. Through constant agitation Rev. Cleage helped reshape and restore the Detroit School System by bringing about the equal distribution of resources, leading to the hiring and promotion of Black principals and administrators. He brought about a new level of community interest and involvement to the church.

It was during his fight against the Detroit Public School system that he realized that there was much power in publishing, for instance, newspapers, in order to shape the public opinion. Cleage recognized that newspapers played an influential role in shaping public opinion. He and his family established the "*Illustrated News*," which was a weekly publication distributed by his church members. PAOCC records state that circulation reached approximately 65,000 weekly. This publication dealt with issues that

affected the black community of Detroit. Rev. Cleage used this medium to effect changes in the hiring and promotional policies of local companies like Sears, Chrysler, Tip Top bread and A&P Grocery Stores.

Perhaps Rev. Cleage's most endearing legacy was the Freedom March that he led in Detroit in June 23, 1963 along side the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The organizers of this march only planned for only 100,000 people, however it received almost complete community participation and 300,000 people participated in the event. Rev. Cleage gave a fiery speech that elated the crowd. This passion displayed by the crowd, mixed with its size of the crowd had many of those in the white business district, police and even some of the speakers who were to participate in the March were nervous and anxious about the possibility of having the crowd get out of control. This march re-affirmed Cleage as a hero in the eyes of the community, brought national attention to him from black America, but it also created a strain between him and other conservative black ministers.

After this march Cleage was very instrumental in establishing the Northern Christian Leadership Conference (NCLC), as a radical alternative to Dr. King's organization, Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC). Rev. Cleage believed that if the NCLC organized under more radical leadership, the White power structure would be left to choose between dealing with them or the "lesser of two evils" and comply with the demands of the SCLC. Cleage's position was that either way Black people would effect change.

Cleage continued to organize as a means to bring freedom and liberation to Black people and in 1963, Rev. Cleage was very instrumental in establishing an all Black

political party and it was named “The Freedom Now Party” and it was under this banner that Rev. Cleage ran for Governor of Michigan and he became the first Black man in the United States to run for that office since Reconstruction.

Cleage continued to use this church as an organizing vehicle for the next four years, from 1963 to 1967. He created an umbrella organization entitled the “Inner City Organizing Committee” (ICOC). Under this umbrella organization, whose purpose was to bring about community control, the ICOC was committed to the tangible realization of Black Power and cognizant of the disciplined and patient struggles essential to achieve it.

1967 was a crucial year in the city of Detroit. That year the city saw violence erupt as a result of the Black community’s feelings of neglect, oppression and exploitation by the white power structure. This was something that Rev. Cleage saw coming. Rev. Cleage was always on the side of Black empowerment; he believed the urban rebellions (termed as ‘riots’ by the media) of 1967 were necessary in order to equalize power in Detroit. This position, taken by Rev. Cleage caused his membership within his church to grow tremendously and the church provided a place of solace for the young “revolutionaries”. This same attitude also caused Rev. Cleage and his congregation to be shunned by other local churches black and white. On Easter Sunday, March of 1967, as a response to the rebellions, Rev. Cleage and the Central Congregational Church unveiled an 18 foot-high painting of the Black Madonna and Child. This was the launching of the would-be “Black Christian Nationalist Movement”, and this was to reflect the Church’s belief that Jesus was a Black Messiah. It was at this unveiling that Rev. Cleage changed the named of his church from the Central Congregational Church to the Shrine of the Black Madonna, and it also symbolized an

unofficial split from the Congregational Church and the beginning of a new Christian denomination. Cleage would eventually name this new denomination the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church. Rev. Cleage patterned his Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church in similar fashion to Marcus Garvey's African Orthodox Church (AOC).

Garvey's African Orthodox Church officially began September 28, 1921 with the George Alexander McGuire ordained as Bishop. This new denomination "...would seek to be true to the principles of Christianity without the shameful hypocrisy of the white church," (Cronon, 178). Garvey was urging African-Americans to worship a God that was in the image of the Black man. The AOC distributed a monthly magazine titled the *Negro Churchman* and by the end of its first year its missionary efforts extended into Canada, Cuba and Haiti. In 1924 at the Association's fourth annual convention "...the opening parade through the streets of Harlem, U.N.I.A. members marched under a large portrait of a Black Madonna and Child," (Cronon, 179). At that convention Bishop McGuire proclaimed that a day was coming in which African Americans would tear down and burn any depictions of a white Christ in their homes. The AOC only had a handful of converts. The majority of Black Clergy never supported the African Orthodox Church. Of Christianity Garvey said:

A form of religion practiced by the millions, but as misunderstood, and unreal to the majority as gravitation is to the untutored savage. We profess to live in the atmosphere of Christianity, yet our acts are as barbarous as if we never knew Christ. He taught us to love, yet we hate; to forgive, yet we revenge; to be merciful, yet we condemn and punish, and still we are Christians (Garvey, 27).

The next chapter will focus on the methodology and development of the members within the PAOCC, initiated by Rev. Cleage.

CHAPTER FIVE

BLACK CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

An Overview

It was clear for Rev. Cleage and his followers that they were going to have to take the church in a different direction. Black Christian Nationalism is the ideology that Rev. Cleage committed to adhering to in order to lead the Black Church in another direction. In the midst of national racial unrest and rebellions in several U.S. cities, in 1968, he published his first book The Black Messiah. This book sought to show where Black Power activism and Christianity intersect and how one was necessary for the other. Rev. Cleage saw Christianity, as practiced in the United States, as a tool used to maintain the status quo of American Society. He asserted that dominant Christian theology promoted in the United States also displayed the obvious good versus bad dichotomy ingrained in the white-black race problem where White equaled positivity, Black equaled negativity and Whites were the primary benefactors of the social order of the Land. In the introduction of The Black Messiah, Cleage said:

For nearly 500 years the illusion that Jesus was white dominated the world only because white Europeans dominated the world. Now, with the emergence of the national movements of the world's colored majority, the historic truth is finally beginning to emerge—that Jesus was the non-white leader of a non-white people struggling for national liberation against the rule of a white nation, Rome...That white Americans continue to insist upon a white Christ in the face of all historical evidence to the contrary and despite the hundreds of shrines to black Madonna's all over the world, is the crowning demonstration of their white supremacist conviction that all things good and valuable must be white, (Cleage, 3).

The Black Church had to be active in re-structuring and re-shaping the presentation of the Christian theology. This had to be done in an effort to show Black people (and more

specifically those Blacks who were active participants in the Black Power struggle) their relevance within the Christian Faith.

Where were the Black man, woman and child in the Bible? Where were the obstacles that the Black Community often faced, in the Bible? These were the questions that Rev. Cleage wanted to answer within his Black Christian Nationalist movement. For Cleage, the Black Church was vital to the liberation and salvation of Black people in America because it was the only institution that afforded Black people the sovereignty to construct an independent power base. The schools in the Black community were constantly in a struggle to obtain the necessary resources just to sustain were failing black children. These schools could not be the institution to build an independent power back for the Black community because they were not independently run and controlled by Black people, or those who had the Black Communities best interest in mind. The church was the closest institution that could create an independent power base for black people. In 1972 Rev. Cleage articulated this position in depth in his book, Black Christian Nationalism: New directions for the Black Church. Cleage states, “The existence of Black people in America depends entirely upon whether or not it is possible to change the Black man’s theology,” (Cleage, xvii). Black people in America had to readjust their concept of God, and God’s relationship to and with them. The church was not upholding its position to stand up for what is right, just, or to care for the needy but rather the church was upholding and maintaining the status quo in America which had positioned whites at the top and blacks at the bottom of every socio-economic scale. Cleage states:

Black people in America have been programmed for the inferiority deliberately, consistently, and exquisitely. The white man’s *declaration of Black inferiority* is basic to all American life. There is no institution in America, no aspect of American life that does

not basically reflect the declared inferiority of all Black people. Not poor Black people, not ignorant Black people, not uncouth Black people, but *all* Black people have been declared inferior. This *declaration of Black inferiority* is the foundation on which American history has been built, (Cleage, xxv, original italics).

Cleage believed that every institution in America, including the institution of the church, promoted the declaration of Black inferiority. Integration, according to Rev. Cleage, was an acceptance by the Black community of their declaration of Black inferiority. There was a need for a new type of Black man who would not just settle for the subtle changes that the white power structure were willing to throw at them. These subtle changes, like integration, did nothing to shift the balance of power. This new type of black man had more respect for himself and his community and saw the necessity of having power within his community. Alain Locke was saying something very similar in 1925 when he wrote the following:

“In this new group psychology we note the lapse of sentimental appeal, then the development of a more positive self- respect and self-reliance; the repudiation of social dependence, and then the gradual recovery from hyper-sensitiveness and ‘touchy’ nerves, the repudiation of the double standard of judgment with its special philanthropic allowances...and finally the rise from social disillusionment to race pride, from the sense of social debt to the responsibilities of social contribution...the belief in ultimate esteem and recognition (Locke, 1925).

Cleage saw the fight for integration as an attempt of Blacks to escape their Blackness. Integration was a means to escape all that came with being identifies as being black in the United States at that time. This is what the Civil Rights Movement was a fight toward. For Black Christian Nationalism slogans like “Integration Now” and “We Shall Overcome” were all cries to escape one’s identity with blackness. The fight for integration was the device that allowed the Black community to hold the White

community in higher esteem. The fights for integration contributed to the Black community's inability to state and defend its own self interest. In conclusion of the issue

Cleage asserts:

To dream of integration, a Black man must believe in the goodness of white people. He must believe that for some reason what is being done to him is his own fault and that he must persuade white people to accept him in spite of his shortcomings and that he must work to measure up to white people. Self hatred is the inevitable corollary of the dream of integration...For the Black integrationist self-hate is inescapable, (Cleage, xxvii).

The issue of Dubois' "Double Consciousness" comes to mind here. For the Black person in America, there is a constant struggle between the African within and the American that one is also supposed to be within. The African and the American values often conflict one another and the inner struggle of who to be true to is constant. The promotion of one is often to the detriment of the other. How can these two positions reconcile themselves is the ultimate question.

Rev. Cleage's position was that the Black church has to be instrumental in redirecting the attitudes of the Black community. The Black Church has to be instrumental in making sure the Black man and woman are in tuned, not just with their Christian faith but in how the African roots are an intricate part of that faith. For the sake of the Black community the Black church has to make a concerted effort to distinguish itself from the white church. The interests of the White community are not the identical interests of the Black community, and one of the church's many roles was to make this fact known. The Black community was marred by efforts of trying to mimic the community of the oppressor. This was also true of the Black Church. After the end of the institution of enslavement and after the post-integration era it seemed that the

traditional Black Church received the same interpretation of God, Jesus, and Bible that was originally presented to them from European Slave masters. This interpretation that was given would never present a revolutionary Jesus or a Jesus that identified with the poor and downtrodden. The interpretation of Christianity that was given to the Africans from the Europeans would never be the type of interpretation that could liberate them from the social obstacles that Blacks faced on a daily basis. That interpretation was not meant to meet the needs of the African.

By adopting a theology that was consistent with the oppressor, and the elite, then those who are oppressed will not receive what is needed to alleviate those societal pressures that are placed upon their backs, and they will simultaneously establish the same value system as those who perpetuate those ills upon them. Within the dominant mainstream theology of Christianity contradictions were perpetuated. One could be complacent about the suffering that takes place on earth and just hope for a better situation in the afterlife. The issues of poverty, brutality, racism, exploitation and other forms of oppression could be ignored and play no role within ones salvation. White theology, in the mind of Rev. Cleage, saw no contradiction in accepting deplorable living conditions and disconnecting the fight for better conditions from the Will of God.

It was the promotions of this theological framework that help black people continue to persevere through the injustices. This method of escapism is what helped many enslaved and oppressed Blacks get through the trials and tribulations of the times. When blacks fought for the right to integrate, vote, live in fair housing, they accepted the brutal beatings, and the murders as a small price to pay for the joy they would receive once they made it into Glory.

In order for the church to meet the needs of her Black constituents and the community a radical shift needed to take place and Cleage was ready to take this step and make the Black Church the epicenter of the Black Power struggle.

Black Christian Nationalism and the Building Blocks of Black Liberation Theology

One of the building blocks of Black Liberation Theology is the examination of what Dwight Hopkins calls, *Black religion during enslavement*. During the time period of enslavement the interpretation of Black Christianity and White Christianity came to be and liberation theology came into conflict with the slave theology. White theology maintained the status quo. It kept whites on the top of the social structure and blacks on the bottom. Africans did not always adopt this equation and often times found within their Christian faith the justification to combat the status quo and the social order. One's position in the social order directly affects how they interpret the social structure. The same holds true even in the case of interpreting spirituality and the rituals of religion. This equation is what brought forth the Black Christian Nationalist movement. Those who followed the Black Nationalist Movement were primarily made of those who were the outcasts of society as well as those who were at or close to the bottom of the social order. It is that position within society that enables them to be most sensitive to the needs of the least in society.

Reinterpretation of the Bible was also another building block of Black Liberation Theology. Rev. Cleage promoted a different interpretation of the Bible to make it more relevant for the Black people. For example, one of the most cherished Bible stories for the Black Christian community was the exodus of the Hebrews of Israel, out of Egypt. It was the association to bondage and enslavement that brought forth a unique sensitivity to

this story. Additionally in the first chapter of Black Christian Nationalism, Rev. Cleage sought to further connect the conditions of the Hebrew people of Israel to the Black community when he asserted:

Generations of Black Christians have found inspiration in the tale of Israel's escape from bondage in Egypt without realizing that the Biblical Nation Israel was a Black Nation. As Black Christian Nationalists in the twentieth century, we do not debate this historic fact, we merely assert it, because it serves to explain the African origins of the basic religious myths and concepts of ancient Israel, and also makes it possible to determine the historicity of specific teachings attributed to the Black Messiah, Jesus, in the Synoptic Gospels, (Cleage, 3).

In the introduction of The Black Messiah, Cleage describes the Biblical nation of Israel as "...a mixture of Chaldeans, Egyptians, Midianites, Ethiopians, Kushites, Babylonians and other dark peoples, all of whom were already mixed with black people of Central Africa," (Cleage, 3). The Israelites were Black people and they were involved in bondage and God made a way out for them which led to the exodus. Black Liberation Theology declares that it was important for the Black community to see themselves in the Bible. Not only did the Black Christian Nationalist movement seek to show the connection between the Black community and the Black nation of Israel but it also declared Jesus of Nazareth, the Black Messiah. In an effort to connect those who were Black Nationalist and activists to Christianity, he also declared Jesus, the Black Messiah, a nationalist seeking to liberate the Black Nation of Israel from the oppression of the white Empire of Rome. This was a contradiction to the mainstream Christian theology that promoted Jesus as a neutral, meek and mild Savior. This version of Jesus was not only promoted in the majority of white Christian churches, but it was the leading perception of Jesus in the traditional Black Church as well.

In 1970, Rev. Cleage “officially” initiated this movement by changing his church’s name from *Central Congregational Church* to the *Shrine of the Black Madonna*. In the same spirit as Richard Allen when he decided to depart from the Methodist denomination, Cleage’s action also marked his departure from the Congregational denomination (which is currently called the United Church in Christ). He underwent a spiritual rebirth and changed his name to Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman. According to primary documents of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church, the new name when translated means “Liberator of the People,” “Defender,” and “Blessed Man” in Kiswahili. Changing his given name to a name in the Kiswahili language also symbolized that African culture and values would play an important role in the reconfiguration of his new church.

These actions were just the beginning. Jaramogi (the title given to the head of this new movement) Abebe Agyeman (Rev. Albert Cleage) had a long relationship with Detroit and he was known as the Black community’s foremost black leader. He had grown up in the city and had attended and graduated from the city’s public schools. In June of 1963, he led a protest march to address the issues of unemployment and education standards, alongside Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and almost the entire black community of Detroit attended that march. He was very involved in local politics and even ran for governor of the state. As a result of what was seen at that time as an unconventional stance his popularity within the Black Community in the North grew. He would be invited places to offer his input on the Black struggle for freedom and liberation, however Jaramogi Agyeman decided to stop travelling and effectively ended his public ministry and

he focused primarily on institutionalizing the Black Christian Nationalist movement.

Upon his departure from public ministry he remarked:

I have been running around the country for some time now trying to talk Black people into power. I no longer believe this approach can work and if we don't do something fast, the window of opportunity for empowering the Black people will close. I'm going to have to function differently from now on. I believe it is time to sit down with some committed young people to build a nation and a future for black people everywhere, (Jubilee Celebration booklet 2003, 43).

In order for Jaramogi Agyeman to begin the institutionalization process and the process of redirection, he had to quickly put some things in place. Re-presenting Christ was very instrumental in the reinterpretation of Christianity. According to a member of 32 years, what made the PAOCC unique to other Christian denominations was

[T]he fact that we feel like the bible is a history book and that Jesus was a black Messiah...most churches are just starting to see that Jesus was a black man, you know, and he was doing things for his people which was the nation Israel which was a black nation, (Personal Interview, 22 November 2008).

This presentation of Christianity was very important and instrumental in attracting the Black Nationalist because it presented Jesus as seeking the same thing for his people that Black Nationalists wanted for their people: a nation of their own free from oppressive and exploitative power of another people. The Jesus that was promoted by the Black Christian Nationalist Movement, sought to show how his people could be liberated by establishing a relationship with God that was based on treating and loving others as yourselves and caring for the needy and fighting on behalf of the oppressed and exploited. This is what the Black Nationalist was fighting for and in this regard they saw their fight and their struggle as not only a part of the Christian ethic but *the* Christian ethic.

Jaramogi Agyeman firmly believed that the members of the Black Community had to be the ones to define their Christianity and they had to make it relevant to their lives. In an attempt to be “accepted” by the dominant white society in the United States, it became very easy for some within the Black community to be willing to compromise their own values and self-interest. Over years, the Christian faith had become watered down and compromised in an effort to make the dominant culture, more specifically white culture, more comfortable. Christianity could be and should be applicable even to those who are seen as outcasts, downtrodden and seen as the ones on the fringes of society and this was not happening. Black Christian Nationalism was seeking to deal with the Black man’s conditioning. Nothing was placed higher than the liberation of Black people. Seeking to eliminate the theology of waiting to receive your reward in the afterlife, the Black Christian Nationalist movement was seeking to build a heaven on earth that Black people could be a part of. This movement also sought to discredit the importance of individualism that permeated throughout the society. All these things found validation within the Christian faith as promoted by the Christian Nationalists.

A staunch opponent of integration, Jaramogi Agyeman aimed to use the separation from white culture as a building block. As in most nationalistic thinking, separation can be used as a tool to empower a segment of a population. Agyeman asserts:

The separateness which the white man has forced on us is now our basic hope for the future. On the one hand it has preserved our African heritage, and on the other it has provided a basis for the power which is essential to our survival. Black Christian Nationalism seeks to build upon this black separateness, (Cleage, 12).

Through separation from white society the Black Church could be autonomous and Jaramogi Agyeman knew that this was the key to building an independent institution.

Agyeman reasserts his stance by stating the following:

The thing that sets us apart as Black Christian Nationalists and gives our movement an importance out of proportion to our numerical membership is the fact that we are unashamedly separatists. We do not want to disappear. We do not want to become a nonpeople. The white man cannot intimidate us and confuse us into becoming a nonpeople, (Cleage, 15).

Becoming a “nonpeople” is what integration sought to accomplish. Separatism preserved one’s blackness, and one’s identity. Becoming a melting pot can cause one to neglect, or even worse, forget about his/her own culture and what makes that culture unique. So in an effort to instill these values and put them into operation Jaramogi Agyeman held the following proponents essential to his faith building goals; one had to be for the liberation of Black people everywhere, one had to see Jesus as a Black Revolutionary Messiah, one had to be a separatist, and one had to work against individualism and for the community.

The Implementation and Institutionalization of Black Christian Nationalism

The Shrine of the Black Madonna sought to differentiate itself from other Christian churches and more specifically, other Black churches. According to Jaramogi Agyeman, many Black churches in the post integration era were, “...grounded in the traditional neo-primitive individualist theology,” and its primary objective was, “...calling sinners to repentance,” (Cleage, 46). The individualistic nature of the Black church was adopted from the white church. Therefore, “...The more highly developed, African, communal conception of man’s relationship with God had been lost when the Black man was uprooted and his history and culture stripped from him,” (Cleage, 46). The Black Church had to get back to Christianity’s origin and Black Christian

Nationalism felt that was about communalism and liberation of the exploited. Agyeman also criticized the Black Church for its adoption of the sacred verse secular theology that was promoted within many Black churches during the 50's and 60's and in most contemporary black churches. The Black church did not see the relationship between the lessons taught on a Sunday morning and the unemployment, unfair housing and other trials that its members had to deal with every day of the week. This situation contradicts the African worldview that Agyeman was trying to uphold. Many scholars in African worldviews and aesthetics, such as John Mbiti, Chiek Ante Diop, and Molefi Kete Asante state that the African worldview did not incorporate a separation between the spiritual and the physical world. They each played an intricate part with each other. Jaramogi Agyeman believed that this concept had to be reintroduced to the Black church. To suffer here on earth while waiting on your heavenly reward was a problematic theological doctrine that was used to pacify the enslaved and oppressed; its implementation would obstruct justice and liberation. The theology had to be eradicated.

The Black Church, because it was primarily controlled by Black people, had to be involved in the liberation process. The Black church could not just be looked at and viewed as a "church". It had to be an institution and would act as the center of the liberation struggle. For Jaramogi Agyeman, the church has to become an institution for the Black community and it had to be committed to serving their interests and work toward solving the issues the Black community dealt with, such as unemployment, lack of proper education, unfair housing, racism, and other social issues. Agyeman acknowledged the Black church as a pseudo-institution, he states:

As a pseudo-institution the black Church has financial resources, buildings, and everything else that a movement needs, but it is completely cut off from the common life of the Black community. So Black people exist from day to day on an individualistic basis. The community in which we live is a jungle because it has no institutional stability, (Cleage, 48).

Agyeman was now faced with making his church an institution that would serve the power interest of the masses of the Black Community. Although it was not fulfilling its mission, the Black church had the most potential. How could the church effectively be doing the Will of God and not actively participate in the everyday affairs of the people who make up their membership? This was a faulty ideology that had to be corrected within the theology of the Black Christian Nationalism Movement.

The Theology of the Shrine of the Black Madonna

Theology of a Revolutionary Jesus and Strategic Separation

For Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman and those who would become members of the Shrine of the Black Madonna, followed and participated in the Black Nationalist Movement. They had to reintroduce a unique theology that distinguished it from the dominant theology of the majority of Black churches during the 50's and 60's. Agyeman makes the distinction clear in this quote:

Our development of a Black theology separates us from Christians who do not accept a theology of liberation. Our theology determines the nature of our commitment. Their theology determines the nature of their commitment. We both say that we are followers of Jesus, but obviously we are not following the same Jesus. We follow a Black Jesus who was a revolutionary leader fighting for the liberation of the Black Nation, Israel. They follow a white Jesus who was used by god to wash mankind in the blood of the Lamb to accomplish individual salvation. When we say "committed to Christ," we do not mean the same thing, (Cleage, 53).

The point that Jaramogi Agyeman is making is that the theology of any church is a good indicator of which side they are on, whose interests they are seeking to serve and where they stand politically.

Such an activist agenda was necessary in order for the Shrine of the Black Madonna, a Christian church, to actively and openly participate in the Black Liberation struggle that was taking place in Detroit and in other northern urban cities, in the late 1960's and early 70's. Agyeman knew that the active participants in the urban unrest that took place in the North had reached to a point where they could not see themselves in the Christian framework and that they would reject the framework. The theology of the Black Nationalist Movement not only allowed Black power advocates to see themselves in the Christian framework but it encouraged their efforts and positioned their actions as doing the necessary Will of God. Black Christian Nationalism as practiced through the Shrine of the Black Madonna was willing to stand on its foundation of Liberation. It believed that what was necessary was to remove itself from the confusions and contradictions of white Christianity and white civilizations. It willingly accepted separation that was ultimately forced upon them by white oppressors.

As mentioned earlier, this particular theology supports and even encourages separation. Agyeman did not believe that the white church and the black church were similar. The white Christian church never risked itself for the sake of their black counterparts. The White Christian church never organized itself to speak out against the injustices that their Black Christian brothers and sisters had to endure. Agyeman and many others believed that the White Church followed the interests of the status quo, and as a result, accepted the "*declaration of Black Inferiority.*" In order to combat this

declaration, Agyeman oriented his thinking with nationalist thinking and believed the self-reliance and self-determination was something that the Black community had to initiate on their own.

However such nationalism had bothered many white churches. Many white churches operated as if they look through a color-blind lens. In many white churches, the issue of race is not brought up and discussed and the hope of the white church is that the elimination or very limited discussion on race could help them project themselves as a color-blind institution. On the other hand Black Christian nationalists did not believe that the White church was color blind because the white church did not involve itself with dealing with the issue of transferring power. As long as the power belongs to the White community, then the White church would continue to benefit from that power. White “Christians” historically have always made up a majority of the white establishment that has the power. It is white “Christians” who establish and maintain as power structure that keeps the masses of non-whites powerless and enslaved to an unbalanced and unequal system. It was primarily white “Christians” who benefitted from the degradation and suffering of Black bodies. This is what has always has been at the root of separation between Blacks and Whites in this country. Whites continued perception of Blacks as sub human has been at the root of separation. However, Black Christian Nationalists didn’t define black separatism as being afraid to associate with whites or the elimination of all white-black associations. Black separation for the Black Christian Nationalist is just a recognition the concerns amongst the two groups are different. Black Christian Nationalism recognized the Black community’s powerlessness and seeks to use the already imposed separation as a place to build power through a reliance and

determination based on self. For the Black Christian Nationalist, separation was crucial to establishment of power in the Black community. For those within the Shrine of the Black Madonna the purpose of integration was to convince the black community that they did not have any unique positions or interests that were particular to themselves.

One of the most significant differences between the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church and the majority of Christian churches in the American mainstream society was the emphasis on the Apostle Paul. According to Jaramogi Agyeman, Western Christianity placed too much emphasis on Paul and not enough on Jesus. The Apostle Paul, according to Jaramogi Agyeman, turned Christianity from a lifestyle *of* Jesus to a religion *about* Jesus. This was very dangerous for several reasons. Jaramogi Agyeman believed that Paul's unique position as a Roman citizen influenced some of his teaching. Jesus was not a Roman citizen, his people were being oppressed by the Roman Empire, and He never had the privileges that Paul received by having that citizenship. For example every Roman citizen had a right to a trial no matter the charge; Jesus was never afforded the opportunity to stand trial before being sentenced to death. Paul had presented Christianity in a way that was not as threatening to the balance of power within the Roman Empire. This played out in the transformation of the faith as a collective, communal enterprise into a more individualistic faith. Paul's promotion of Christianity was aimed at presenting salvation to the Gentiles(non-Jews). Through this promotion of Christian faith the oppressed and the oppressor could both equally achieve individual salvation, without the oppressor feeling as if he had to participate in the liberation process of the oppressed. Apostle Paul promoted that it was by faith and confession (the works of the individual is excluded) that allowed individual salvation (Romans 10:9-13), while

other passages in the bible such as ones written by James, that promote works *with* faith failed to be as recognized (James 2:14-26).

It is the position of Black Christian Nationalist that Jesus was always concerned for His people as a collective not as individuals. In the effort to be liberated Jesus taught the people of Israel to establish a relationship with God in a radical way that transcended traditional Jewish laws and statues. This often times put him at odds with the Pharisees and Sadducees (the elite and Jewish scholars of that day). Jesus would point out the major contradictions in what these religious scholars professed and what they actually would do; similar to the way the PAOCC would criticize the traditional church for the separation between what the Church would promote to the people versus what they would do for the people. Confession was not enough it had to be matched by what was in one's heart which would be displayed in their works. Jesus' open defiance and criticism of these religious scholars and the empires oppressive structure, which often worked together in an effort to keep both groups relative positions of power, is what ultimately had him killed. What Jesus displayed to His people was that liberation came from being true to oneself and moving out of a love that expanded beyond self but to the other. Jesus taught that the greatest commandment is Love. Matthew 22: 37 -39 of the Holy Bible quotes Jesus saying Love God with all of your heart, mind, and soul, and to also love our neighbor as ourselves. By moving out of this kind of Love it would be hard to reconcile with the injustices bestowed upon themselves or anyone else. This love that Jesus promoted would move one to combat those injustices. Jesus as a revolutionary is not only displayed in his radical teachings but it is also displayed in his willingness to pay the ultimate sacrifice. Jesus' death becomes revolutionary in the sense that Jesus would

ultimately sacrifice, His life, for the betterment of His people, the ultimate display of unselfishness.

During his ministry the Apostle Paul was punished, beaten, thrown in jail and ultimately beheaded for his promotion of his Christian faith however the reasons for Paul's death differed from Jesus' death. Apostle Paul's death came as a result of his promotion of the Christian God as a higher authority than Caesar. It was dangerous and even life threatening to promote a higher entity than Caesar within the Roman Empire. Paul's death did not come as a result of showing the oppressed how to release themselves from the bondage of oppression and exploitation of the Roman Empire. According to the PAOCC, Paul showed how individuals could have individual salvation, serve God and look forward to living in a heavenly paradise after their physical bodies succumbed to death. Despite these differences between Jesus and Paul, it was Paul's theology to the Gentiles that was spread. In an interview, the second and current leader of the PAOCC, Jaramogi Menelik Kamathi explained the church's position on Apostle Paul this way:

Our founder's position was that Paul was Jesus of the modern Christian church and this was part of his [Agyeman] problem with the Christian Church, that it tended to emphasize individual salvation and relate its mission in the world to be so of the world, being spiritual, that the church was basically of no value to the real problems and the real people in the world. And so this focus on being saved and delivered and flying away on wings to heaven and all of that, that focus tended to make the church less political, less enlightened, socially involved, its like it created an alternate universe, a spiritual universe where we deal in that universe and the real problems of the real world we really don't get down in the mud, the nitty gritty of that and try to do anything about it...Our founder felt that all of that stemmed from Paul's theology, (Kamathi, Personal Interview 23 November 2008).

The Pan African Orthodox Christian Church's position on Paul has "soften" since the founder declared Paul a sort of sell-out in his early works, the church currently looks at

Apostle Paul as a great organizer and examines his extraordinary ability to create and organize Christian churches and as a man who could create and establish new leadership. Paul is taught and promoted from this perspective within the PAOCC, however adopting a more individualistic, other-worldly notion of the faith, modern Christian churches are able to distance themselves from the social ills of society that plague the world and do not see it as a contradiction. This was a path that the PAOCC was not willing to travel and they had to promote social responsibility as a necessary component of the Christian faith.

Psychological benefits of a Revolutionary Jesus on Black Men

The United States has had a tumultuous relationship with the Black Man before its inception as a nation. The image of the Black Man suffered greatly under enslavement and legalized segregation. Under enslavement the traditional responsibilities that fell upon the man, could not happen for the Black Man. In his article “The Myth of the Impotent Black Male,” Robert Staples states, “Not only was the slave father deprived of his sociological and economic functions in the family but the very etiquette of plantation life eliminated even the honorific attributes of fatherhood from the black male, who was addressed as boy...”(Wilkinson and Taylor, 135). Since enslavement the Black man had his status reduced to being an unimportant figure in the household and in the community, and this notion still finds its way in the social discourse even in contemporary times. Stereotypes that Black men relinquished their responsibilities to their families and communities persist. These stereotypes seek to keep the Black Man in a premature, undeveloped state. In a capitalistic society, being able to provide materially is extremely important and a man’s ability to perform that function has direct implications on his manhood. As a result manhood can only be achieved if a man is willing to integrate

himself into the capitalistic, individualistic, social system. Throughout various points in American history the Black Man has systematically been left out or kept at the bottom of the work force. This position does not allow one to flourish and therefore the ability to acquire basic needs for survival (food, shelter, and clothing) is an everyday struggle. The Black Man struggled to meet the western perception of manhood. A new image of Manhood had to present itself.

The presentation of Jesus as a Revolutionary could provide that redefinition of Masculinity for the Black Man. Jesus the revolutionary proved his worth by choosing to combat a system that would produce a poor and exploited class of people. Jesus, who was a part of the poor and oppressed class, projected his humanity by working to eradicate and a corrupt system, not working to try to become a part of it. A Revolutionary Jesus tells a Christian that their responsibility is not to try to become part of an unfair society rather use your humanity to take a stance and battle the injustice.

This same presentation of Jesus also served as a critique of what E. Franklin Frazier called the Black Bourgeoisie. The Black Bourgeoisie were a group of middle class blacks that had become isolated due to their rejection by whites into American culture and their break with their own cultural traditions which separated them from the masses of the Black Community. In 1957, of the Black Bourgeoisie, Frazier stated:

One of the striking indications of the unreality of the social world which the black bourgeoisie created is its faith in the importance of 'Negro business,' i.e., the business enterprise owned by Negroes and catering to Negro customers. Although these enterprises have little significance either from the standpoint of the American economy or the economic life of the Negro, a social myth has been created that they provide a solution to the Negro's economic problems. Faith in this social myth and others is perpetuated by the Negro newspapers, which represent the largest and most successful business enterprises established by Negroes. Moreover,

the Negro newspapers help to create and maintain the world of make-believe in which Negroes can realize their desires for recognition and status in a white world that regards them with contempt and amusement, (Frazier, 25).

Frazier was pointing out that only a few Negroes could benefit from participating within the present economic system of the United States. Even with the promotion of creating and supporting Black businesses the success of those businesses did not equal to success for the masses of Black people. It could be stated that Frazier's quote points out that capitalism is an individualistic enterprise. It is not concerned with the masses of any one group but rather the few elites who are able to maintain and benefit from power. Individualism over the community was antithetical to the African way of living. Africans always have moved and cared for the community as displayed in various slave insurrections, escapes to the North through the utilization of the Underground Railroad, the Civil Rights Movement, and even the Black Power movement. These were all communal activities.

Jesus the Revolutionary did not advocate the negation of His own culture to be accepted by another. Although the culture that Jesus was a part of was undervalued, condemned and exploited, He never once tried to work against his own culture to adopt a culture that experienced success and power within that society. The Black Bourgeoisie abandoned their essence and who they were, when they abandoned their culture and sought to assimilate with the dominant-mainstream culture. The actions of the Black Bourgeoisie were not masculine, according to the standards brought forth by a revolutionary Jesus. Masculinity was not seeking to be a part of a corruptible system but, where ever that system displayed inequity and unbalance, destroy it.

Psychologically this presentation of Jesus benefited the Black man who adhered to Black Christian Nationalism. They were able to see honor in their revolutionary stance and its willingness to sacrifice the individual for the masses of people. Black Christian Nationalists knew that Black Men had to undergo a process of redefining what it meant to be a Black Man. They believed that their depiction of Jesus could do that. By opening up and bringing one's conscious the revolutionary works of Jesus, those who were actively participating in the revolutionary times of the Black Power movement could see how their actions were in aligned with Christianity. For those who were not participating at all in the Freedom movement, hopefully, a transformation could take place. In his book, Visions for Black Men, Na'im Akbar states that there must be a transformation that takes place before man can fully come into Manhood. He states:

The force that transforms the person from being a boy to becoming a man is knowledge. The boy takes his budding rationality and uses it to expand his consciousness...Consciousness is awareness...Awareness is the ability to see accurately what is. Being able to see accurately means that one must be properly oriented in space, time, and person, which means that the prerequisite for consciousness is to have some accurate image of one's self and the world in which one finds himself (Akbar, 12).

One could not fully grasp their manhood until he was fully aware of who he was, is and how he related to the world he lived in. Any Black man who was not aware of his subjugated role within the American society, or believed in the promises of integration and assimilation, and did not actively work to combat those conditions was not ready to accept his manhood. That man would still be behaving in his boyhood stage. The transformation of boys into men, who were willing to accept their manhood, was of vital importance of the PAOCC.

Sacraments of the Shrines of the Black Madonna

The theology of the Black Christian Nationalism seeks to relate the Christian experience to the Black Struggle in each and every way, and this even extended itself to the sacraments of the Christian Church as well. The two sacraments that most Christian churches practice universally are *Baptism* and *Holy Communion*. Baptism within the Christian faith, traditionally symbolizes the spiritual renewal of the individual undergoing the Baptism. Baptism is the outward showing of the inward change from one who did not accept Jesus as the Christ to one who has accepted Jesus as the Christ. For Agyeman, Baptism had a deeper meaning in relation to the Black Struggle. For the Black Christian Nationalism movement that was taking place within the Shrine of the Black Madonna, accepting Jesus as the Christ was not just accepting him in words but in and through deeds. Jesus, the Black Revolutionary Messiah, is what was being accepted when one became baptized within the church of the Shrine of the Black Madonna. The followers of the Black Christian Nationalist Movement saw those deeds as revolutionary, and in the midst of a problematic racial confrontation in the United States, if one was to accept Jesus, then the revolutionary deeds had to also be taken up and they had to be activated by bringing about Black empowerment. The Black community had to change from its fearful, integrationist ways into committed revolutionary state of being, fighting for the upliftment of Black people. Accepting Black Christian Nationalism was accepting a new commitment to the Freedom struggle. It is a total commitment to the uplift of Black people and the relinquishing of its individualist characteristics such as greed and self-aggrandizement.

The sacrament of Holy Communion within Christian churches is representative of the last supper that Jesus had with his disciples before he was to be carried away and executed. It was at the last supper where Jesus told his disciples of what was about to take place. At this “Last Supper” Jesus broke bread for all the disciples to eat (which represented the sacrifice of His body) and wine to drink (which represented His blood that he would have to shed to redeem mankind). This last supper was seen as the fulfillment of the Covenant between God and his people. For Black Christian Nationalists, the sacrament of Holy Communion, and its fulfillment of the covenant between God and his people had to express itself in a relative significance. Holy Communion is a statement of commitment to the revolutionary struggle. It is not the automatic ticket to paradise in the afterlife but it is a statement to others that you are willing to work, struggle and sacrifice for the revolutionary change that Black people are in dire need of. The liberation struggle is the fulfilling of God’s relationship between He and His people and if you were not able to commit yourself to the liberation struggle then you were not worthy of the Holy Communion.

The Communalities of the Holy Spirit

In the mainstream Christian church God is Sovereign and he works along with and in union with what has been termed the *Holy Trinity*. The Holy Trinity is the co-existence of God the Father, God the Son (Jesus), and God the Holy Spirit. According to Christian thought, the Holy Spirit was Jesus’ gift for us here on earth, to be with us as He prepared to ascend to Heaven to be with the Father. The Holy Spirit was going to be with Christians to aid and accompany them in their work. According to Christian thought the Holy Spirit was bestowed upon the Disciple’s fifty days after the Resurrection of Jesus, it

is known as the day of the Pentecost. This was identified in the Bible by a great sound like a windstorm from heaven that filled the house in which the 12 disciples were located. As this wind filled the room, the disciples began to speak in different native languages of the world. This ability was given to them by the Holy Spirit, and those who heard the disciples were amazed at the fact that they spoke the native languages of the world. This is the Biblical account of the Holy Spirit as stated in the second chapter of the Book of Acts.

In contemporary Black Churches when an individual becomes so overwhelmed and overfilled with the Good News (the Gospel of Jesus Christ), that they seemed to reach a trance-like state, or possessed by an outside force, it is identified as the presence of the Holy Spirit. Often times this leads to a praise of God that includes screaming and shouting, perhaps uncontrollable movements, and might even include speaking in an unknown tongue/language as the disciples did in the Book of Acts. Black Christian Nationalists believe that over time the interpretation of the acts of the Holy Spirit has been diluted over time. The Holy Spirit is most effective and displays itself in communal activity. The Holy Spirit, when displayed through the individual, loses its effectiveness and its fullest potential is not met. The Holy Spirit is the revolutionary power which comes to an exploited people as they seek to change the conditions that have kept them powerless. For Agyeman, the Holy Spirit had to be used as a means to alleviate the suffering that the Black community was caught in. The Holy Spirit is a communal activity. When Black men and women decided that they would no longer sit in the back of the bus they came together and protested the local bus companies in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955, this was an act of the Holy Spirit. It was the Holy Spirit that caused all

those Black men and women to act in unison. It was the Holy Spirit that made sitting in the back of the bus more problematic during that time period than at any other time. It was the Holy Spirit that gave those Black men and women the conviction that they were worthy of fair treatment by the local bus companies.

Agyeman asserted that it was the Holy Spirit that brought forth the new level of consciousness for Black people in the country and throughout the world. Perception of the Holy Spirit could not be wasted on individualism, according to Agyeman and his followers, the Holy Spirit had to be used in an effort to organize and mobilize the masses. The Holy Spirit is the power behind the conviction in the movement for Black liberation and against any form of oppression and exploitation.

Agyeman was also adamant about expressing his discontent about the effectiveness of the Holy Spirit within many churches across the nation. This was due to the promotion of the Holy Spirit as an individual experience and not a communal one. To be filled with Holy Spirit and to have that experience come and go in the midst of a service was extremely inefficient. Where was the Holy Spirit put to use? Where was it used to benefit others in the service? How did the Holy Spirit benefit anyone else in the service? These were questions that Jaramogi Agyeman wanted to examine when the Holy Spirit was present. The Holy Spirit had to be more than just a positive individual experience. Jaramogi Agyeman concludes the matter this way:

We cannot afford to the luxury of just having a good time. Black folks can enjoy being together better than anyone else in the world, but we waste the feeling of togetherness. Just think how many black churches waste the Holy Spirit every Sunday morning, because they fail to tie it to any real, down-to-earth program, (Cleage, 259).

The Components of Black Christian Nationalism and the Shrines of the Black Madonna

Current Institutions

For those in the Black Christian Nationalist movement, everything that involved the Shrine of the Black Madonna was making a statement about your level of commitment to the upliftment and the advancement of the Black community. In his mission to institutionalize Black Christian Nationalism Jaramogi Agyeman began implement a constructive ideology.

Jaramogi Agyeman articulated seven steps in Blacks responses to Enslavement in his book titled Black Christian Nationalism. These 7 steps toward Black Liberation are as follows: *To seek Integration; To cry out in Protest; To strike out in violent Rage; To analyze the nature of our oppression; To develop an educational process; To restructure the Black Church; and to Confront the Enemy*. The Black Community had to go through these steps in order to achieve Black liberation. Agyeman was trying to move the community toward developing an educational process and restructuring the Black Church in order to attain the last step, to confront the enemy.

Jaramogi Agyeman had a positive history with the youth of Detroit. Agyeman always looked at the youth as the energy behind the movement. It was for this reason that he implemented the Shrine of the Black Madonna's *Alkebu-lan Academy*. Of the Alkebu-lan Academy, Agyeman intent was to have Alkebu-lan Academy replace the traditional school. It starts with the youth at 5 years of age. Agyeman felt that to begin at that age, it would not take as long to reverse the psychological damage that may have been done as a result of the negative stereotypes regarding Black people that may have been promoted in society or passed down from their parents within the home.

In an interview I conducted with one of the teachers of the Alkebu-lan Academy in May of 2008 in Detroit, she explained that the Academy teaches the youth several principles that it feels are necessary for their liberation. For example, the Academy reiterates the Church's definition of God as cosmic energy and creative intelligence, and that definition "...teaches them that they have the power within themselves to do anything." The children also learn lessons about the founder of the church and other black leaders such as Harriet Tubman and the civil rights struggle. The children learn specific rituals and prayers that members of the church must also be familiar with. The goal of the Alkebu-lan Academy is to teach young people how to be responsible to their community and how they as black people are also people of God.

The Pan African Orthodox Christian Church also has established *cultural centers* at each of their sites. The cultural center is primarily composed of a book store and an African Holocaust Museum. The book store carries books from mostly African and African-American authors that are addressing and speaking to issues that affect the black community. Each bookstore is run by an "administrator" and along with books one can purchase audio cassettes, video and DVD's that also address issues that relate specifically to the Black community. The Pan African Orthodox Christian Church uses its cultural center to conduct Black history classes and other Black Nationalist organizations use the facility as a meeting place. One clergy member of the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church explained their goals in the following:

We find out a lot of people want to do good things but they don't have a venue, they can't afford space...to run the program is taking up the resources so to find the building to house the program becomes problematic. So our Holy Patriarch...charged us to allow

our institutions to be used in times we are not using them, by other organizations, (Personal interview, March 23, 2008).

An African Holocaust Museum is also located on specific sites of the Shrine of the Black Madonna. The African Holocaust Museum is a tribute to those who were victims of the institution of enslavement. It is a presentation that educates the observer on the savagery of enslavement. There are depictions of enslaved Africans being hanged, beaten, and murdered. The purpose of the Museum is to make clear to any individual who is visiting that enslavement was brutal and highly immoral. It becomes clear that the church's position is that to adequately combat the contemporary injustices, one would need to have a proper understanding of the harsh realities and difficulties of the terrible past that enslavement brought to people of African descent.

The Cultural Center and the African Holocaust Museum have been a significant part of the Shrines of the Black Madonna within the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church for a long time and the Church is currently in the process of establishing additional institutions.

Membership

Although the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church has worship buildings (the Shrine of the black Madonna's) in four different locations (Detroit, Atlanta, Houston, and Calhoun Falls, SC), they consider themselves one church. According to the Holy Patriarch of the church, there are about 20,000 members on roll. When asked how many of those members are active, the number dropped to about one thousand. There are different levels of membership within the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church that are outlined by Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman in his book Black Christian Nationalism. There are three levels of membership within the PAOCC. The highest level of

membership is the *Participating Member*. When one commits to becoming a participating member of the PAOCC they are taking the following oath:

I commit my life to the Black Christian Nationalist Movement, and accept the discipline which this commitment places upon me. I will support its total program by attending services and activities regularly. I will participate in the action group to which I am assigned and will seek other opportunities for service. I will contribute the basic pledge of ten dollars per week or more when I am employed. I will accept such leadership responsibilities as may be given to me, (Cleage, 214).

The next level of membership is identified as a *Contributing Member*. Those who fall under this category make the following commitment:

I support the Black Christian Nationalist Movement. I will attend services of worship regularly and will contribute sacrificially. I am unable to participate in an action group or to accept organizational or leadership responsibilities, (Cleage, 214).

The third and smallest level of member active members is the *Associate Member*. Those who fall under this category make the following commitment:

I accept the Black Nationalist philosophy. I will attend services of worship whenever possible and will contribute regularly to its financial support, (Cleage, 214).

After deciding to become a member one also becomes “assigned” to an action group. There are several different action groups within the organization but according to Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman, they serve to the following basic seven functions: 1) To perform assigned task and involve members in the Nation building process of Black Christian Nationalism (BCN); 2) To help members grow in their understanding of the theology, philosophy, and program of (BCN) through group discussion which leads to increased commitment and participation; 3) To recruit program specialists where needed; 4) To provide opportunities for group fellowships for group fellowship which foster unity

and the friendly spirit of African communalism; 5) To participate actively in the action council and its related community organizations; 6) To recruit new members for the Black Nation through a planned program of community outreach; and 7) To develop a leadership cadre, (Cleage, 215).

This is the work and organization of Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman and the Black Christian Nationalist Movement of the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church. Jaramogi Agyeman laid the foundation of the PAOCC. In the next chapter we will see how the PAOCC persevered through a period of transition, and we will also examine the contemporary and future plans and works of the organization.

CHAPTER SIX

THE PAN-AFRICAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Period of Transition

The Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church (PAOOC) was initiated in 1953 under the leadership of Reverend Albert Cleage, Jr., who later changed his title and name to Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman. As Holy Patriarch, Agyeman was directly responsible for all the programs implemented inside the church up to that point. He had been the only leader of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church until his death on February 20, 2000. What commenced was a period of transition for the PAOOC.

Losing a leader had generally proven to be very detrimental to black organizations of the past. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) suffered and fell out of the national limelight after the death of their leader and first president, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU) dismantled and came to an end after the death of their founder and leader, Malcolm X. The Pan African Orthodox Christian Church wanted to make sure that they did not succumb to the same fate.

In an interview with the current Holy Patriarch, Jaramogi Menelik Kimathi, he spoke to the need of the PAOCC to make permanent, the position of Holy Patriarch.

The position itself was in a vital time, our founder did not start of being Holy Patriarch. He started of being Rev...he finally took an African name and his African name reflected his position within an evolving church. At that point we were the largest, fastest growing black church in America. So his broad vision of being head of a denomination led him to take the name Jaramogi which meant "blessing". The decision was that every person who became the presiding bishop of the church would take that title... by the time the new church constitution was written in 1978 there was a need to designate formally what this title would be...and the decision was that

the title would be Holy Patriarch, (Personal Interview, 23 November 2008).

The Duties of the Holy Patriarch and the Installation of a New Leader

For the PAOCC, the position of Holy Patriarch is the most significant to the life of the church. The Holy Patriarch represents God's "General" here on earth and has complete authority bestowed upon him by God, the complete spiritual and earthly administration of the Church. Whoever this position is bestowed upon, it is for life. For the PAOCC the Holy Patriarch is what Abraham was to the Nation of Israel.

The Holy Patriarch has the responsibility of looking after the soul of the members of the church and bringing forth divine revelation and insight. The Holy Patriarch is one who must often intercede on behalf of the people of God. The person whom this title is bestowed upon must embody a high standard of social, moral, spiritual and ethical behavior. They must embody these traits to demonstrate that they are under a total obedience to God. For the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church the Holy Patriarch represents the intermediary that is in direct communication with God. The one who achieves this title is knowledgeable of the needs and requests of the collective community and he is expected to take care of the well-being of everybody within the church community.

This position's various responsibilities the installation of the Holy Patriarch is a very important event and the PAOCC makes it a service. In an effort to make sure that the PAOCC never finds itself in a position of demise due to the illness or death of a leader, the former Holy Patriarch in time, will publicly name a successor to the position. When the time comes for another Holy Patriarch to be appointed there is a formal

ceremony conducted in order to initiate the new Holy Patriarch into office. This ceremony allows all the church members and community to summon blessings of God and the blessings of the ancestors upon the new Holy Patriarch. This process and this service ensure that the position of Holy Patriarch is always and continually filled. The position of the church is that it is crucial to ritualize the installation of the Holy Patriarch.

When Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman passed away, Cardinal Demosthene Nelson became the next Holy Patriarch of the Church. From August 4-9, 2000 the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church hosted its Fourth Pan African synod in Calhoun Falls, South Carolina, which included a meeting among church delegates to discuss ecclesiastical matters of the church. Cardinal Nelson was officially installed as the new and the second Holy Patriarch of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church. Cardinal Nelson was also given a new name as Jaramogi Menelik Kimathi. At this synod Jaramogi Kimathi read his essay entitled “Synod 2000: Great Transitions,” in which he mentioned the transition:

This transition is the most critical and dangerous one that we have ever faced. The things that we do in the next few weeks will lay the foundation for what our church, our struggle, and our people will become in the new millennium...The position must be preserved and continually developed as a vital institution of our church upon which its integrity depends. This is the first time that we have had to deal with transition in this sacred office but it will not be the last...By accomplishing this transition with uncommon dignity characteristic of the PAOCC, we pay homage to the life and memory of our founder and we also secure the firm footing necessary to carry Black People’s struggle for power and freedom into the 21st Century,(Kimathi, 8-9).

The Synod continued for three days and was concluded on August 7, 2000 with the new Patriarch in office.

Beulah Land

The Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church had been very influential among black communities in which its churches resided. They had implemented programs that were geared toward changing the mindset and the value system of the Black community. Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman initially wanted to show that Black people were God's chosen people. This was done by identifying the Nation of Israel as a Black Nation and Jesus as a Black Messiah. Agyeman also believed that the young black power advocates and their cause was not in contradiction to Christianity and that Jesus himself was a Black revolutionary. In this respect, as a revolutionary church which requires first and foremost "the formation" of the mind, I cannot help but be reminded of Martin Delaney and Edward W. Blyden who advocated "training of the minds" before one can launch any movement, let alone a religious organization. What is being established is what many Afrocentric scholars call "victorious consciousness". Victory from oppression, racism and other various forms of oppression has already taken place in the mind, therefore one is able to move, challenge and act in a way that extends beyond societal stereotypes and prejudices that oppress the individual. This is a revolutionary state of mind because your thinking transcends the boundaries that are created by societal standards and norms and it also is done with the attempt to improve humanity for all. An example of victorious consciousness would be the taking over of the slave ship *Amistad* by enslaved Africans which was led by Joseph Cinque. Africans aboard this ship had an understanding that an intolerable level of injustice was being waged upon them. Rather than go through with this injustice, collectively under Cinque, the Africans chose to risk their own lives and fight for overall justice and the uplift of humanity. These Africans took the revolutionary

mindset that they were more than slaves, they were in fact members of the human family and they should be treated as such or risk their life fighting for that. “Victorious consciousness” had taken place the moment the enslaved Africans decided collectively to take over the ship.

This is the type of change that the PAOCC initially focused on. From 1950’s throughout the 60’s the nature of oppression came from white America. However as time passed the overt nature of racism had undergone a reshaping and the racism that used to be rather direct changed into more subtle forms, such as institutional and systemic racism.

That’s our challenge as a church right now, as long as we were able to rail against what was wrong with the country we were understood much better. That hard line of racism was there, we were understood much better. But today as things have evolved and that hard line isn’t there anymore...We have to switch from railing against an injustice in the world to try to do the things we can do, to control what we can control, to build what we can build. To focus and on self determination and become self reliant people, (Kamathi, Personal Interview, 22, November 2008.)

Toward the end of Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman’s life he had a vision of creating a space where black people could come and live in harmony in the spirit of communalism with one another free from the pressures of an individualistic world. In the 1980’s Jaramogi Agyeman launched the Beulah Land Farm Project. According to records of the PAOCC, the goal of this project was to raise money to obtain and independent, fully operational, 5,000 acre farm. The purpose of this farm would be goal of this project was to raise money to obtain and independent, fully operational, 5,000 acre farm. This is the project was called the Beulah Land Farms project and it was to take place in Calhoun Falls, S.C. According to a clergy member of the PAOCC,

Beulah is what we call, fulfilling our founders vision. Our goal is to have 5000 acres; we are at 4000 now. But it is a place where we can deal with it from an agriculture point of view, we deal with timber, cattle, fish, poultry, organic farming, camp retreats, place where organizations can come and meet because we have 5 miles of river front. A place where kids can go and get out of the inner city a couple days and re-adjust their body systems...so they get a chance to touch nature and grow things...It provides that opportunity to reconnect and also provides economic opportunity so that we can begin to employ brothers and sisters (Personal Interview, 23 March 2008).

According to the vision of the founder, Beulah Land Farms would be a “safe place” where brothers and sisters would live together and work together in the spirit of communalism. This vision is still far from being completed but substantial progress has been made toward fulfilling the founder’s dream.

Currently the Beulah Land farm is located in Calhoun Falls, South Carolina and it has various areas of operations already in progress. The farm currently has over 200 heads of cattle and they are working towards reaching a goal of one thousand. The farm is equipped with beautiful pastures and they are also engaged in a “cow-calf operation” that allows cows from other farms to come onto Beulah Land farms and graze for a fee. The farm is also growing timber and hay which also has it monetary worth. They are growing Pine trees and Hardwood trees.

Beulah has also invested in aquaculture. On Beulah Land 2 ponds were dug; one pond is 10 acres wide and the other one is 6 acres wide and they are filled with water that comes from several wells that are located on the site. These ponds are filled with catfish. According to primary records of the PAOCC, the ponds bring forth a harvest of 20,000 pounds of catfish per week. This fish is provided by the Church for the Church however they have also expanded and have contracted with other companies. Beulah Land is in the

midst of extending their agricultural program and many vegetables and fruits are grown, they also have a developed poultry and goat operations.

The vision for Beulah Land Farms is not just to be a farm land. Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman wanted Beulah Land to be a space where one could live and enjoy all facets of life. There are some ideas that go beyond the vision of farmlands that the PAOCC is committed to bringing into fruition. At the current time the PAOCC is working on many initiatives to take place on Beulah Land Farms. They are currently working on building a Shrine of the Black Madonna worship center. According to primary PAOCC documents, the shrine will be a 700 seat sanctuary. Behind the worship center they will build an activity center that will house a gymnasium and a number of other rooms.

Beulah Land Academy is a future enterprise that the PAOCC is looking to establish on Beulah Land Farms. The Beulah Land Academy (BLA) will serve as a private school that will provide the children with a top notch education. It will also serve as a boarding school which will provide housing and necessary services to its students. The BLA will also admit qualified students who are not members of the PAOCC, through scholarship. This institution will also be used to build bridges for children within the African diaspora. The BLA will be a school that educates African children from pre-Kindergarten age up to the 12th grade.

The PAOCC is also seeking to create a space where the retirement community of the church can also come and live without cutting off ties from the church. They can settle on the farm the BLA will be seeking the skills and leadership of the church elders to play a role in educating and enlightening the students.

Along with these initiatives, a trucking service, seminary school, and the building of a community house are also among missions that the PAOCC plan to fulfill. The implementation of Beulah Land Farms means so much to the future of the life of PAOCC. When asked about the meaning of the land to the organization, a clergy member stated, “What Beulah Land means is ‘Land that God has given us,’ to rebuild ourselves, to provide food and land...we can rebuild our communities as a base for building a nation,” (Personal Interview, 25 May 2008).

Liberation Academy

The PAOCC is also committed to the education of the children of the Black Community, as the founder Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman was very active within the Detroit City Public Schools. At a time when the African-American national dropout rate of high schools is near 50 percent, and black boys continue to be placed within the special education track, the PAOCC continues to display their commitment to the education of the black youth by teaming up with the “Knowledge Is Power Program” (KIPP) in Houston region and they are in the beginning stages of establishing their Liberation Academy. In an interview Jaramogi Menelik Kimathi stated the following:

We have to encourage and expand educational opportunities. Encourage and find new ways to keep people in school so that they might eventually be able to reap the harvest of the development... We're presently in an effort to try to build seven schools in five years in conjunction with KIPP Incorporated (Personal Interview, 23 November 2008).

Another clergy member of the PAOCC discusses the need for the Liberation Academy in this way:

The KIPP Liberation Academy...is speaking directly to the problem of the lack of proper funding and education in the inner

cities...To provide the facilities working in partnership with them that will allow us to provide top grade education for youth in the inner cities who have been for quite a long time under-served and under-surfaced. That is one way that we can take years of growth and investment property that the church has and take those same institutions, the land and deal with it in a different way so that we are providing more service to the communities where we live (Personal Interview, 23 March 2008).

One can see that the PAOCC are using their new opportunities to strengthen the Black community, the group whom they seek to minister to. In everyone of their cites they have institutions available to the Black Community. In South Carolina, Beulah Land will serve as that institution that will directly benefit the Black community. The PAOCC in Houston are hoping that the Liberation Academy that is soon to be constructed is a display of community involvement and activism. The PAOCC of Detroit utilizes its Akwabba Center building as its direct connection to the community of Detroit. In that center there is a free health clinic which is named after the father of Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman, Dr. Albert Cleage, Sr. and it offers free immunizations and referrals. In Atlanta the PAOCC takes advantage of the opportunity and relationship they have with Morehouse, Emory and other institutions of Higher learning by often having direct dialogue with each other, and this will allow some of those members of the community, who may not be able to afford to attend these institutions, to communicate with the institution.

Theological Distinctions of the PAOCC and the Worship Service/Religious Experience

It is very clear that the PAOCC has completely involved itself with the mission of liberating the Black community in the United States but no one should loose cite of the fact that the PAOCC is a Christian organization. Whenever this organization involves

itself in a project or any community endeavor, it does so from their Christian perspective. It is their unconventional interpretation of Christianity that propels them to become community involved and communally related.

A unique theological distinction between the PAOCC and the traditional Christian church is the interpretation of the Holy Trinity. Although this term never appears in the Holy Bible, most Christian churches have accepted the Holy Trinity. This is a statement that there is God the Father, God the Son, which is Jesus the Christ, and God the Holy Spirit which released to the world upon Jesus' ascension. Traditional Christianity has accepted this notion that God has expressed himself within these three forms. God is the Father, God is Jesus and God is the Holy Spirit. The PAOCC's stance on the Holy Trinity is a little different.

...as creations of God we share in the ability to access God's power as Jesus was able to do. For us the Holy Spirit, we call it the Revolutionary Holy Spirit...gives us the ability to make change in the world. We don't necessarily talk about God the Father, God the Son, and the Holy Ghost in that way, we recognize that those components of God, Jesus, and the Revolutionary Holy Spirit as three aspects of things we need in order to be the hands, feet [and] body (Personal Interview, 25 May 2008).

Another clergy member adds:

We don't dispute what other churches are saying, we believe in the awesomeness of God, God obviously is cosmic energy and creative intelligence, creates the awesome things and God is known by many names so we can call Him God the Father, and we believe he sent us a Comforter in [the] sense of the Holy Spirit and certainly Jesus was here to demonstrate how the Holy Spirit worked, (Personal Interview, 25 May 2008).

Through their worship service and their community involvement and action, the PAOCC hopes that the individual undergoes a "KUA" process within themselves. The science of "KUA" is a Kiswahili term which means, becoming what you already are, is

the transformational system that the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church feels should take place within every Christian. For the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church, religion is a developmental process. Religion is not something that is with someone one temporarily, but rather an experience and a realization that takes time and evolves in different stages. Religion should help the people reach a higher level of consciousness and must encourage one to achieve the greatest good for human kind, and that is the way to serve God. It is important to know that God is defined as “cosmic energy and creative intelligence” within the PAOCC. God is a spirit that goes beyond the human realm and therefore God cannot be minimized by gender or race.

The PAOCC believes that looking at religion as a developmental process is something that the traditional churches of today have moved away from. According to the PAOCC this has happened largely due to the Christian theology spread by the Apostle Paul. Jaramogi Kimathi in an article entitled “Introduction to the KUA Transformational System” states the following:

Paul’s new Christianity taught that we reach salvation differently. Paul turned Jesus into a sacrificial lamb- a blood sacrifice- for the sins of the world. As a result of Jesus’ blood sacrifice on Calvary, he preached that all we had to do was utter magic words accepting Jesus as our personal savior and mysteriously we were saved...Adherents to Pauline Christianity did not seek spiritual development...Instead religious life consisted of remembering, praising and thanking Jesus for what he had done for us in hope that they would be rewarded by going to heaven to be with him after death (Kimathi, 59).

As mentioned in the last chapter, the PAOCC has definite theological issues with the Apostle Paul. This is something that separates the PAOCC from western Christianity from the outset. Traditional Christianity as practiced here in the West has high regard for

the Apostle Paul and he is the most authored individual in the New Testament. In a personal interview a member of the PAOCC clergy expounds on this difference this way:

Our theology is not grounded in the Pauline doctrine of other worldly salvation but actually in the fact that our salvation is tied to how we live and what we do for our people in our community. It is a group experience, so for us salvation does not mean I am going to die and go to heaven. That does not mean we don't accept the existence of heaven, but our focus is on living the way Jesus lived and not focus on what is going to happen when we die, (Personal interview, 25 May 2008).

PAOCC criticizes the emphasis on praise and individualism that takes place in most traditional Christian churches in the Western World. The PAOCC seeks to combat this attitude and manifest their Christian beliefs. Where the traditional Christian church emphasizes *praise*, the PAOCC seeks to place emphasis on *service*. Where the traditional Christian emphasizes *individual salvation* (through confessing that Jesus is the Christ), the PAOCC seeks to place emphasis on *group salvation* (through doing the work of Jesus Christ which will lead others to seek Him out). Where the traditional Christian Church promotes and emphasizes *individualism* ("what can I do so I can get to heaven"), the PAOCC seeks to promote and emphasize a value of communalism ("how can we do the work of Christ together so that we can all enjoy the fruits of our labor together"). Where the traditional Christian emphasizes faith alone, the PAOCC seeks to promote the synthesis of faith and work.

The PAOCC through its worship centers, Shrines of the Black Madonna, understand the process of transitioning from one value to the next must be clear and defined. The process must be met with a set of procedures that will make the PAOCC value system clearer, relevant and applicable. Before this organization could build, establish and implement one thing in the community in which they reside and seeks to

aid, their message and procedures had to be clearly defined and made relevant to the Christian faith through ways of establishing the worship service.

Sunday Morning Worship

The Sunday morning worship experience at the Shrines of the Black Madonna are very similar to Sunday morning worship experience at many Black churches, but there are also some distinctions. The PAOCC has a worship center in the cities of Detroit, Atlanta, Houston, and Calhoun Falls, South Carolina. Upon walking into the church you will notice the church's security team. This security team is called the Macabees and their job is to look after and protect the church building, members and all associated with the PAOCC (the name "Macabee" comes from the small band of Hebrew Jews from the village of Modin, who successfully defeated the Roman army from colonizing them and forcing them to worship pagan gods about 200 B.C.). They are welcoming but their presence is a display of how serious and organized the PAOCC is in regard to their message and its work from the outset.

Each shrine has a choir to sing hymns and gospel music. The songs that are sung are traditional songs that could be heard at almost any Black church. An observation that would catch the eye of a parishioner rather quickly is the absence of the cross. The universal symbol of the Christian faith is the cross, so to have this symbol absent from a Christian Church is surprising. The symbol that seems to replace the Cross is the Ankh. The Ankh symbol is displayed on the pulpit, it is also around the necklace worn by many, if not all of the clergy. A member of the PAOCC clergy states:

The Ankh is the Egyptian symbol of life, which is actually an older symbol than the cross. Many years ago our founder taught us about the value of Jesus' life. So we place our emphasis on Jesus' life and not His crucifixion. However we do wear crosses and do

accept the cross because the cross is a symbol of sacrifice that we are willing to take on. (Personal Interview, 25 May 2008).

Another noticeable distinction between the PAOCC worship service and the traditional Christian church is the difference in the visible leadership during service. In all of my accounts the “worship leader” for the morning service was a woman, and during my visit to the Detroit Shrine, a woman rather than a man, gave the sermon for the morning worship service. This is unique especially because it has been well-documented how women are absent from the leadership positions within the Christian Church. The Black Church has also come under the same criticism. Statistics have shown that women generally make up over 70 percent of the Black Church membership but are scarce when trying to identify church leaders. A female clergy member of the PAOCC stated the following of her experience as a woman in the PAOCC:

I have found it to be very fulfilling, which is opposite my experiences in other churches. A lot of our leadership, in this church are women. Even if you look at other churches, although they may not be in the leadership position, the women are what make the church go. But if you go to some Baptist churches, a woman can't even stand on the pulpit. That has not been the case in this church. I fill very fulfilled and I have the abilities because of Jaramogi [Agyeman], to do this. He ordained me, so this is for me fulfilling as a woman, I have not ran into that 'you can't do this because you are a woman' thing, that is not part of our structure. Notice that it is called Shrine of the Black Madonna and not the Temple of the Black Messiah, (Personal Interview, 23 May 2008).

Another female member had this to say of her experience as a member of the clergy within the PAOCC:

...here it is different. We not only prepared the meals, and are on the Mother Board...we could also be [in] leadership and we could give the spoken word. I was ordained quite a while ago, and at my ordination I was able to preach and deliver the word. It was not a matter of was I a woman but it was how has God impacted my life and did God call you, (Personal Interview, 23, November 2008).

Another female clergy member stated, “I feel like there is no gender bias. We could preach or teach. Some...may be skilled in a particular trade. So I thought that the foundation and the structure allowed women to assume leadership roles,” (Personal Interview, 23 November 2008).

It is clear that within the theology of the PAOCC, women too must have their voices heard. From observation the make of the clergy was about 50-50 split in regards to gender. This far exceeds the percentage of female clergy in the traditional Christian Church. The women of the clergy assert the notion that the PAOCC gives them ample opportunity to take up leadership roles and responsibility.

Another distinction between the PAOCC and the traditional Christian Church is the creed that it follows. Most Christian churches follow the Apostles’ Creed which was written after the close of the New Testament. The PAOCC has its own *Black Nationalist Creed* that its members must believe in and it reads as follows:

I Believe that human society stands under the judgment of one God, revealed to all and known by many names. His creative power is visible in the mysteries of the universe, in the revolutionary Holy Spirit, which will not long permit men to endure injustice nor wear the shackles of bondage, in the rage of the powerless when they struggle to be free, and in the violence and conflict which even now threaten to level the hills and mountains.

I Believe that Jesus, the Black Messiah, was a revolutionary leader, sent by God to rebuild the Black nation Israel, and to liberate Black people from powerlessness and from the oppression, brutality, and exploitation of the white gentile world.

I Believe that the revolutionary spirit of God, embodied in the Black Messiah, is born anew in each generation and that Black Christian Nationalists constitute the living remnant if God’s chosen people in this day, and are charged by him with the responsibility for the liberation of Black people.

I Believe that both my survival and my salvation depend upon my willingness to reject individualism and so I commit my life to the liberation struggle of Black People and accept the values, ethics, morals, and program of the Black Nation, defined by that struggle and taught by the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church.

This Creed is printed on the program bulletin that is handed out every Sunday, at all worship sites. It is a statement of beliefs that the organization has. After reading it one could get a sense of the church's theology and how they interpret God's message to man and specifically the Black man.

The Black National Anthem, "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing," that was written by James Weldon Johnson in 1900 and adopted by the NAACP as the Black National anthem in 1919, is sung in unison every Sunday at the Shrines of the Black Madonna. This is what some would consider secular music and should only be sung at a special service of some kind in the traditional church. However, after understanding the revolutionary structure of the PAOCC and its mission of liberating the Black community, the song seems quite relevant.

Where most Christian churches recite the Lord's Prayer that can be found in the Book of Matthew of the Holy Bible Chapter 6, the PAOCC recite their *Prayer of the Black Messiah*. It is as follows:

Almighty God who called together the Black Nation Israel through Thy son, the Revolutionary Black Messiah, Jesus. Hallowed be thy name, May the Black Nation speedily come and Thy will be done on earth as we accept commitment to daily sacrifice and struggle. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive Black brothers and sisters who trespass against us. Help us to resist temptation as we struggle against individualism, and may the black Nation stand as a living witness to Thy power and Thy glory forever and ever. Amen

These alterations or adaptations (i.e., Black Christian Nationalist Creed, Black National Anthem, Prayer of the Black Messiah) to the worship service of the PAOCC must not be seen as a way of ignoring the traditional expressions of the Christian church, but rather as a method that will make the most oppressed and exploited people of this society feel relevant and participant of the Christian experience.

Through observation of the worship experience and religious services at the four locations, the women in the congregation tended to outnumber the men in a ratio that was about 1.5 to 1. The Shrine of the Black Madonna's in Atlanta, Detroit and Houston had at least 100 to 150 members in attendance for worship service. The Shrine of the Black Madonna in Calhoun Falls, SC, had the smallest congregation attendance of about 40 people. I am sure that this is due to it being the most recent Shrine and they are still working on making their presence felt in that community. It seems to be the hope of the PAOCC that in the near future the South Carolina Shrine will be the epicenter of all of PAOCC activities.

There were people of all ages at the worship services. The children who are members of the PAOCC also took part in the worship experience. Some have jobs as ushers and alter boys. The children must also make a commitment to the liberation of Black people before undergoing the process of becoming an official member of the church.

The racial makeup of this church was 100 percent African-American. The ministry of the PAOCC is a ministry that is geared to the Liberation of African-Americans and this is probably the reason for its racial make-up. The socio-economic make up of the PAOCC is not something that one might be able to see by observation. In

many Black churches material definers are presented to get a sense of one's social economic status, however in the PAOCC about 80 percent of the membership during my observations wore black and red colors to church. This "uniform" was brought forth to bring a sense of unity between the members of the Church. It also serves as a means to eliminate material definers of social status. If everyone is wearing red shirts or blouses and black pants or skirts then it makes it that much harder to make a discriminatory fashion statement according to wealth.

Thoughts from the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church Membership

In my research I handed out surveys to members of the PAOCC and my return success of the surveys were slightly under 20 percent. However from this small percentage I was still able to draw some conclusions. Of the surveys that were returned, two-thirds of them were female. The age ranged from the youngest identified at age 20 to the oldest identified at age 77. One hundred percent of the respondents identified themselves as Christians. When asked about their personal economic status, the responses varied with 16% of the respondents making less than \$10,000 a year, 33% stated they made over \$50,000 a year. 22% stated that they made between \$10-30,000 a year, and another 22% stated they made between \$30-50,000 a year. 5% of the respondents chose not to identify their personal income.

Two out of every three respondents felt that political, social and economic position in society can influence the interpretation of Christ's message. The same ratio agreed that Christianity is a religion that should show the connection and relevance between the spiritual realm of the after live and the social realm of this life. 55% of the

PAOCC respondents felt that generally Christianity as promoted and practiced in this country did not meet that criteria.

100% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that places of worship should have various programs/workshops open to the public community it reside in. 88% of the PAOCC respondents felt that their places of worship was and is currently very active in the community in which it resides.

Even from looking at the results from the surveys, one can get a sense of how important community involvement and social responsibility is to the theological construction of Christianity inside the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church.

Is the PAOCC Black Liberation Theology in Praxis?

Does the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church meet the criteria that have been set up by Black Liberation Theologians as a church that puts this theology into practice?

The mission of the PAOCC was stated by a clergy member as follows:

Our mission in a broad sense is to restore this world to submission to God's Will and that's a huge overreaching mission, but more specifically there are prison ministries and women ministries and all that. Our ministry specifically is to the victims of an on going Black holocaust, so that's where we focus our attention. Of course our doors are open to anyone but that's the main focus of our churches work...We don't want to just have a good time on Sunday and forget about what's going on every other day so our mission is really to be *service Christians* that use God's power to deal with the very real problems that people have, (Personal Interview, 23 November 2008).

Those who are descendents of those who suffered through the Black holocaust, African enslavement, are with whom the primary focus of the organization lays.

As mentioned in the first chapter, Dwight Hopkins stated that the first step in building a Black Liberation Theology is an examination of Black Religion during the

times of Enslavement. There has to be an acknowledgement that Africans had a different religious experience. A lot of their experience was influenced from African memory that the enslaved Africans brought with them over to the West.

One characteristic that Africans brought over with them to the West was the denial of separation of the secular and sacred world. Black Religion during enslavement tied their spiritual faith with their secular reality. The theology of Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey, Nat Turner, and Harriet Tubman would not allow them to separate their Christian duties from their secular duties. They were tied together and were one in the same. Commitment to the cause demanded their active participation in the liberation processes.

The Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church (PAOCC) continues this tradition. The PAOCC does not seek to separate one's spiritual duties from their secular responsibilities. According to the PAOCC, one can not uphold the Christian faith without letting that faith effect the way that interact and behave in the world. One's faith should direct how they move in a troublesome world. A Clergy member of the PAOCC stated the following:

Jesus in Luke 4:18-19 he's talking about what his mission is all about. The Spirit of the Lord is upon us to preach good news to the poor, liberation for those who change, recovery of sight to the blind. Everything he was talking about was affecting people's daily life situations. And so that is our read of Christianity. We don't see ourselves doing anything beyond what Jesus was calling his followers to do, (Personal Interview, 23 November 2008).

The second building block of a Black Liberation Theology according to Hopkins is the interpretation or rather the re-interpretation of the Bible. Black Liberation Theology holds to the position that God is not a neutral God. God is always on the side

of those who are oppressed and exploited. God's work can be seen in the people's struggle to alleviate oppression and exploitation. By focusing on the social conditions of the African-American community and trying to eliminate the vestiges of racism, through the Nationalist concepts of self-determination and self-reliance, the PAOCC makes a clear statement that the work of God is to work on the side of those who are oppressed.

Through their philosophy of Black Christian Nationalism one can also see how their interpretation of the Bible differs from that of the traditional Christian church. The PAOCC believes and promotes Jesus to be a Man of African descent. Jesus and the Hebrew Nation of Israel would be considered an African people by American racial standards. This directly contradicts that many depictions in the West, more specifically in the United States, that characterize Jesus and the Nation of Israel as Europeans. The PAOCC support this claim by looking at the make up of the Nation of Israel of the Old Testament beginning in the book of Genesis. Jesus, being of African ancestry and of the Black Nation Israel, is interpreted by the Black Christian Nationalist philosophy as a Black Nationalist, who while here on earth was fighting for the liberation of that black nation which was being oppressed by the white Roman Empire. This ideology led to Jaramogi Agyeman and the Black Christian Nationalist's unveiling of the 18 foot painting of the Black Madonna holding her black baby Jesus, on Easter Sunday in 1967 at the Detroit Shrine of the Black Madonna. This also led to the renaming of their worship centers to the Shrine of the Black Madonna.

The advocacy of this philosophy by the PAOCC was important to the Black community because it related the work of Jesus to the work of many young Black Power advocates of the 1970's. Having attained knowledge of this time period is what Dwight

Hopkins identifies as the third building block of Black Liberation Theology. Those twenty years between 1950-70 is a time period that the United States came face to face with the impact of racism and its influence on its Black citizens. The PAOCC came into existence during this time period and what the Black community had to endure during this time period is still the force that drives the religious organization today. The PAOCC recognizes that racism is not as blatant as it once was but its remnants and legacy still affect the Black community to this day. The philosophy of Black Christian Nationalism encourages self help. It is through self help that the Black community will gain not only the respect of others but independence for themselves. According to this philosophy the Black community has to build itself up economically and political through racial solidarity and through a promotion of communalism. Fighting for the right to be Human by any means necessary was the revelation of God's work in America.

Alongside the notion of political and economic uplift, there was an advocacy of reconnecting with one's African heritage. The PAOCC is highly sensitive to the mental damage that the blatant racism of the 1950's has caused. The effects of that damage are still in the minds of many people of African descent. The organization believes that a true knowledge of the contributions of Africa and her people will lead to a new knowledge and better appreciation of Black people. The PAOCC offers Black History and appreciation classes to the community in an effort to do just that.

Method is the fourth building block of Black Liberation according to Dwight Hopkins. How does one display and carry out a liberation theology? The PAOCC carries out its Liberation theology in different ways. The PAOCC uses their Black Christian Nationalism as the center of Nation building. Liberation for the PAOCC is

having the ability to create, own and define for themselves. This liberative process is occurring on Beulah Land farms in Calhoun Falls, S.C. where there is hope of establishing a viable community. As stated earlier, they are seeking to build a school, a worship center, living quarters along side the production farm. In Houston they are building an educational institution to make sure that the Black Community can have a chance of obtaining a first class education. The Black community suffers disproportionately from many health factors. In Detroit the PAOCC has a free health clinic for those in the community that can't afford medical insurance. These are just some of the ways that the PAOCC is carrying out a Black Liberation Theology. They are seeking to liberate the Black community from the bondages of inequality and disadvantages in education, health care, housing, employment and many other areas of life. Christianity for the PAOCC is the motivation toward re-establishing the Black Community. It is their Christian duty to uplift and do for the least of their brethren, just like it was Jesus' mission to free the Nation of Israel from their oppression by introducing them to a new radical way to establish a relationship with God.

Is the PAOCC Afrocentric?

Although the PAOCC seems to meet the criteria of a Black Liberation Theology, this research also wanted to examine the PAOCC through and African-centered scope and determine whether or not the religious organization is Afrocentric. According to Molefi Asante, in his book, *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change*, Afrocentricity is a "...mode of thought and action in which the centrality of African interests, values, and perspectives predominate. In regards to theory, it is the placing of African people in the center of any analysis of African phenomena," (Asante, 2). Although the Pan African

Orthodox Christian Church has made it clear that it seeks to minister specifically to the needs of people of African descent, the question of whether it is Afrocentric or not can be argued.

Jaramogi Agyeman understood that the needs and interests of Black people were not at the forefront of American society. Before Agyeman took on the task of establishing the PAOCC and the Black Christian Nationalist Movement, he recognized from his own experience, within the Congregational Church, that the needs of Blacks were not ingrained into the religious experience of Blacks. This is what inspired him to create the religious institution, and this institution's focus was going to be on people of African descent that resided within American shores. Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman had an understanding and an appreciation of African culture. Pouring libations and venerating the ancestors is an intricate component of the PAOCC religious/worship experience. However this alone is not enough to make a decision on whether it is Afrocentric. In her article "*Ma'at, Afrocentricity, and the Critique of African American Drama,*" Nilgün Anadolu-Okur identifies nine assumptions that are presented as criteria for proper evaluation of African American drama. Although her article focuses on drama, it can be applied to any African American enterprise or discourse. The discourse which the PAOCC upholds can be analyzed through a similar criterion. These assumptions are the foundations of the Afrocentric critical method and involve generative possibilities for other ways of looking at African American discourse.

The first assumption is to locate one's *discourse in the Historical Literatures/Oratures of the Particular People*. Does the creator of the discourse, or the speaker have a historical African-American consciousness? Agyeman certainly had a

historical knowledge of African people. His knowledge allowed him to identify and promote the African presence in the Bible at a time when it was seen as controversial and blasphemous. The Black Nationalist Movement knew that they had to resurrect the many truths that were told within the Bible but were kept secret from the masses of Black people. Agyeman presented a Christian teaching from which the European influence was absent.

The second assumption that must take place in an analysis of African American discourse is, *Transcending Eurocentric Negations of the People's Culture*, which is also within the PAOCC. The PAOCC had to actively combat the stereotypes and negative images that were assigned to Blacks as a result of discriminatory perspectives of the European educational system. In order for this to take place the PAOCC had to have enough understanding of African traditions to move beyond those common assumptions made by Europeans. This was done by offering up counter arguments such as Jesus the Black Messiah.

The third assumption for proper analysis of discourse is the *Themes of Transcendent Discourse*. This seeks to know the relationship between humans (human relations), the being and the supernatural and human relationship to one's self. The PAOCC promotes separateness of space and theology but this does not come out of a sense of dislike to the European. Although it dislikes what the European power structure does to the African, its promotion of separation is fostered to encourage a sense of unity between African people, and establish a sense of self-determination and self-reliance to execute empowerment. The PAOCC also believes that anyone and everyone can potentially possess God-like attributes. God is defined as a cosmic energy and creative

intelligence and it is professed that everyone, regardless of age, race or gender, can possess these traits. Consequently, the relationship between the human and the self is very critical. Each individual must be able to be honest and even critical of one's self when necessary, if they are to achieve their fullest potential as a worthy being.

Anadolu-Okur's fourth assumption is the presentation of the *Principal Contexts of Resistance, Liberation and Action*. She states, "The aim of this issue is the discussion...of several themes, including the following: a) resistance to oppression, b) liberation from stereotypes, and c) action in anticipation of a reaction," (Ziegler, 147). The Black Christian Nationalist movement through institutionalizing the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church sought to tackle these three principles. By being active and working toward building a nation for Black people, the PAOCC was actively resisting oppression. It is through this teaching that members of the PAOCC become liberated from the stereotypes while simultaneously creating the necessary instruments to combat any anticipation of a reaction.

The fifth assumption is *Addressing the Work to a Particular Audience*. In essence, what is the discourse adopted by the PAOCC saying to the African-American community? The PAOCC is trying to tell the African-American community that through the Christian ethic of self-determination, a re-evaluation and appreciation of African history and culture, the African in America could change his or her spiritual and psychological status. This turns into the sixth assumption of *Employing the Cultural Mythoforms that Inform Creative Expression*. Mythoforms are figures and/or myths that are used within one's discourse to help interpret the social and political reality. For example, the revolutionary, liberative spirit that existed within the black community in

the 1970's came to use figures like Malcolm X and Harriet Tubman as cultural mythoforms. The PAOCC uses the story of the exodus in the Bible and the life of Jesus as examples of African people who sought out and achieved physical and spiritual liberation. Hope, salvation, endurance, and perseverance are some of the qualities that are engrained in the messages of the PAOCC leadership.

The Social/Political Context Which Shapes the Work is the seventh assumption that must be examined in determining if the discourse is Afrocentric. Anadolu-Okur states that the leader who is informed with Afrocentric rhetoric "...must be cognizant of the political era, the social context, and the prevailing issues," (Ziegler, 148). Agyeman was a community man and had a reputation of being so before he created the PAOCC. He was extremely aware of the times he was involved in which influenced the components and themes within the religious organization. He sought to create a structure that would not only combat the conditions of the 1960's but through the structure created, the circumstances which led to the struggle for civil rights could never reappear and affect black people the way it did.

Lyrical Qualities of the Work is the eighth assumption that is to be examined. The substance of who the people are and what they seek are expressed in songs, poems, dance, and other rhythmic forms. Songs that are sung within the PAOCC worship services are songs that come from traditional Black Christian Churches. These songs still express a need to be free from sin, free from judgment and free from oppression. The PAOCC also incorporates the singing of the Black National Anthem, "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing" and recitation of a Black Nationalist Creed. This is a statement of their desires and expectations.

The last assumption that Anadolu-Okur discusses in her work is the *Ideas of Unity and Harmony* present within the African endeavor. The PAOCC emphasizes this notion uniquely through its promotion of cohesiveness and separation. Because there seems to be so much disunity within the African American community itself, the PAOCC promotes a necessity for African-Americans to unite among themselves and create a sense of harmony within their own community first. The PAOCC's position is that unity between the races cannot take place until there is unity amongst the race.

Jaramogi Agyeman used discourse that he believed could present Christianity in its true light and further contribute to freedom movement. In a sermon entitled "An Epistle to Stokely," which he published in The Black Messiah, in an effort to convince Stokely Carmichael and other young freedom fighters to join his movement so they may have organizational support, he states:

To Stokely and the young men of SNCC, I would just say briefly that the Christian religion that you are rejecting, that you are so opposed to, is a slave Christianity that has no roots in the teachings of the Black Messiah. You could be ordained in *this* Church as civil rights workers if we could somehow do away with the distinctions which exist in the people's minds between what's religious and what's not religious. To ordain civil rights workers for civil rights work would declare that the Christian Church believes that this is what Christianity is all about, that individuals who give their lives in the struggle for human freedom are Christian and that the Movement is not only Christian, but that the Movement is the Church.

The Black Church must recapture the loyalty of the black youth if it is to be significant in the black revolution and it must find a way to save its brave young men from death on some distant battlefield. I read from the Gospel of Mark 3:27. 'But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house.' When they draft all of the cream of our young men, whether they kill them in Vietnam or put them in the penitentiary, they have bound our strong men. Then indeed they may at their pleasure plunder our house, (Cleage, 46).

In this sermon Jaramogi Agyeman wants to let Stokely Carmichael and other SNCC members know that their work is in alignment with the PAOCC's Christian ethic.

The discourse adopted by the PAOCC seems to meet most of the critical elements needed for an African-centered suggested by scholars such as Molefi Kete Asante and Nilgün Anadolu-Okur. However whether the church itself is Afrocentric remains to be argued. My research shows that the PAOCC has the unique capability to be Christ-centered and have its ministry African focused. Although the prevailing Afrocentric thought suggests that one has to reject Christianity as a faith to be Afrocentric, the PAOCC's structure evidences that this position is open for debate. The proper argument is that what has to be rejected is actually the prevailing mainstream Eurocentric Christian theology. The PAOCC rejects this theology and promotes one that is centered on an African Messiah, and the role of the African peoples at the foundation of the Nation of Israel. The Pan African Orthodox Christian Church is, as most Christian Churches are, *Christ-centric* while simultaneously focusing and directing their ministry to the Black Community. The PAOCC acknowledges that Israel was a Black/African people and that Jesus had African Ancestry. It is possible that his upbringing and the various African influences in His life help Him to profess and practice a certain way to carry out one's life essence.

Conclusion

If one were to use James Cone's definition of a Black Theology of Liberation, which maintains the position that Christianity must be used as a force of societal change where the status quo equates to the oppression and exploitation of a people, then the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church falls in line with this thought. They use their Christianity as a means to improve the conditions of the black community. They also seem to meet the criteria set by Dwight Hopkins four building blocks, as I showed earlier in the chapter. My research shows that the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church is a Christian denomination and organization that puts Black Liberation Theology into practice. If one sought out to know what a Black Theology of Liberation looked like, felt like and what its tangible implications are, the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church would stand as a great indicator.

This research shows that there are still significant groups of people who feel that a Black Liberation Theology is vital and necessary in America. It is a theology that still continues to exist and manifest itself today. The Pan African Orthodox Christian Church is proof of this. This research also displays what Black Liberation Theology looks like in a tangible sense. The PAOCC allows one to see, feel, and touch Black Liberation Theology.

The Christian theology that is practiced by the PAOCC is a theology that centers on liberating the oppressed from the oppressor. Christianity is seen as a liberative tool and the utilization of the faith in this manner is similar to the way Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey, Nat Turner, John Brown and Harriet Tubman utilized their faith. The

faith of these individuals put this faith into action. Action is an integral component of the Christian ethic.

The PAOCC promoted the importance of African culture to its membership and also take pride in their African ancestry. This is parallel to what the Nation of Islam (NOI) was doing in the 1950's and 60's. The NOI was ministering specifically to the black community by re-presenting and re-interpreting the Islamic faith and the PAOCC did the same thing by re-presenting and re-interpreting the Christian faith.

The PAOCC is still adhering to the theology they promoted since their inception in 1953. It is still ministering specifically to the black community, and promoting liberation on behalf of the oppressed. The PAOCC believes that the church can be the epicenter of the Nation building process for Black people in the spirit of communalism. The PAOCC in the 21st century is moving toward institution building. They are either currently or have committed to building educational and religious institutions. They continue to develop their Beulah Land farm and will also be building living facilities for their senior citizen membership.

Black people are not monolithic, not all church groups see, or even want to see the importance of a Black Theology of Liberation. Even those who see the importance in the theology may not see it the same way as practiced by the PAOCC. My research is not suggesting that this is the only way a Black Theology of Liberation can function, but rather to suggest that PAOCC's discourse and their advocacy for a re-evaluation of Christian values and teaching does qualify as one way of adhering to and administering a Black Theology of Liberation.

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APPENDIX

Excerpts of Position Statement on Black Power
National Council of Negro Churchmen

We, an informal group of Negro churchmen in America, are deeply disturbed about the crisis brought upon our country by historic distortions of important human realities in the controversy about "black power." What we see shining through the variety of rhetoric is not anything new but the same old problem of power and race which has faced our beloved country since 1619.

...The conscience of black men is corrupted because having no power to implement the demands of conscience, the concern for justice in the absence of justice becomes a chaotic self-surrender. Powerlessness breeds a race of beggars. We are faced with a situation where powerless conscience meets conscienceless power, threatening the very foundations of our Nation.

We deplore the overt violence of riots, but we feel it is more important to focus on the real sources of these eruptions. These sources may be abetted inside the Ghetto, but their basic cause lies in the silent and covert violence which white middle class America inflicts upon the victims of the inner city.

...In short, the failure of American leaders to use American power to create equal opportunity in life as well as law, this is the real problem and not the anguished cry for black power.

...Without the capacity to participate with power i.e., to have some organized political and economic strength to really influence people with whom one interacts, integration is not meaningful.

...America has asked its Negro citizens to fight for opportunity as individuals, whereas at certain points in our history what we have needed most has been opportunity for the whole group, not just for selected and approved Negroes.

*...We must not apologize for the existence of this form of group power, for we have been oppressed as a group not as individuals. We will not find our way out of that oppression until both we and America accept the need for Negro Americans, as well as for Jews, Italians, Poles, and white Anglo-Saxon Protestants, among others, to have and to wield group power.**

*Published in the New York Times July 31, 1966, passage taken from Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*. 1967, p.48-49

March 23, 2008
Interview with Clergy Member #10
Shrine of the Black Madonna
Pan African Orthodox Christian Church
Atlanta, GA

Weldon McWilliams: Cardinal (name left out intentionally), what is the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church?

Clergy #10: Okay, the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church is the denominational name, an independent protestant denomination, and the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church represents that denominational name.

Weldon McWilliams: Ok, and did the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church stem from another Christian denomination?

Clergy #10: Yeah, basically the history, if you will, of how we came to be the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church, we come out of the St. Marks United Presbyterian Church. That was one of the streams in which our founder, Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman was apart of, and then we, in 1953, we became the Central Congregational Church, then in 1967, the Shrines of the Black Madonna, and then in 1972, the Black Christian Nationalist Movement, then the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church became a separate denomination, so we kind of come out of that whole stream of some association with, affiliation with the United Presbyterian Church, which is now the UCC, the United Church of Christ. So we have an affiliation with the United Church of Christ, because our founder, Albert B. Cleage, which I'll also be using the name interchangeably (with) Jaramogi Abebe, was ordained under that denomination banner, if you will.

WM: What makes the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church unique to other Christian denominations?

C10: I think what makes the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church unique [umm]. When looking at other denominations, if you will, other Christian groups, is that we try to look at Christianity before Constantine, before Christianity became kind of like co-opted, if you will, by the state, became a state religion. We try to look at Christianity and take it back to its African roots. What influence did African people have upon the foundations of Christian faith, and in so doing, that kind of separates us, not in a negative sense, but it just makes it, it makes us a little bit different because we try to stay true, as much as we can to the African influences of Christianity and be able to embrace that even with in the context of North America.

WM: What is the mission of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church?

C10: We would say that our mission is to return Black people back to their African glory, the histories of our African past. It is also a mission of liberating Black people. That is to change the conditions that black people live in and around the world, to one that really represents what God really intended for us as a group of people. That's not to be at the bottom of every level in society, but have our proper place in this world, with dignity, power, respect, and the ability to, again, not only survive but to flourish.

WM: And how does the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church utilize Christianity as a tool for liberation for Black people?

C10: Okay that's a good question. We utilize Christianity as a tool for liberating black people in that we look at Jesus as the Black Messiah. We look at Jesus as, if you will, an example of what the power of God, Holy Spirit, looks like in daily involvement. We

look at Jesus and say ‘okay’...we don’t look at Jesus and say ‘Jesus died for our sins’ but that Jesus represents the ultimate level of commitment and sacrifice that one must be willing to give for that which one believes and as black people we can really anchor ourselves on this particular image, be it male or female, that these qualities, these attributes that Jesus had, that we are bold enough to proclaim that we can reach that same level of having the Holy Spirit manifest itself through us as we engage the world in which we live.

WM: And what makes the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church, Orthodox? I am trying to figure out the term orthodox. What makes it Orthodox?

C10: Right, orthodox in the sense that we are trying to take Christianity back to its African roots, so it’s orthodox in that sense. We try to get back to the original or as close to it as we can in terms of what Christianity looked like, so that sense of orthodoxy, the old, returning to the old.

WM: And what is the leadership structure of the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church?

C10: Okay, the leadership structure of the church stems from the Holy Patriarch, who is the presiding Bishop over all of the regions of the church. We are located in Detroit, Michigan, which is the central region. We are located here in Atlanta, Georgia, which is the southern region. Houston, Texas which is the southwest region and Beulah Land farm which is in South Carolina. So we have a Holy Patriarch, and then from the Holy Patriarch we have, um, kind of like a person who is directly responsible to him, or in alignment to him, which is like his chief executive officer, I’m sorry, chief operating officer. And then from there you have a College of Cardinals, which is made up of all the

Bishops and the Cardinals of each region. Then from there you have the local assembly of cardinals and then you have the regional operations and then it begins to tier down. So to kind of sum it up, there is a hierarchy, but it's a hierarchy that is very fluid, and what I mean by that is that each region has the ability to function independently in the sense that, you know things that Atlanta may look at a little bit different than Houston because of the context, but we are still accountable to, you know, someone in the organization, which would be the Holy Patriarch, and also to the local regions. So as a Cardinal I couldn't just go out and do anything that I wanted to do without having some accountability to the assembly and to the members of the church. So everybody in this African sense is accountable to someone.

WM: Um, now what does one have to do or what process is taken in order for one to become a member of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church?

C10: Ok, to be a member of the church we have a process that you must go through. Either on Sundays or even in our African History class on Saturday we extend an invitation to brothers and sisters to join the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church. On Sunday mornings or after the message is given we extend an invitation for brothers and sisters to join the church when they walk down the aisle, we accept one as a member, in terms of just that particular act, but then after that you go through orientation training classes, which we call O.T.G, where you learn just the basic tenants of the church. Then you get baptized, so one of the end results of orientation training is baptism, which is a, like Jesus', a rite of initiation unto the movement at that point you are official, officially a member of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church, with all rights and we stress responsibilities therein. After O.T.G., you go through confirmation training.

Confirmation is where you know confirm in your faith, that you go to a deeper understanding of the tenants of the church you go into a deeper understanding of the group process that operates inside the church. After the confirmation process, part of the confirmation process is the African naming ceremony. So after you go through confirmation during that ceremony you are also given an African name which brings us back into alignment, if you will, and an association, and an appreciation, and identity with our motherland, Africa.

WM: And what is the significance in the name, “Shrine of the Black Madonna”?

C10: The Shrine of the Black Madonna, the shrine in African tradition was a place where religious ceremonies and festivals took place. The Shrines for us represents the institutions that are owned by the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church. So if you were to go to anyplace where you will find the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church, you will find the Shrine of the Black Madonna bookstore and cultural center, the Shrine of the Black Madonna Missionary Training Center, because there is no institutions [that] are owned by individuals, they are all corporately owned. So the Shrine represents those institutions that are owned by the denomination of the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church.

WM: As far as coming up with the name the Shrine of the Black Madonna, I assume that Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman, pick that name for a specific reason, so I am just trying to get to the significance of the actual name, I guess maybe the Black Madonna component.

C10: Good, well Jaramogi looked at it, if you look at the picture of the Madonna and the child, what he envisioned was that if black people can get to a point where they loved each other so unconditionally like a mother loves her child, then if you look at the

picture, its like a city behind it, then a nation can rise up out of that type of unconditional love for one another, and then a love that black people have and should have for the Black woman, that high level of respect. You know if you don't have that, then how you treat black women is ultimately and indication of how healthy the nation is. So that infinity for and appreciation of the Black women was the impotence for Jaramogi Abebe deciding to name our church, our worship centers the Shrine of the Black Madonna.

WM: And have you encountered any controversy surrounding the concept of a Black Madonna, as opposed to, you know being here in America the images we see of the Madonna is usually of European descent.

C10: Right. Initially there was a lot when the Madonna was first unveiled in Detroit MI, which was back in the 60's. I don't want to quote the date because I might get it wrong. But it was on Easter Sunday in the 1960's, so if you can imagine during the sixties how controversial the unveiling of a black Madonna was, at the time it was revolutionary. But today if you go into a lot of Black churches, you are beginning to see this embracing of the Black Madonna, Black Jesus, and a lot of that can be directly attributed to Jaramogi Abebe taking that bold stance to say that its not only healthy for us as African people to have pictures of biblical characters that look like us, it is also more in line with history. So now it's less of a problem at least from the point of view of those who have studied, and now can say I understand that before the enlightenment period, if you will, you know the re-awakening, whatever, that you know Jesus being venerated as a black man was not new you know, so history supports you know what we are visually witnessing so it's less of a problem now. You still have pockets of people who say 'why does color matter', and only time color matters is when you say black, you know when you say white we

don't have a problem, we don't even question it, we have learned to read against ourselves, you know nothing good can come out of Egypt, nothing good can come out of Jerusalem, nothing good can come out of Galilee, so nothing good can possibly come out of Africa, so therefore we can't even imagine the person that we quote unquote say is our Savior looking like us, which has more to do with the psychology of black people than anything, the damaged psychology that we have to work on healing.

WM: Also I want to get a sense of, I am doing my research, the analysis I want to use is an afrocentric, African- centered analysis but I also want to look at it from a socio-political, socio-economical lens also. So I just want to know what is the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church's position on capitalism, or the economic structure in the Black Community.

C10: Well, you know, capitalism as a model in of itself is problematic because it is predicated upon somebody having to control everything, and you have to have structured into this capitalistic system, a group of people that are exploitable. So we try to look at more of, and we understand that we live in a capitalistic society, don't get me wrong, and that we have to engage, as we run bookstores and manage property and stuff like that, that we are very much in the flow of how this society operates economically but at the same time we understand that communalism is an alternative to this capitalistic model because capitalism as an economic system is a very young system in terms of this world economies and how economies have grown over the centuries or the millenniums if you will. So we try to understand that if we can offer an alternative, that is a model of communalism, what we call a network communalism, that says, 'yes we still have to make a living, we still have to produce products, we still have to market we still have to

distribute,' but if we can do so in a way that is fair and equitable then we can channel those funds right back into the community. Therefore we have a network of communalism, as a church we understand that we live in a world where there are have's and have not's, so as an individual I can definitely be a have not, but if I can take what little I do have and pool it together in terms of an institutions, then from an institutional stand point we can serve as a 'have' in a sea of 'have not's.' So we can be able to give, use the institutions to help others. So capitalism, we understand is a model but we're convinced that if we can offer another model that is equal appealing, then people will gravitate to it. Capitalism in of itself is really not true in operation because alongside capitalism is Darwinism that says survival of the fittest, but then when you look at the news and Bear Sterns went under capitalism and the Darwinist theology would say let it go down because obviously they cant compete but the government turns around and bails them out which is a contradiction in this whole ethos of capitalism and Darwinism. So they get us to buy into but when the housing market turns you have individuals foreclosing and the government was like we don't want to have anything to do with it. Or they did not move with the same aggressive stimulus as they did when they dealt with Bear and Sterns. So we figure if we can hold capitalisms intention and provide options then we are doing our jobs.

WM: Also looking from a socio-political, socio-economical, and socio-cultural lens, what is the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church's position on patriarchy in this society.

C10: OK, patriarchy, we as our name indicates, Shrines of the Black Madonna, so obviously we embrace the qualities and the attributes that black women bring to the

struggle. There are certain things, not just saying gender, but there are just certain aspects of this worlds that as males we just don't zone into. And patriarchy, all the way back to the bible all the way back to Abraham and Lot and all those cats, is built upon a patriarchal system. And we have to speak to it and in the shrine, I think the shrine from my estimation is a very inclusive church, in terms of the hierarchy from the Holy Patriarch to the person, no matter what position in the church but your going to find sisters in there, not just as figureheads but actually have the power to execute what their title says they should be doing. And I don't mean that to say that in other denominations you have authority but you don't have the power, you have the title but you don't have the leverage to exercise what that title says you should exercise because you are breaking down patriarchy. I am not so naïve to say that we are just hitting on all cylinders, because you may talk to a sister that may say we still have some room to go which is ok because we are open to internal critique as well as the external critique of the things we are doing. But we are definitely trying to hit up against that wall of patriarch and I think that Jaramogi Abebe and Jaramogi Kamathi is continuing in that legacy of bringing down those walls because we have had bishops and cardinals sisters in the church forever, it's not new to us. But I am sure there are some blind spots that we can address but we definitely try to push up against that whole idea of patriarchy because we can be very oppressive.

WM: So women can obtain any leadership position in the Pan African

C10: Any position from the top to wherever.

WM: So say a women was to acquire the top position her title would then be Holy Matriarch

C10: Yes the Matriarch

WM: So the term is not static

C10: No, its fluid.

WM: The Pan African Orthodox Christian Church has about how many members, are you aware?

C10: It's in the thousands, because as our Holy Patriarch says we are one church in four different locations. So the number is well into the thousands, and in each region the number fluctuates. In Atlanta we would say we have 2-300 hundred members on any given Sunday maybe a 100 or so, you know that number goes up or down, but the church being in four different locations if we were just to consolidate and be in one place it would be huge because we own property everywhere we are.

WM: On the question of race, why is the Color of Jesus so important?

C10: I would almost buffer that question with why isn't it important. It's important especially when race has been use as a justification, and color has been used as a justification for our degradation, and our exploitation and our oppression and our marginalization. That if we can go back in history and say 'No that's not true' we know that Michelangelo was commission to paint the pictures of the last supper, we know that history has shown us that, its not true, so lets be true, then as the scriptures says, the Truth will set you free. So for an oppressed people, to redeem if you will, the images of the divine that were used against us, it's liberating because if I can see in that person I am looking at who embodies these characteristics that are dormant inside of me and I can see being acted out in somebody who looks like me, that's very liberating. Then they would have to say, 'why did they change the color if it didn't matter.' So there was an agenda

there as well, and so you're not going to fight against something that looks like you, you been taught that. So it is very important that we be able to redeem and liberate ourselves and be able to embrace our color which has so long been used against us, internally as well as externally because sometimes you can internalize you oppression, and then do the same things to one another. And it is not to say Jesus is black and we hate all white people and we need to put down everybody else, no it's to say I can affirm myself without putting anyone else down, which is problematic for many people nowadays they have to push you down to lift themselves up.

WM: Thank you, again also in reshaping the image of Jesus Christ, how has the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church reshaped the image of Jesus the Christ; the black Messiah, not just on the physical level as far as pigmentation and color, just the conceptualization of who Jesus was.

C10: Okay, I think in doing that, and that is an ongoing conversation, that is an on going deconstruction and reconstruction process, if you will, because for so long Jesus was the Lamb of God, who came to take away the sins of the world, the meek, and this that and the other and then you go back and look at history and you look at the biblical text and books outside the bible, secondary literature, and began to see that there are different understandings of Jesus. We began to try to tease who Jesus was in His context, that he was a man, apart of a group of people, lived at a particular time, ok what was going on at that time, what was going on with the people he was apart of, who was in control, who was being signified upon, as far as not being worth anything. And then you begin to look at the person, he was in Galilee, what was going on in Galilee, they were being oppressed, ok. So this was part of his communal conversation, so therefore we began to

construct a different image of Jesus. He was a revolutionary, He was working for change, He was turning over the status quo, he was saying, 'I know you heard this has been said but this is what I say.' He was trying to mobilize change inside his community, and so therefore we have an understanding of Jesus that forces us , or at least challenges us to do something in the here and now and not so much focus on the, JESUS PAID IT ALL, and all we have to do is exist, not in community, just exist and when we close our eyes, though we did nothing here, in heaven we will get this great reward. So our understanding of Jesus really challenges us to put into practice many of the things that he did that he picked up from those who came before him. He didn't come with some knew idea but part of the history of his people as a Jew, the way they were holding on to their understanding of God in the midst of the oppression and exploitation, he basically gleaned a lot of that information a lot of those experiences and thus began to strike out, whether it was his own people or whether it was the Romans, it didn't matter, whatever was wrong was wrong. So I think reshaping Jesus in that context as someone who was very much apart of the times and not outside of the times really help us to make Jesus real but at the same time places great responsibility on us to try to do some of the things he did in His time in our time.

WM: In reading some of the literature by Jaramogi Abebe; the Black Messiah, Black Christian Nationalism, I wanted to get some clarification on Jaramogi's position on the Apostle Paul, I am just not clear on what Jaramogi's , or the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church's position on the Apostle Paul.

C10: Well Jaramogi, and I am several generation removed from that conversation, but as we can tell from his writing, he was very much, he really held Paul in tension because

Paul is taking a message, for all practical purposes, a liberating message, and then he takes it and waters it down if you will to make it acceptable to another group of people and so Paul was kind of viewed like a sell out to his race and because so much of Paul literature has been used as a oppressive tool, you know, we not going to deal with Paul at all. You know the stuff he was talking about, “Slaves be obedient to thy master,” “Go back and serve your oppressor, and everything is going to be alright,” that did not strike accord with our founder, you know especially during the time when the church was really hitting that revolutionary stride, if you will, Paul was very much pushed to the Curb, and on to the Curb because of the way a lot of his writings were used. So much of the Slave theology and the slavery institution, the institution of slavery was predicated so much on a lot of Paul’s writings, that in a liberation struggle there was no place for that. That meekness and you know serving your oppressor didn’t have a place, I think Jaramogi pushed it that way, you know, we didn’t need it.

WM: I guess I just wanted more clarification because I have been in churches where Paul, you know wrote so many letters, and he authored in the bible so many books, so I just wanted to know how did that effect or how did you deal with those books.

C10: We can look at them because there is something you can glean from it especially because Paul was dealing with for the most part the organizational church. Where the disciples were more like a movement, Paul begins to put together a lot of the structures of the church and a lot of the organizational mechanisms you need in order to operate a standing institutions, you know he is writing letters to Corinth you know and he is writing letters form Patmos, he is writing letters to all these congregations if you will, that are beginning to have this standing congregation for lack of a better word, where the

disciples were moving you know, and because Paul's writings positioned itself with the State, it found appeal, then he begins to trump not only the disciples but in some cases he begins to trump Jesus. People focused more on Paul than the life of Jesus, you know because Paul and those who attributed letters to Paul did so much writing. So the disciples come back later, you know those who say they wrote the new testament, the gospels and all that, they write in after Paul you know so he who writes first sometimes sets the tones and everybody else becomes apologists trying to get their points across. But there are some things you can glean from it, with proper interpretation, and begin to understand the context, in which he was speaking, who was his audience and how would his audience receive this message and is there is anything that can be gleaned from it that can assist us as we engage in the struggle then we can do that, but you really have to do the proper research to understand what he was talking about, did he really say this or was that a later adaption of his letters and all that other stuff. But he was very much problematic for a lot of liberation theologians and I think still to this day.

WM: Also in reading Jaramogi Abebe, he was very critical of individualism, and I know you spoke to it a little bit earlier in our conversation in regards to capitalisms but I just want to know the position or the stance that the Pan African Orthodox Christian church takes on individualism and what that presents to the Black Community.

C10: It presents a challenge, because individualism, as Jaramogi says, is a global cancer. Its all over the world, its seductive, its enticing, its desirable, its immediate gratification. But because it is a cancer, it destroys everything that it comes into contact with from the inside out. So individualism becomes the one thing that we really have to fight against. Going back to an African centered, African world view, communalism is held above

individualism. So there is this fight, not to destroy your individuality, the things that make you Weldon, the things that make you unique as an individual, but to fight against this idea that Weldon is the center of the universe and everything revolves around him and he has no responsibility to anyone else, his actions are done in isolation, which they are not. You don't live in an individualistic world, we live in a world that is very communal and very harmonious until we decide that we just going to try to impose ourselves on the world and just throw everything out of balance, and individualism does the same thing, it throws everything out of balance. What I mean by that, well we have enough food to feed everybody, but because of individualism and greed, we stock pile certain things, we don't produce this and raise the price up, starve people and we don't think it matters anywhere. So for us individualism is that one thing that has been that constant stream throughout the history of this church that no matter where you go we struggle against individualism, we struggle against individualism, we struggle against trying to put ourselves at the center of the universe and not feel as though we have a responsibility to generations yet unborn, to generations that are here, that we owe a debt to those who came before us, so it is always at the front and that's been in my estimation a cornerstone of the church that we recognize that as a group of people we have always done better when we have done it together. The world may say that you are an individual by yourself but we know groups control the world. So we have to submerge our individualism, submerge "what I want, when I want it" for what's good for the group. From that position we move forward. They say if you want to run fast, run by yourself; but if you want to run far, run with somebody else. So that is pretty much how we look at

it. We have gone back and try to embrace the African Communalism that is in us and try to use that to do the things we are trying to do.

WM: How does that coincide or relate to this idea in the church that you want to establish a PERSONAL relationship with Jesus so in establishing a personal relationship, what does that mean? Is that a form of individualism, in seeking a personal relationship you become more concerned with what I need to do to make sure this is a relationship with Jesus, and does that leave room for individualism to creep in and take priority over communalism? So how does it [communalism] speak to this notion of seeking a Personal Relationship with Jesus?

C10: That kind of goes to the whole notion of individualism. Again this individual person did something over 2000 years ago, that somehow is going to save you. I am not worried about anybody else I am worried about me. Am I going to get my crown and my wings? Not even to the point where it matters how I go about doing it. So this idea of having a personal relationship with Jesus, what does it mean? How do you know you have it? What is it different about your life that represents that you are one with Jesus, what is the transformation? Sometimes we can say we have a personal relationship with Jesus and therefore when things are going on in the community we say “well I am going to go pray to Jesus” instead of saying I pray to Jesus as an example and now I am going to do what I have to do. Whatever happens in the end is going to happen anyway. So we don’t have a preoccupation of whether I am in right relationship with Jesus. I am more concerned if I am in right relationship with you, you know that person I see everyday, that horizontal relationship. Then the vertical is important, that also I am not only in relationship with Jesus but also with God that permeates the universe. How am I in

relationship with nature? How am I in relationship in terms of the world in which I live? Which is to say am I environmentally Conscious, am I taking responsibility to make sure the air we breathe is healthy that the water we drink is healthy, the food we eat is healthy? Am I engaging those act as well, which were acts that Jesus didn't have to deal with in his time. So there are things that we say Jesus saved us from that never come up, but somebody could give us a very naïve notion of, "Jesus Paid it all future sins and whatever so that is covered to" well that is questionable. But the whole idea of individualism does begin to creep up in our understanding of salvation as well, "As long as we can get you thinking about yourself we can destroy everybody else" you going to just be worried about how to get yourself saved, then the grim reaper comes knocking on your door and you realize your not exempt.

WM: In light of the recent comments made by Rev. Jeremiah Wright, or what has recently come to light by the media. According to the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church, is there space for politics in the church? Is there a separation or is there room for politics or is something like what Rev. Jeremiah Wright said too political. Is there room for that in the Church?

C10: I think within the Black Experience, we have to understand that the Black Church was a place where Black people educated. We didn't have the privilege to go to school we worked in somebody else's field while we sent their kids to school. So they could sit down and philosophy on world events all day. But we're working from sun up to sun down. They don't remember that but we remember that. So it was the Black preacher's responsibility, his divine obligation, to speak truth, what is going on in the world. Now if I go to my oppressor's church, he is not going to tell me that picking cotton is a sin, that

what they are doing to us is a sin...I have to get another perspective. What America is afraid of is another perspective, that's all it is, another perspective. I am not going to see things the same way you see it. You whipping me you think I am going to think that is good, you lynching us, that's good? You have the same Bible and you come from that Bible with a different interpretation than I do, I cannot leave that interpreting process up to you. And if you feel strongly in your point then a debate is no more than a war between words and idea's. So don't get afraid if I been able to come to this text and glean not only the Bible as a text, but life experience as a text, the constitution as a text, the bill of Rights as a text, the policies made in America as a text. So I think it has a place, politics is sacred, and you can not live in a bubble and think you do not have to mention this because some people may not be all that astute to what is going on politically. But the Black Church for the longest has placed the responsibility on the preacher to critique what's going on in the world. And what I ask people to do is to push back from the agenda's of the radio stations, the agenda's of the Television station the agenda's of the Newspaper companies, because all them have agenda's, and ask, is what he said, was it true. Is there something in the history of this country that will create such an environment that something like this could happen, is it True? No whether you like the way he said it, whether he whispered it or screamed at the top of his voice the black preacher, one of the characteristics of the Black preacher, not all black preachers, is the charisma, the energy, the rhythm of the voice, the intonation, the lifting and the raising of the voice. But was it true. Now if it wasn't true then you can say I will take him to task on that. And the thing that they are also failing to realize, when they mention his name, they say Rev. Jeremiah Wright, not Doctor, this is crucial, why are they leaving that out.

When we think of Doctor we think of somebody who is educated, well-versed, and can dissect things, they just say reverend and we think he is just another Black preacher who has gone out there by the wayside. No he is Doctor, so you have to ask yourself why aren't they saying that, so its not so much what they say all the time but what they don't say. In our church politics is sacred, you have to engage in it, as a good citizen.

WM: On a personal level, how long have you been a member of the Shrine of the Black Madonna?

C10: I have been a member for 18 years.

WM: Why did you become a member of the Shrine of the Black Madonna?

C10: I think for me it was a multitude of things. Every now and then I sit down, because I never thought I would be here, if you ask me when I was growing up in Beaumont Texas, a shrine right there in Houston that I never heard of, right down the street. I think life situations, my mother, I never forget had Ebony books in the house, 3 volumes, Black cover, gold letters, took us from Slavery to the civil rights movement, and I used to sit down and look through them. I think all that was preparation for something like this. The culmination of those experiences over a period of time, I think led me here, I loved going to church, raised in the church, loved it, but I also wanted to see how what I did on Sunday translated to what went on, on Monday. That was always the missing piece for me, there seemed to be this divide between the aesthetic worship experience on Sunday and then the daily toils and mistreatment that we experience Monday through Saturday. I wondered how God then speak to us in our circumstance. I can be happy on Sunday then go through something on Monday. This seemed to be the perfect marriage of the two and also the challenge to develop the mind. I am not just

reading the Bible, I've got to read the Newsweek, the Times Magazine, I have to ready the NY Times, I have to read the Wall street journal, I have to read all these things because all of them have an impact on how life is constructed, so when I heard the message on Sunday morning from the pulpit and it integrated all these different things that have a direct impact on the quality of Black Life, I was like "WOW." That is the question I had as a child that no one could really answer. This is what I was feeling as a black man in this country, and it's not a bad thing but as a result of a conditioning process that took place long before I got here but I am not going to leave you there, now I am going to show you that you can get another process that can unearth that and put together a process that is more in line with what God meant for us to be. So I didn't leave the church when as a child of middle age because I had this theological problem with the church that I could articulate because it worked for me at that stage in my life. As I grew older I had to begin to challenge in a sense what does God mean for me, what does Jesus mean for me. What does this relationship and all these dynamics mean in terms of now how do we deal in the world in which we live. That was some of the things that kind of planted me here. Personal experiences, life experiences, and just seeking, not knowing what I was seeking but like anything once you get it, you know this is it.

WM: What is your official position and official title within the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church

C10: I am a Cardinal, a CEO, and the Pastor of the Shrine of the Black Madonna here in Atlanta, so that is my official title if you will.

WM: In the relationship to the hierarchal structure, are you the one in this region that talks directly to Jaramogi Kamathi.

C10: I talk directly to Jaramogi as any one can, anyone can but ideally you would want to go through the chain of command inside of the region first, but he is the last person, like the Supreme Court, where no local region can just make decisions, like I may have a personal agenda against somebody, if I have a personal agenda with you and I am trying to exercise my power in an abusive way then you still have a person you can go thru and say, “although the local assembly said I couldn’t do this, I still want to have an appeal with the Holy Patriarch,” then there is a process by which that happens. But yes I go directly to the Holy Patriarch. Just like anybody can come to me with certain things and other things we try to go through a process you go through group leaders then the administration, then if it gets to me then we look at it. I have the authority bestowed upon me by the Holy Patriarch to make statements on behalf of the church, to enter into contractual agreements, disciplinary actions, to speak on behalf of the assembly in absence of the assembly. I do that with the consciousness that that is not something to be abuse, so there are very few cases where I would just act alone. If it is nothing but a telephone conversation with some one, but I know in the event that I have to make those decisions then I make those decisions but I understand that my colleagues at the same time place a lot of trust in me so I don’t want to foreclose on that trust, so I try to maintain those contacts and conversations as often and frequents as I can.

WM: How is the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church, more specifically, the Shrine of the Black Madonna, here in Atlanta effecting the community?

C10: That’s a good question also, as you can tell, going into the book store, there were various people standing up, I think there is a casting call going on in the bookstore, but the bookstore the holocaust exhibit, which is apart of the bookstore as we mentioned

earlier, a lot of the school kids come into the holocaust exhibit on an African [centered] Field trip, if you will, and so they have an opportunity to come into personal contact with their history, which makes a lasting impression. We don't really understand the depth at which we are shaping the consciousness of these young kids at a very early age. Which is very important because a lot of this, you don't see this until you get much older and start venturing out for yourself. Being able to have relationships with the school and being able to provide institutional resources for different groups in the West End or the Greater Atlanta Area. We find out a lot of people want to do good things but they don't have a venue they can't afford space. There program, really to run the program is taking up the resources so to find a building to house the program becomes problematic. So our Holy Patriarch, Jaramogi Menelik Kamathi, charged us with is to allow our institutions to be used in times we are not using them, by other organizations. We have been doing that, the Muslims use and have used before the West End Learning Center for their West End study groups the New Black Panther Party use one of our institutions for their meetings, we bring in different speakers on various topics in the African Diaspora. In our founders hall we offer a free African History class on Saturdays which is open to the community. We enter into the AIDS walk everywhere for the last 10 years. We have brothers and Sisters from the continent of Africa, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, we just had a drive where we provided uniforms for the Mafakeyla school in Zimbabwe. So it is very encouraging getting emails from Zimbabwe thanking the church for their contribution, we have to just let them know that they have brothers and sisters in America who care, and that is just the local area. We just had a school across the street they didn't have a place to meet for their assemblies, so we opened up the shrine and let them have their performances and

things of that nature. The idea is that we don't want to be an island unto ourselves, so with the Catholic Church if there is something we can work with them on then we work together, there is a Baptist church on the other side because in the end we are all God's people. If we can find areas of commonality where we can work from each others strength then we can do a lot in our community because we don't care who gets the credit. Let's just get it done. I think with the Home school and the Nursery, bringing kids in to get an education that isn't just test driven, because you know a lot of the schools, they cut out band they cut out drama, everything is just a test, a test, a test. So we want to teach to the whole child, body mind and spirit. So we bring all of that in and service the community that way. Then with the dynamic worship service we have on Sunday, that is another place where brothers and sisters who are trying to do something can come in and spiritually charged to go out and do what God has placed on them to do within their specific ministries, you say what kind of ministry is that. You can be on your job and be ministering and the chaos that goes on their people are looking for a still voice in the midst of the storm, not that you're preaching but you can minister to peoples need. Obviously people need something because they shooting people up at the jobs. We look at the Shrine as a place where people in the community can gather, you don't have to be a member of the church to benefit from the sacrifices that people have made in order for us to be here members and non members alike. So if we have something we can help somebody with, that's what we try to do. WE try to drop our bucket right where we are.

WM: What are some of the contributions being made here at the shrine of Black Madonna to combat the institutional racism?

C10: In Houston we are dealing with KIPP, the KIPP liberation Academy, and that is speaking directly to the problem of the lack of proper funding and education in the inner cities. So because we have a lot of land in Houston we were able to enter in a partnership with the KIPP liberation Academy to build a school there. To provide the facilities working in partnership with them that will allow us to provide top grade education for youth in the inner cities who have been for quite a long time under-served and under-surfaced. That is one way that we can take the years of growth and investment in property that the church has and take those same institutions, the land and deal with it in a different way so that we are providing more service to the communities where we live, and that's one of the ways, especially in Houston. In Detroit we have the Akwabba center, the Akwabba center is the name of a building we have in Detroit that services the community. In Atlanta we don't have an Akwabba Center but it's a similar structure that will allow us to do similar things, case and point, because we are so close to the universities and we have members who are graduating from Morehouse, Emory, ITC, you name it, so we are able to have a relationship with the Academy if you will that we can bring them into the shrine so that the Academy and the church have dialogue with one another. That is a beautiful experience. So those are some ways that it is open to the public. Everyone can't afford to go to these institutions, but like it was back in the day, bring those same instructors and have them converse with your congregation so that there is not such a disconnect. We have been able to provide a fertile dialogue between the academy and the church.

WM: Lastly, can you explain the significance of the Beulah Land?

C10: Beulah is what we call, fulfilling our founder's vision. Our goal is to have 5,000 acres; we are at like 4,000 now. But it is a place where we can deal with it from an agriculture points of view, we deal with Timber, cattle, fish, poultry, organic farming, camp retreats , place where organizations can come and meet because we have like 5 miles of river front. A place where kids can go and get out of the inner city a couple days and re-adjust their body systems, you know everything in the city is fast but when you go out to Beulah Land it just slows down, so they get a chance to touch nature and grow things and see what it takes to get food from a seed to a vegetable to washing it and putting it on the table. This idea of having some type of understanding of how things get done. It provides that opportunity to reconnect and also provides economic opportunity so that we can begin to employ brothers and sister, then again that network communalism, now we have a place where people and work, where people can live, where people can shop, where people and worship, then you are just circulating those resources. You go outside the network if you have to but if you can keep it inside the network, but if I am a brother looking out and saying I have these skills but I understand that a lot of these jobs are being shipped overseas. Well America might not need them but we need them. What will make a person feel better than to say, I have a job, take care of my family, they have a school they can go to, a place I can live a home to call my own, get the tax write offs and all the tax breaks you get from home ownership, I can worship. Again it goes back to our first question on individualism and capitalism, it just provides an alternative, not everybody has to buy it to capitalism, enough people are going to buy in to keep it going, but it doesn't have to be. When that's all there is then its like what ever I have to do to get some money that is what I am going to do. So we are at least able

to provide an alternative to that process. Understanding that everything stems from our understanding of God, and then from that, all the institutions we have spin off form this understanding that there is a divine presence and energy that permeates the universe to which we are accountable. Then from there this understanding branches of to other institutions that we own and so that this underlying principle governs these institutions as well.

WM: Thank you for your insight.

May 25, 2008

Interview with Clergy Member #11 and Clergy Member#12

Shrine of the Black Madonna

Pan African Orthodox Christian Church

Detroit , MI

WM: Cardinal can you tell us what is the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church and how it came to be?

Clergy11: The Pan African Orthodox Christian Church was established by our founder, Rev. Albert B. Cleage, Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman. He was in the congregational church movement and he had a church over on, now called Rosa Parks, 12 street, and he was trying to bring about change in the Black Community and he couldn't do it at that church so he started a church called the Central United Church of Christ and with that came the programs with community change and the standing up for what our community needs here in Detroit and out of that came the Shrine of the Black Madonna church and its building institutions for people, which didn't exist and they barely exist today but we are working on it.

WM: And Bishop what makes the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church unique from other Christian denominations?

Clergy12: Well several things, first of all in terms of our theology, our acknowledgement that God is Cosmic energy and creative intelligence, and our understanding of who Jesus was and what his role was in terms of Jesus being a black Messiah, and why he lived, what he did, and the importance of his life and how that can be the guideline for us to free our people. Our theology is not grounded in the Pauline doctrine of other worldly salvation but actually in the fact that our salvation is tied to how we live and what we do

for our people in our community, it is a group experience, so for us salvation does not mean I am going to die and go to heaven. That does not mean that we don't accept the existence of heaven, but our focus is on living the way Jesus lived and not focus on what is going to happen to us when we die. That just a few of the differences there are many more but I just wanted to make the theological point.

WM: And Bishop what is the mission of the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church?

Clergy12: Our mission is to beautify and transform our people and our community, to restore our people to who they are supposed to be. I am trying to think of a way to put it succinctly and it is very difficult to do that. We understand what our mission is but to put it into a slick sentence is not an easy thing to do but we recognize that we have a responsibility for bringing back the world back into accordance with the will of God. The way things as today, the imbalances where you have people who are powerless and people who have everything, that is not the way God intended for the World to be and as Christians it is our responsibility to bring back the world in accordance to God's Will.

WM: And by our people and our community you are referring to?

Clergy12: I am referring to people of African descent but we are not the only people in the world. We recognize that we have to be changed ourselves but eventually the change is going to have to take place within the whole world. Everything will have to change.

WM: Can you explain how the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church uses Christianity as a tool for liberation through the example of the Black Messiah. Is Jesus perceived differently within the Pan African Orthodox Christian church than he is in other churches and if so can you explain those differences.

Clergy11: Christianity is not just a tool, Christianity is a liberation theology, whether or not it is interpreted correctly or wrongly. Jesus the Black Messiah sought to liberate his people, and he taught them certain tenements and a lifestyle which was communalism and being disenchanted with the system that enslaved them and the spiritual values of the covenant relationship with God. The return to their covenant relationship with God, just like all the prophets before Him taught that they had to come back to the relationship with God and when they came back to their relationship with God things start happening for them, the nation of Israel. And that was the reason that they were able to get the progress and maintain the progress that they had. Once they lost a sense of who they were as a people then they would become slaves.

C12: All types of calamities would be followed because they would pull away from God. They would go out and do other things, and a prophet would rise up and say you have to come back to God. We got to do this, we got to do this, and become a people again. That when they're able to take full advantage of God's Blessing. I just want to add though, you guys were talking about Jesus, in relationship of how we know Jesus to be. Well in conventional Christianity, it is more of a religion about Jesus than the religion of Jesus. And the Apostle Paul introduce that, many of those things...if you are reading the New Testament you will find distinct differences between Matthew, Mark, Luke and in some cases John, and the rest of the New Testament. The point beyond the crucifixion of Jesus and after the writing of the Synoptic Gospels then you have the Gospels of the Apostle Paul, who actually knew Jesus, who was never apart of Jesus' movement. So what he did was create a religion about Jesus. Many of the things Jesus believed in Paul said was irrelevant after law. He said under grace we don't need the law

but Jesus said I not come to change the law but to fulfill the law, to bring the people back to what God has set for them to do, there is a marked difference in that. Most conventional Christians believe that Jesus was God, God in the physical form. Well we don't teach that. We say Jesus was a man of God and was able to access His inner divinity and because he was able to do that there were numerous things that Jesus was able to do and affect change and heal and teach, but he told the disciples the things that I do even greater things you can do if you have Faith. So he said that power was there for them to access. And that is at the birth of the first church, they were able to access their power, go out and heal, I mean Peter was able to heal people with his shadow, but they didn't have faith prior to Jesus' crucifixion so they were helpless, until they had to come back and sit in that Upper room for fifty days and that's where the birth of the church took place.

C11: Jesus said, "why call me good, there is none good but the Father who sent Me," meaning the Father is there and I am here. There is another area in the Bible that says that I and the Father are one, we can all say that once we become one with the Father in meditation and in prayer and doing the things God wants us to do we are one. Just like Cardinal _____(name left out) preached today, God made us in His own image, we are spiritual beings in physical bodies doing the Lords work. So we are endowed with the power of God, and Jesus said all the things I do you can do also. That is our responsibility, instead of worrying what is going to happen to us when we die. And what did James say; James said faith with out good works is dead. So its all tied in together we got a mission all of us, everybody is born into the world has a mission and we that

recognize our mission have a responsibility for carrying it out, and that's what we do at the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church. [31:30]

WM: This will lead me to the next question, bishop if you could answer it, what is the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church position on the Trinity, you know how most churches look at God the Father, God the Son and the Holy Spirit all in one, so what is the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church's position on the Trinity?

C12: Well we just said that our theology, that God is cosmic energy and creative intelligence, and yet as creations of God we share in the ability to access God's power as Jesus was able to do. For us the Holy Spirit, we call it the Revolutionary Holy Spirit, and that gives us the ability to make change in the world. We don't necessarily talk about God the Father, God the Son, and the Holy Ghost in that way, we recognize that those components God , Jesus and the Revolutionary Holy Spirit as three aspects of things we need in order to be the hands, feet, body of God, I don't know if I can put it in any other succinct way.

C11: WE don't dispute what the other churches are saying, we believe in the awesomeness of God, God obviously is comic energy and creative intelligence, creates the awesome things and God is known by many names, so we can call Him God the Father, and we believe he sent us a Comforter in sense of the Holy Spirit and certainly Jesus was here to demonstrate how the Holy Spirit worked and with the whole acknowledgement that God is a good God and energy is available to us everyday and so we utilize the Holy Spirit to do the things we do to keep going and to change the world to know who we are and also as God's helpmates here.

WM: One of the many observations that I have come across here at the Shrine of the Black Madonna here and in Detroit is that I didn't see the Cross, which many will say, has become the universal symbol of Christianity, but here at the Pan African orthodox Christian Church, I have seen the ankh around the necks of the cardinals and bishops and in the sanctuaries. Bishop if you can explain the significance of the ankh in relation to the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church?

C12: The ankh is the Egyptian symbol of life, which is actually an older symbol than the cross. Many years ago our founder taught us about the value of Jesus' life. So we place our emphasis on Jesus' life and not His crucifixion. However we do wear crosses and do accept the cross because the cross is a symbol of sacrifice that we are willing to take on. Just like Jesus bore His cross because that is what he needed to do for His people. WE accept that cross in that same way but we use the ankh because it's the symbol for life and he wants us to live the way Jesus lived and do the work that Jesus did. They are not opposed to one another, we started using the ankh at an earlier time in the church and we also embrace the use of the cross, but the ankh the symbol we use, people identify with us a lot more but we use both of them.

C11: The Ankh symbolizes life and the Holy Spirit is life. We have responsibility for maintaining it and making it happen more abundantly.

C12: One of our rituals we talk about with Jesus, by his life and his death upon the cross, teaches us that there is nothing more sacred than the liberation of Black people. So both of those things are important if you are going to follow the footsteps of Jesus you want to follow his life example but be willing to sacrifice your life for Black people.

WM: Moving on to the Social aspect, does the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church, would they still consider themselves a Black Nationalist organization...

C12: Yes we still do

WM: Can someone explain Black difference in Black Christian Nationalism and Black Nationalism?

C12: Much of what we have discussed is Black Christian Nationalism. Black Christian Nationalism was conceived of and written by the founder of the Shrines of the Black Madonna as new directions for the black church. The church itself, the black church, has been, of all the institutions that have exist most of our ability to move around and work within those institutions are limited. The only one that we had movement inside of was the church. But the church didn't have the relevancy that it needed to have to the conditions and the needs for Black people. So Black Christian Nationalism was new directions for the Black church, the church could be an institution that can help us bring about liberation. I don't know if I can give you everything in that answer but I do recognize and want you to understand that Black Christian Nationalism is our way of life the way we think, our doctrine, its not just something out to the side. Black Nationalism does not necessarily embrace any kind of theological or spiritual base. Jaramogi taught us that we cant do any of the work we need to do if we don't feel that it is God directed. A lot of folk in the movement, when I first joined the Shrine moved on to do other things, "you know I was trying to do that black thing but you know..." because they did not have that fuel that they need that comes from God. There is a section in The Black Messiah I think its called epistle to Stokely, and one of the things Jaramogi was trying to get young men like Stokely to know was to accept, your doing what your supposed to be doing but

you need to do it inside of a spiritual place because you need that spiritual strength and this needs to be part of what it is we need to move forward as Black folks and as Christians. So I am saying a lot of stuff.

C11: We have a responsibility to be at one with God, utilize the revolutionary Holy Spirit to do what? Not to get a good looking car and “bling- bling” and all that, We are responsible to move obstacles from God’s people and in order to do that we have to do whatever we have to do in the trenches to make it happen. Our people are in trouble, we need to have nationalism to bring our people together, to let them understand that it’s God’s Will that we have power. Its God will that we have power in order to survive, in order to remove all barriers that keep us from each other in love and keep us all there is to keep us from our relationship with God, in order to do that we have to build institutions. Black Christian Nationalism addresses itself in a very Christian like way and a very spiritual way the same way that Jesus was addressing himself to the Jewish people in the time of Jesus. So we are Black Christian Nationalists and we are also Pan-Africanists. We believe we are all one people and the same thing that is happening to us is happening to the brothers and sisters on the continent and South Americans and so forth and so on. The only people who are going to change that, is us. God has empowered us, first of all with wisdom, and the people, such as Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman, and this church and other places and other situations and other people to make it happen. We are sinful if we don’t bring our people up where we ought to be, to trade off with the rest of the world to get where it ought to be. We are the salt of the earth, we are God’s first people, and we have a certain responsibility to the world and to God to make the world right. Black Christian Nationalism, Christianity is not just a tool but a lifestyle that we use.

WM: That brings me to my next question. Jaramogi Agyeman, in his book, Black Christian Nationalism, he stated throughout the book that while preparing for liberation here, that Black Christian Nationalism is still working to liberate the African continent, so I wanted to know is there still works being done, or what works are being done to liberate the African continent while working for liberation here?

C12: We don't have at this particular movement, a branch of the PAOCC on the continent those things are still to be put in place and we recognize that this is something we will need to do. It's not like it is something that we have put on the backburner. One of the things that we acknowledge is that in order for us to be free, black people, in order for black people here to be free, black people everywhere have to be free. Here, the Caribbean, wherever we are, we have to be about movement so that's, I know that one of the things that will be on our plans...The Black Liberation movement has had a profound affect on every other group of people around the world, most profoundly in Africa, because when you think about when the Civil Rights Movement began and then developed into the black power movement those things fueled the independence movement many places in Africa. There is a direct connection to what we do here and how active we are here because those outside say "they can do that, we can do that." It's been connected all along. It's not a surprise most African nations began their struggle for independence in like '60, '61, '62, the same time the Black movement was gaining steam. So we are connected in that way.

WM: One of the unique things I found here was the infusion of the African Culture which you might not find in other Christian Churches here in the United States. They tend to stay with the dominant culture, so can you speak on the infusion and the role African culture play in the construction of the Pan-African orthodox Christian Church.

C12: We are an African people, that's number one. Secondly Christianity is an African religion so Western influences are things that came later on. But if you go back to the history of Christianity then you know it is an African religion. WE have always as African people been different in how we deal with worship, you know the call and response, the rhythm and all those things come from our African heritage as African people, particularly the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church, that has to be part of our worship and our spiritual practices. It goes for us without saying, pouring out of Libations for example, Jesus is an ancestor to, actually the Eucharist the bread and the wine, if you think about the structure of it, much of it is tied to the way that we deal with honoring our ancestors. What did Jesus tell the disciples? Do this in remembrance of me. When they shared the bread and wine that was something they were to continue to do on and off, but it has its root in African spiritual practices.

C11: We are an African people and we are finding our roots again and in finding our roots we are finding power, spiritual power, spiritual responsibility it is all connected to a view, it has to be an African worldview that also means our survival, if we just look at the world through a European, based on the survival of Europeans and all those they want to

touch, but an African worldview has to be in the same arena we have to have a view for our people.

C12: Part of the process to capture Africans and make us slaves was to take our identity from us and make us ashamed of being Africans and in order to reverse that process we have to embrace the African, in terms of where we come from, so we need to bring those things into our life and into our history, so we deal with our history with our culture because those the things that were taken away from us. So often time what's absent is absent not by accident but because it was built into us to be ashamed of that which makes us who we are. So we embrace the African because that is who were are and we want to incorporate that into what we do.

WM: Is there a difference or would you consider yourselves revolutionary nationalists, cultural nationalists, does it make a difference, is the dichotomy even important.

C12: We don't use those particular terminologies, we say we are Black Christian Nationalists, we're Pan Africanists in all that that entails, I don't think we have any differences with those who are cultural nationalists or somebody who is a revolutionary nationalists, we don't like to go through differences we are all people who are concerned with our future and the outcome of what happens to our people.

WM: Can you Cardinal just explain what is "Beulah Land" and what's its purpose?

C11: Beulah Land is 4000 acres of Land that this church and African people thru this church has purchased in South Carolina. What Beulah Land means is "Land that God has given us," to rebuild ourselves, to provide food and land where we can rebuild our communities as a base for building a nation. We have livestock there, we have fish we have various commercial ponds and selling those fish to commercial and private markets,

it is also an institution in the making of African people and the church is going to us it to build a community. We are building houses down there and people are moving down there. So it's a work in the making.

C12: Its also like a prototype because this not going to be our only, this is like Beulah land one, eventually as time goes on we develop all the various inner workings of Beulah Land, we will have more than one Beulah land because we need more enclaves like that. Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman, the founder of the Shrine of the Black Madonna, always dealt with our cites and what we would expand to is like enclaves, they're places where we can live and have sanity and the kind of life that we need to have as a people. Also Beulah Land... a lot of times people want to change their life, but you can't stay in the same environment you can't stay in the middle of chaos and confusion and be able to emerge as a different person. If you have fallen victim to that you have to have a place you can go to be healed and whole and Beulah Land also can offer for many of our people, that kind of place to be. To get out of this because cities often contribute to the madness that our folks experience and those who need to get out that environment, Beulah Land offers a place where they ca be changed and healed.

WM: Can you explain the different terms or different levels of leadership, or the leadership structure?

C11: First minister in the church is the presiding Bishop and that is Jaramogi, the founder set up the whole structure Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman, Albert Cleage, set up the Structure and he was our first presiding Bishop. His title is Holy Patriarch. Jaramogi is not a name it is a title

C12: I think it means Holy blessed man, I am not sure of the exact translation but it is a title and it follows the person who is the next Holy Patriarch. They are called Jaramogi, like our current Holy Patriarch Jaramogi Menelik Kamathi. SO the title continues on. He was installed as Jaramogi in August of 2000. We have Cardinals, Bishops and Ministers, and we are all Reverends. He wanted to use African names so we have Walamu's and Fundi's which is the first level of ministry. Then we have Bishops. Bishops are basically an administrative title. Anyone who is a Bishop is usually a person who has an area of responsibility that they administrate just like I am the cultural center's administrator. I guess you can say it is similar to the Catholic Church

C11: We also have what they call the college of Cardinals and Bishops at the request of the Holy Patriarch, serve on the National College, then you have local regions then you have your regional Sunday Cardinals and we decide policy for the church on a day to day basis. Those who have administrative positions, run the church but policy is made locally and nationally by the assembly of the Cardinals and the college of cardinals. And Jaramogi presides.

WM: So if I am correct the order from the Top down, I'll say is the Holy Patriarch, then it would be the college of cardinals, then the Bishops, then the Walamu's and Fundi's .

C11: As far as administrative responsibilities, because you also have orders in the church such as the orders of the Maccabees, the security, the order of the Essenes and those who are those with history and are full time with the Church. Then you have Missionaries in the church who give their whole life to the church.

WM: Now does each church have a pastor?

C12: Each region of the Church has a pastor, In Detroit its Cardinal _____in Atlanta its Cardinal _____. The pastor handles the religious prayer needs of the community but in our church you do more. Each region has an administrator and a CEO.

WM: What is PAOCC position on reconciliation between the oppressed and the oppressor, within a Black Liberation theology? Can reconciliation take place, and is it discussed within the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church?

C11: Yes but it hasn't been a real basis. It can't be an apology and business as usual. There has to be a new plan, this is how life is going to work between us. We are also apart of the United Church in Christ, and that's a multiracial organization that I personally feel is good to be apart of, because what it does in our church, and through our Holy Patriarch Jaramogi Abebe, he always said that we can't do it alone and we cant change the world alone. We are talking about a mission that those who are on the right side of righteousness have to prevail over those who are not on the right side. That is the only way we are going to do it. That means whoever. God talks to everybody. We say I believe human society will stand under the judgment of one God revealed to all but known by many names. That's true in the essence of everybody has their way of worship, but the main thing is how does this hit the road, in terms of how we treat each other and how we don't oppress one another and allow for opportunity fairness and opportunity for all. We are going to do what is the best of our ability to have power and as long as those folks say that they want to reconcile with us and they are helpful, we can see that, because we are certainly not going to do that with anybody else. It would be contradictory.

WM: Have you Bishop, experienced anything as a woman that as been limiting and have you had to deal with male privilege,

C12: As a woman in the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church, I have found it to be very fulfilling, which is opposite my experiences in other churches. A lot of our leadership, in this church are woman. Even if you look at other churches, although they may not be in the leadership position, the women are what make the church go. But if you go to some Baptist churches a woman can't even stand on the pulpit. That has not been the case in this church. I felt very fulfilled and I have the abilities because of Jaramogi to do this. He ordained me, so this is for me fulfilling as a woman , I have not ran into that “ you cant do this because you're a woman” thing that is not part of our structure, Notice that it is called Shrine of the Black Madonna and not the Temple of the Black Messiah.

WM: Thank You.

November 22, 2008

Member#1 Interview

The Shrine of the Black Madonna
Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church
Houston, TX

Weldon McWilliams: Today is November 22, 2008, Weldon McWilliams conducting and interview with (*name withheld*) of security of The Shrine of the Black Madonna in Houston, TX. Um, how long have you been a member of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church?

Member #1: 32 years

Weldon McWilliams: And what attracted you the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church?

Member #1: Well, I grew up in Detroit and uh I live right down the street from Shrine 1 um they have programs for the kids for the summer, you know, so um my cousin was involved in the church and he got me to come and I really liked what was going, I liked the feel that I got. You know, everybody was friendly, you know, everybody was helping each other, you know, and it just attracted me to being apart of something.

Weldon McWilliams: Okay and what are some of the things that currently keep you involve and keep you in the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church?

Member #1: I guess my belief that um that we can do something about the blithe of black people, you know, I joined in '76 and um back then, you know, black people were um, that's when the drugs started infiltrating the community and different things, you

know, and I felt a need to do something for my people, you know, and the shrine offered that to me.

Weldon McWilliams: Okay um in your mind what makes the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church unique to other Christian denominations?

Member #1: I guess the fact that we feel like the bible is a history book and that um that Jesus was a black Messiah um most churches are just starting to see that Jesus was a black man, you know, and he was doing things for his people which was the nation Israel which was a black nation, you know, and um I guess that's it.

Weldon McWilliams: That's good. Um how has the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church impacted your life personally as a member?

Member #1: Um I think it taught me a lot you know um I've grown so lot in the church because I joined as a teenager and I been here ever since, you know, and it seems like my world view, it shaped my world view, it shaped how I deal with people uh, basically all aspects of my life, you know, have been changed for the sight, you know, considering that most of my friends ended up in drugs or ended up in jail. You know, and I could've went that route too but being in the church it sent me in another direction.

Weldon McWilliams: And were you um I guess a Christian before or were you involved in the church before you joined or this was your introduction to the Christian church as well?

Member #1: Well, I was introduced to the Christian church but I wasn't a member of the church per say (Weldon McWilliams IV: OK) I didn't go to church, my family didn't go to church, you know, like we weren't forced to go like every Sunday or something we went Easter and Christmas. You know, but um I always had a problem with the Christian

church because of the different things that I saw as a young man, as a teenager, you know, you see different things and you wonder why, why are things the way they are, you know, if, if my whole thing was if God is so good why are black people doing so bad, you know, and it's a book out that talks about that, you know, but that was my whole upbringing, you know, like we had it hard, we had it difficult, you know, and why is that, why is it there is such a separation, but then too I couldn't see myself, praising a blonde haired, blue eyed Jesus, you know, I couldn't see that, you know, I was born in Alabama (Weldon McWilliams IV: Okay), you know, so I went to Detroit when I was like maybe 12 (Weldon McWilliams IV: Okay), you know, (Weldon McWilliams IV: Different house?) yes with all the things that I saw, you know, and I grew up in a, during the civil rights era when they were doing the bus boycott and the marching and all of this, you know, like most folks think the bus boycott ended but it, it went a long way, it was up until '64, you know, it even went beyond that, you know, but um it was a lot things going on in life that I saw as a child and had questions about.

Weldon McWilliams: So did the, the image and the depiction, I guess, of a white Jesus that made it and, and your relationship to white people at that time growing up in Alabama and also in Detroit, I guess, that's what you're saying made it hard for you to find yourself bowing down and worshipping?

Member #1: Yeah, yeah.

Weldon McWilliams: Okay

Member #1: Yeah

Weldon McWilliams: Yeah um Reverend Cleage in his book Black Christian Nationalism stated that the church should move from a more individualistic from more

individual; the church should move from individualistic notions to more of a communal nature. So I wanted to know how has the Pan-African Orthodox and the Shrine of the Black Madonna, how has it affected the community here?

Member #1: I think we had uh we have a, a large impact on the community like when we moved here in Houston um, across the street was apartment complexes all the way down, you know, we had this little complex on the corner and in those apartment complexes there was always shootings, always drugs, always uh just mayhem up and down, people getting they house broken into and stuff. You know, and by us purchasing that property we change the face of the community. Instead of everybody looking out for themselves everybody was looking out for each other.

Weldon McWilliams: O.K. Um, now I've gone to a few uh worship services in Detroit and in Atlanta and one of the things I've noticed was that a lot of the members, many of the members wear the color red and black so I just want to know is there a particular significance to those colors red and black or?

Member #1: Well, you know with you dealing with the red, black, green flag you deal with the red for the blood, black for the people, green for the land. You know, the uniform was uh was implemented to bring, so that um everybody would look the same, you know, so red and black for, blood for the people, black for the people, and the blood that's shed and will be shed.

Weldon McWilliams: Ok, so it is in fact the uniform that I guess members of the church take upon themselves to wear. Um, now what does, earlier we talked about the learning, you stated that you learned that Jesus was a revolutionary was our black Messiah so I wanted to know what did that presentation of Jesus as a black revolutionary uh

revolutionary Messiah what did that do for you on a personal level what and what did, does that mean to you on a personal level?

Member #1: I think it gives me something to strive for if I want to live to be like Jesus then I'm living to be like someone that looks like me. You know and it's, it's not like I'm trying to live outside of um outside of who I am, you know, because I am a black man and if I try to live like a black man. I'm trying to serve like a black man.

Weldon McWilliams IV: Now as a member of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church for 32 years, can you just describe the membership process? I remember reading in his book uh the, the black uh Christians Nationalism that he, he, he describes I guess, the process the different levels of the membership um and that indeed it takes, it doesn't process before you obtain full membership so I just want to know if you can describe that a little bit maybe the different levels of membership or how long the process?

Member #1: The different levels have changed over the years like we have to conform to the times per say but when I joined, you know, you had um you had a orientation you had a BTG level, then you had that ATG level, then you had the cadre level, you know, and um when you first came in you went through 8 weeks of CTD or 8 weeks of orientation training which orientates you to the church. And um you get your African name, you become a BTG member which is basic trainer and that teaches you about the church and what the church is doing and the mission of the church and from there you can determine weather you want to move on to the next level but this level uh contains aspects of different things to help you to grow.

Weldon McWilliams: And can you explain to me the significance of receiving African names within the membership?

Member #1: It's all about identity, you know, like the name you're giving a slave name, we say slave name per say, you know, like John, Jacob, Job, George, and you know, those are slave names. Those are not the original names that were given to black people when they were in Africa you had and African name and your African name reflects you as a person. Something you can grow into, you know, like my name is _____ which means black inspiration of noble promise, you know, so um it gives me something to strive from, to strive for and your name reflects you as growing person it's something you grow into.

Weldon McWilliams: Okay, thank you um I just, just uh again going over black Christian Nationalism and, and uh I guess what one of the things that are some of the issues, main issues that uh just trying the black Madonna in Houston, what are some of the issues that we're addressing now as far as uh what are on the top concern, I guess what are some of the top concerns for the uh shrine of the Black Madonna, some of the things that the members are working on uh maybe are there any projects that going on specifically in Houston that the shrine of the Black Madonna's involved in?

Member #1: Uh right now I guess our biggest thing is uh a partnership with uh Kipper County for across the street to open a uh liberation academy and I guess it will go from K to 12, you know, and um I mean having a place where, where our children can go and learn and not be afraid to be black. You know, what I'm saying? So I guess that's, that's the biggest thing that we're dealing with.

Weldon McWilliams: Okay, and you also say you're a member of the security, how long have you been on the security team here at the Pan-African?

Member #1: 30 years.

Weldon McWilliams: 30 years?

Member #1: Yes.

Weldon McWilliams: Okay, and, and I know that there, can you, there's a name for the security, what's that name?

Member #1: The Maccabees

Weldon McWilliams: And can you explain the historical significance of the Maccabees?

Member #1: The Maccabees was a military of the nation Israel they fought against the Greeks. They started off fighting against the Greeks, you know, and they ended up fighting against the Romans and fighting against they, they were a small band of um revolutionaries, you would have to say, that came together to defeat the Greek army. They um, they liberated, they started out in a small city called Modine and Modine was uh it was a small, small area in Israel. And um the Greeks wanted the Greeks was conquering Israel per say and they had like the leaders and everything come together and they wanted them to bow down and worship the king. They wanted them to worship pagan Gods, you know, they wanted to sacrifice pigs on the alter and all of that you know but this small band, it started out with uh Matthias and his 5 sons. There was 6 of them at first, then the people got involved, you know, so they, they were uh they, they fought like uh how would you say, I don't want to say renegades but they, they were like hitting, they hit and then they disappeared in the mountains, you know, and the whole thing was they were strong. They were lead by Judas Maccabees, that's were the Maccabees comes from and the Maccabee in terms of meaning means 'hammer'. A hammer to be willed by

the people and it means by the people, for the people, and (Weldon McWilliams IV: That's where it comes from?) Yeah.

Weldon McWilliams: So I'm getting a sense that the historical significance of the Maccabees; and correct me if I'm wrong, it was the Maccabees were people who fought for the nation of Israel (Member # 1: Yeah) because they did not want to bow down to these oppressors who I guess wanted to have...?

Member #1: If you really want to learn about them, there is a book called 'My Glorious Brothers' I forget who uh authored it but it's a good book and it tells the story if, if you look in the bible, if you have a bible with uh with all the books of the Maccabees which tells the story also.

Weldon McWilliams: Okay, and how does one go about uh, I guess being a member of this security now, say for instance if I were to join and I went through the membership levels, say the next step that I wanted to take was security, is there a special training also for those who want to be within the security?

Member #1: Uh, yes it is um, the thing is you have to be chosen (Weldon McWilliams IV: Oh.) it's something someone has to see something in you (Weldon McWilliams IV: Alright) and say this person make a good Maccabee (Weldon McWilliams IV: Okay) you know, (Weldon McWilliams IV: That's definitely good.) I guess the number 1 thing is integrity.

Weldon McWilliams: Well again, I'd like to thank you very much for your time and thank you for this (Member # 1: No problem) thank you.

Member #1: Glad to be of service.

***NOVEMBER 22, 2008

Member#2 Interview

THE SHRINE OF THE BLACK MADONNA

THE PAN-AFRICAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHURCH HOUSTON, TX

Weldon McWilliams: Here at the Shrine of the Black Madonna in Houston Texas conducting an interview with Captain _____ (intentionally left blank) member of the Shrine of the Black Madonna here in Houston Texas. Uh, Captain how long have you been a member of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church?

Member #2: 28 years uh, since September of 1979.

Weldon McWilliams: Okay, and what attracted you the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church?

Member #2: Uh, the books, the knowledge that black people were talking if you must know I was born 1951 in Mississippi. I grew up first hand in Jim Crow south with colored water fountains, couldn't go in restaurants to eat and couldn't go to the bathrooms. So to come from Mississippi to Detroit and meet somebody who is actually doing something to change the conditions of black people, that's what attracted me to the Shrine of the Black Madonna.

Weldon McWilliams: So when you joined the shrine in Detroit, uh I believe that's where it all began, correct?

Member #2: That's correct. I joined at the mother shrine in Detroit.

Weldon McWilliams: And what are some of the things that keep you involved in the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church; to be a member for 28 years that must say something about the organization. So what are some of the things that keep you active?

Member #2: Little things that happen every year that spark hope that there is a place and a time for the true history of the black man to be revealed.

Weldon McWilliams: Thank you, um how has the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church uh I guess, what makes that unique to other Christian denominations in your opinion?

Member #2: It is an active religion I mean, you know, the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church called upon me to practice my Christianity daily. 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Not just on Sunday. The things I do on Monday reflects the stuff I go through on Sunday, there's no difference. God's involved with me 24 hours a day and I'm involved with God 24 hours a day.

Weldon McWilliams: Alright, alright, so how has the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church and the shrine of the Black Madonna, how has that helped you shape or reshape your views of Christianity or was this; when you joined in '79, was that your first interaction with Christianity or did it help? Did the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church help reshape pre-existing views you might have had prior to joining?

Member #2: I was born in a very, very religious family in Mississippi and we went to church regularly. I became a teenager right in the middle of the civil rights movement and the churches were being burnt and destroyed because of their involvement in the civil rights movement but belief of God kept churches in the center of focus for the black communities to come together. We could not come together in public schools and no one

had any businesses to gather at so the church was the center of the community. So to be an active part on an on going struggle for humanity attracted me in the '60s, so in the 70s when I moved to Detroit and I found out that that was still happening, that attracted me and that kept me involved.

Weldon McWilliams: Um, in Jaramogi Agyeman's book, "Black Christian Nationalism", he stated that the church should move from a notion of individualism to more of a communal nature, so I wanted to know how has the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church and the Shrine of the Back Madonna, how have they affected this community here in Houston?

Member #2: Well, when we came here, there were several housing complexes in the area and the low life of black humanity existed in those complexes with prostitution, dope sales, abandoned families, violence, black on black violence and the housing complexes perpetuated that and kept it going, so over the years we were able to buy the complexes and change the conditions of the communities and move in people were the kids could walk the streets and not have to worry about getting snatched up, pulled into a gang, being raped, or being induced into prostitution. So we have cleaned up this community here.

Weldon McWilliams: Okay, that's good. Um, one of the things I've also noticed in me attending worship services in Detroit and in Atlanta; I noticed the uniform or many members wear black and red so if you could just explain the significance of the black and red that's worn by a lot of the members during the worship service?

Member #2: Unity. The liberation colors are red, black and green. The red is for the blood that's been shed, the black molds the oneness, green is for the land that black

people must control in order to control their destiny. But red and black shows unity ,the fact that we can reject the world and the clothes that L. A. and New York tell us what we should wear show the commitment to something bigger then oneself.

Weldon McWilliams: Thank you, that's great. What did the presentation of the way Jesus is presented in the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church, through my readings of the books "Black Christian Nationalism" and "The Black Messiah", which were both authored by Jaramogi Agyeman, he points out that Jesus was a black revolutionary so I want to know what did that presentation of Jesus as a black revolutionary mean for you and what did that do for you?

Member # 2: Revolution, to change that which is or to make things better. All of us should be revolutionaries. The blackness of Jesus is a historical matter. The nation of Israel was black. A.J. Rogers first wrote about this. Dr. John Henry Clark and AJ Rogers, they proved what A.J. was writing about, that the bible is a history of the nation of Israel and that according to Dr. Clark, white people were talked about twice. That was when the Greeks invaded and when the Romans invaded. Everybody else in the bible was black people. So the significance of Jesus' blackness it means everything, I mean, a better question is why do people want to hide his blackness? That is the reason why I am attracted to it. When I look in the mirror I see blackness, every morning when I get up the first thing I see is me and if I'm made in the image of God and the image of him created is me then it lets me know that me and God walk hand and hand; or I with God which ever way is politically correct but it's a together journey with me and God.

Weldon McWilliams: And what's the significance of the receiving African names, I know that one of the steps in the membership process is that at some point each member receives an African name so I just want to know what is the significance in that?

Member #2: Historically with African people when you make a transition you accept a name befitting the transition in which you made. If you read your bible it started off Abram was called by God to lead the land. Once he accepted the call of God his name was changed to Abraham throughout the bible you will read this. So the willingness to follow God reject the world, the African name is only befitting to an African person.

Weldon McWilliams: Well again, I'd like to thank you very much for your time, wisdom and sharing your experiences thus far with the Shrine of the Black Madonna, thank you.

NOVEMBER 23, 2008

Clergy #6 and #7 INTERVIEW

THE SHRINE OF THE BLACK MADONNA

**THE PAN-AFRICAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHURCH
HOUSTON, TX**

Weldon McWilliams: Today is November 23, Brother McWilliams at the Shrine of The Black Madonna in Houston, Texas, interviewing two members of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church. Bishop _____(intentionally left blank) and Bishop _____(intentionally left blank). Okay, my first question is how long have you been a member of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church?

Clergy #6: I've been a member since 1971. Thirty-seven years.

Clergy #7: 1972. Thirty-six years

Weldon McWilliams: Okay, and what initially attracted you the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church?

Clergy #6: Well, I grew up in Detroit and I think as a teenager there were always a lot of different activities going on in Detroit. Detroit is a very cultural city and so I had an opportunity to come in contact with several educators who were members of the church. My high school, well actually my junior high school teacher was a member. My high school counselor was a member, and later on I found out that one of my college professors was also a member of the church. But what really attracted me was the fact that the ministers made the sermons applicable to me as a teenager. I was very

conscience of my cultural heritage and the Bible was something I could relate to as a teenager.

Weldon McWilliams: And Bishop, what are some of the things that attracted you to the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church?

Clergy #7: I think it was the message. The message seemed to fit the conditions that I lived under. Um, I think it was a message, a simple statement that General _____ would always say. He would say that Black people have problems and you need somebody to help and the areas that I lived was full of a lot of problems, drugs, crime and all kinds of things that I saw in the Black community and his sermons seem to address those problems and call for someone to help. So in the spirit of the Shrine, when I came in I would come to service, I would fill up with the energy. It pulls you in right away.

Weldon McWilliams: In my research a lot of the Christian Churches, even in Black Liberation Theology, there's an aspect of Black Liberation Theology called Womanist Theology, where they believe that women should be more inclusive in the worship experience. Traditionally, research has shown in the Black Christian Church 70 percent of its members are women but in the leadership positions or the Clergy positions you don't see 70 percent women. It's under 10 percent believe. So speaking with you who are you who are not only members but also Bishops here within the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church, I just want to get your experience as a woman. How has being a member of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church affected you as a woman? Have you experienced any of the gender bias that many researchers have said exist in the Black Church such as sexism and things of that sort? Have you had any experiences with

these issues as far as gender bias in the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church at any point in time of your membership?

Clergy #6: Quite the contrary, at the time that I joined it was a very inclusive atmosphere. I joined when I was a teenager. I was seventeen and there were older women who were in the church who were in leadership roles. I grew up in the Baptist Church. My mother is still a Nurse's Aide and a Mother of the Church and my grandmother before me. So I was always apart of a rich tradition of being involved in the Church with women playing a role. But here it was different. We not only prepared the meals, and were on the Mother Board, and ushered, we could also be leadership and we could give the spoken word. I was ordained quite a while ago, and at my ordination I was able to preach and deliver the word. It was not a matter of was I a woman but it was how has God impacted my life and did God call you? Because of that, it has allowed us to do greater things then we would've had we tried to be exclusive instead of inclusive.

Clergy #7: I originally found the same thing to be true. When I joined the Shrine you were broken up into groups and my first four group leaders were women. They gave me my basics and my foundation in the Church and I felt like we're called to the Shrine of the Black Madonna. I feel like there was not a gender bias. We could preach or teach. Some Bishop may not preach but teach, but they could teach or they maybe skilled in a particular trade. So I thought that the foundation and the structure allowed women to assume roles in leadership as well as Ushers.

Weldon McWilliams: And those reasons that those specific Bishops do not preach are not because of their gender, right?

Both: No, No.

Clergy #7: You know, I don't necessarily feel like...the preacher only asked me to preach one time, but I'd rather do something (Clergy#6: She runs the book store) Yeah, Yeah.

Clergy #6: That's her expertise. She's such an inviting person. I don't think you can find many people in the city of Houston who don't know Bishop _____ and the things that she's done. So, the one thing that our church taught us is to take our gifts and share them freely regardless of gender.

Weldon McWilliams: And how has the presentation of Jesus as a Black Revolutionary Messiah, which I think the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church has lead the way because you do see depictions of a Black Jesus and it's more common now then it was when _____ first presented that. So what does this presentation of Jesus as a Black, not just as a Black Man but a Black Revolutionary Messiah do for you? What is the significance do you think that it has over the membership and congregation?

Clergy#6: What it allows us to see is that God has a direct affect on what we do. That we say in our creed that the revolution of the spirit of God will not long and do injustice. And in each generation that spirit is born anew. And that with Jesus God intervned into the affairs of Israel and because Jesus was Black, it lets us know that we didn't have to despair. God is also...that God is on our side. One thing I tell people all the time is that it's not just enough to say that Oh isn't it good that Jesus was Black, but we can worship, everybody can worship Jesus even though he is black historically. The Bible tells us this. When I went to seminary, I went to seminary in South Carolina, which is a Presbyterian Seminary, traditionally white, predominately male and the first thing the professor asked me was, I know all of .these other denominations, but what is the Pan-African Orthodox

Christian Church? And he stated, putting them all on the board he said, “Okay I know where the Baptist came, the Methodist came, but where does yours fit in?” I said, well let’s go back a little bit further. Let’s go back right here behind the first Christian church. We’re talking about African Orthodox because all the textbooks that I studied in seminary say that Christianity was developed in North Africa. So it has the foundation, the African origins. So we’re not talking about something nice, oh let’s paint him Black, we’re talking about historically. So if you’re dealing with the truth, it doesn’t matter. Just like Barack Obama, he’s the President, not just because he’s Black but he is Black. So Jesus was Jesus. He was a revolutionary because in terms of his intent. He is Black so it’s not because he’s Black, but it is the fact. He’s still Jesus. He’s still Christ. It doesn’t matter. (Weldon McWilliams: Right.) But it did empower us at a time when it seemed as if our people as a whole needed to be inspired. So that needed to be brought out. But it wasn’t like we brought it out only because we wanted to inspire but because it was true.

Weldon McWilliams: Thank you again for your time and I look forward to being in contact with the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church and letting you know about the progress.

NOVEMBER 23, 2008

Clergy #5 and Holy Patriarch Interview

THE SHRINE OF THE BLACK MADONNA

**THE PAN-AFRICAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHURCH
HOUSTON, TX**

Weldon McWilliams: Weldon McWilliams conducting an interview with _____ of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church here in Houston, TX November 23. Cardinal _____ if you can, can you explain the mission of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church?

Clergy #5: Our mission in what broad sense is to restore this world to submission to God's will and that's a huge overarching mission but more specifically there are prison ministries and women ministries and all that. Our ministry specifically is to the victims of an on going black holocaust so that's where we focus our attention. Of course our doors are open to anyone but that's the main focus of our churches work. And we have this saying, let's not waster the Holy Spirit. We don't want to just have a good time on Sunday and forget about what's going on every other day so our mission is really to be service Christians that use God's power to deal with the very real problems that people have.

Weldon McWilliams: And how does the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church utilize Christianity as a tool for the liberation for black people?

Clergy #5: Well, we think that our way of Christianity its one the most revolutionary focuses around the bible being one of the most revolutionary books. The whole story of the Old Testament is God working a people to escape bondage and find freedom. It's a

story that's told over and over again. Their in bondage, they cry out for help, God helps them, they find freedom and then they fail to live as God would want them to live. And then they end up back in bondage and it's that same story told over and over. And so when we read that, when we read the gospels and Jesus saying, "I have come not to abolish the law but to fulfill it." He's trying to make a connection between all his ancestors before. I'm trying to do the same thing. I may be doing a few things different and y'all may look at me cross eyed but I'm still here trying to build a kingdom of God on earth. And so the way we use Christianity is we believe our read on it is free from a racist slant or a slant that, I guess a better way to put it is our read of Christianity is free from the slave Christianity that was taught to our people on plantations. We were told, slave be obedient to your master and your reward will be in heaven after you die. Jesus in Luke 4:18-19 he's talking about what his mission is all about. The spirit of the Lord is upon us to preach good news to the poor, liberation for those who change recovery of sight to the blind. Everything he was talking about was affecting people's daily life situations. And so that's our read of Christianity. We don't see ourselves doing anything beyond what Jesus was calling his followers to do.

Weldon McWilliams: Now I understand that, in reading Reverend _____ or _____ book "The Black Christian Nationalism," I know he stated he wanted the church to move from a more individualist notion to a more communal notion. So I want to know in what ways has the Shrine of the Black Madonna or the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church affected the community here specifically in Houston TX?

Clergy #5: One way we have done that is by how all members of our church are in groups. Now truth be told in our region our groups are not as strong as they could be but

we still operate with the group concept and so we're operating like that within our church but also without, which allows us to work with other Christian churches. The Nation of Islam shaped their community center, which is a real vibrant community center here in Houston. We've also partnered with the University of Houston in their 'A.A.' Studies program. Also every Kwanzaa we're apart of an operation unity where all these different black organization put on a citywide Kwanzaa celebration. But I guess in more tangible general terms a few years ago there was an apartment complex down the street that was on 56-66 M. L. K. Blvd., that was known as the bucket of blood because there was so many police calls out to this place. Selling dope, shooting every single day, over 400 police calls a year. So when we purchased the property that went down to zero. But even years before that 2 other apartment complexes across the street were in almost as bad a situation, but when we took those over we changed the whole dynamic of this community. The last thing that we did with the apartment complexes; 5500 and 5400 which we don't have anymore; we sold those to KIPP Liberation Christian Academy. When we did that folks who had stopped investing in our part of town viewed this piece of Houston as the center for future growth of this city. So there's going to be a rail that comes down M.L.K Blvd, a YMCA that opens up on the corner, KIPP Liberation Christian Academy is in the process of building a school right across the street, which is the 1st school construction in the area in almost 30 years. And so in that way we have directly affected the quality of life in this community by brining all this development. Just because of our mindset, you know, we had other people who wanted to buy that land. We had people who wanted to build malls and all kinds of stuff but _____ (intentionally left blank) said we have to partner with somebody that is of black mind and

KIPP Liberation Christian Academy being a school that wants to educate young minds, specifically young black minds, it was the perfect fit. Less money but it was with our program objectives.

Weldon McWilliams: What is the significance of the name the Shrine of the Black Madonna?

Clergy #5: A few things number one, we believe that the bible is the story of an African people so not only Jesus and Moses but Mary and everyone else except the Greeks and the Romans were an African people. So it's an honor of the fact that Christianity is an African religion. Number 2, it's an honor of black women that fact that Mary gave birth to a Messiah and our founder Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman in his poem "The Messiah" there's a line in it that says now each mother is a Black Madonna or each child born of a black Madonna is a new messiah only waiting to discover his or her identity. So its homage of black women, all that they have done for our people, for our struggle. And one of the tangible ways that we show that is that we've had sisters as ministers, bishops and cardinals in our church as long as we can remember whereas it's still considered revolutionary to have a woman as a minister.

Weldon McWilliams: So that would bring me to my next question, I was wondering what are some of the requirements to enter into the clergy here at the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church.

Clergy #5: You see God works in mysterious ways because _____ came right in time because our requirements have changed; we have reasons for that, if you wouldn't mind speaking about that.

Holy Patriarch: We don't have any hard and fast concrete requirements other than them

being to our satisfaction submitting to the calling. Usually people that identify themselves for the ministry, they have done something related to the ministry within the church and we get evidence of their interest in ministry and at some point they declare that intention or we ask them. They show evidence of having some kind of gift to care as in that regard and we try to nurture that gift and work with them to encourage them. So we do like for our ministers to gain an undergraduate degree and to attend a seminary. It's not mandatory to function as a minister but it's highly encouraged because it gives necessary broadening and develops respect for the profession. I think a lot of people do not think of the ministry as a profession because they are not really introduced to the broad profession in a way where they appreciate the nuances' and the work that has gone in over time and trying to figure out how the ministry relates to the various congregations that have manifested over the centuries. So I think its kind of important that that person to not only have a sense of, I'm doing this now but I need to have a sense of how people have related the power of God, the human need in other times and that it's okay to think about that. Not just do it the way I say it. But to be able to think about what's best because you may end up in a situation where what's best at a given time is like you're in unfamiliar waters and as you try to ministry to this particular situation, there is no road map. And I think a lot of black churches; the black church tradition is doing as you've seen it done. Doing it as Reverend so and so did it, or as somebody across town and successful and doing it, and there being a lot of thought about how do I relate the power of God to the needs of the people in this time given the context of which we live. That takes more than just doing it the way you've seen somebody else do it.

Clergy #5: And also, you probably have better feel for this; we have a pretty high percentage of our ministers who are seminary trained in comparison to other churches.

Holy Patriarch: There's not much of a seminary tradition in Houston in the sense of there aren't seminaries here. But we've been lucky enough to have sent a lot of ministers to ITC or to Emery and to have a relationship with the school where they welcome the people that we send. Also, we have a relationship with Yale so when we would have someone apply, they would genuinely welcome them. So that has given us a strong foundation.

Weldon McWilliams: And that other voice you hear is the Holy Patriarch of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church _____ (intentionally left blank). I was speaking to Cardinal _____ (intentionally left blank) about the significance of the name of the Shrine of the Black Madonna and he was explaining the significance of that name as far as paying respect to the African nation and paying respect to the woman, the Black woman specifically. I wanted to know what the name or holding that position of the Holy Patriarch, I imagine a situation or a condition can exist where it would be a Holy Matriarch if that were the path meaning that Holy Patriarch is not the title per se, meaning this is a position only a man can hold. Meaning that if there was a woman in that position it would be Holy Matriarch?

H.P: The position itself was in a vital time our founder did not start off being the Holy Patriarch. He started off being Rev. needless to say that Rev. stood for revolutionary. But he finally took an African name and his African name reflected his position within an evolving church at that point we were the largest, fastest growing black church in America. So his broad vision of being the head of a denomination, lead him to take the

name _____ (intentionally left blank) which meant blessing. The decision was that every person who became the presiding bishop of the church would take that title. Once, this was like '72 by the time the new church constitution was written in 1978 there was a need to designate formally, what this title would be. What you would call that within the framework of the constitution. And the decision was that the title would be Holy Patriarch, and at that time because no one envision anybody but him being in that position. We hadn't done any advance thinking about the possibility. We didn't add the title Holy Matriarch in the constitution but that was certainly his intentions because he expressed it many times after that.

Clergy #5: And I just want to add, excuse me, you asked me about the significance of the Shrine of the Black Madonna I told you about only 2 things but the 3rd was the fact that she was a mother of our church. That's our charge, to be the mother of our community. Our mother is nurturing and caring and all that, that's our charge for our community.

H.P.: And there is another dimension to that too. And that is that the most controversial aspect of our faith in the beginning was the fact that we had black depictions of Jesus and the disciples and that was in the 1960s. That was tremendously controversial. Basically thanks to our work it's become common but it wasn't common then and the Shrine of the Black Madonna had some traditional roots within the Christian community. There were other, primarily catholic churches throughout the world that had Shrines of the Black Madonna, so it wasn't a completely unknown thing. In America it was unknown but around the world it didn't cause any alarm for somebody to mention the Shrine of the Black Madonna. So the institutional and traditional roots of the name also gave a kind of,

support legitimacy to our effort to redefine the figures of the bible being of African decent.

Weldon McWilliams: And that goes back to, I believe I heard I'm not sure but in places in Europe there are depiction's of Black Madonna's' and I believe one of the Popes'?

H.P.: The last Pope, John Paul the 2nd, that's his name; he's home church in Poland was the Shrine of the Black Madonna.

Weldon McWilliams: The Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church, I guess I see a lot of similarities in the Roman Catholic Church structurally, but I also see a lot of similarities in what some call the Oriental Orthodox Christian church based in Egypt. Is there a specific line, I guess in my research there was a split amongst the Roman Catholics and the Oriental Orthodox and some of the literature I've read, I saw in my research of the Oriental Orthodox Christian Church a lot of the time there is an emphasis on James as well and some of the differences that occur between Paul and James as far as their works. So I wanted to know if the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church aligned more with the Oriental Orthodox Christian Church more than the Roman Catholic or is it in a line all by itself or do you pull and take from both?

H.P.: Well, that's the reason why Orthodox is in our name. We've often been asked, we know based on what church history teaches that they would lump us into the Protestant category because we are not catholic but our position is that we are in a direct line from the Orthodox Church because while we may have grown out of a church which would have been characterized or labeled Protestant the roots we identify with, the theological lineage that we come out of is out of the church of the disciples that was more closely aligned and impacted more greatly the Orthodox Church we are more kin to them

theologically. Now its kind of a dicey thing because of the tradition we come out of because we are in America where those churches broke away from the catholic church and we started off apart of the United Church of Christ and still maintain a relationship with the United Church of Christ for that reason you can say we are a Protestant Church. But theologically we are aligned with the Orthodox Church, Church of the Disciples, the Eastern Orthodox Church were we have been recognized as a part of their constellation of churches.

Weldon McWilliams: Thank you, thank you, I was trying to research that and I had some trouble trying to sort that out so I appreciate that. In _____ (intentionally left blank) book *The Black Christian Nationalism*, he was very critical of the Apostle Paul and I just wanted to know what was the churches position today on the Apostle Paul as far as, for instance I know you are Protestant grew up in a Baptist Church you know, the Apostle Paul is emphasized heavily, his writings, he is the author of many books in the New Testament so I just wanted to know the churches position on the Apostle Paul and if you can go into that.

H.P.: Our founders position was that Paul was Jesus of the modern Christian church and that was part of his problem with the Christian church that it tend to emphasis individual salvation and relate its mission in the world to be so of the world being spiritual that the church was basically of no value to the real problems and the real people in the world and so this focus on being saved and delivered and flying away on wings to heaven and all of that, that focus tended to make the church less political, less enlighten, socially involved, its like it created an alternative universe, a spiritual universe where we deal in that universe and the real problems of the real world we really don't get down in the mud the

nitty gritty of that and try to do anything about it. I think that the separation between church and state is an acknowledgement of this being the churches preferred position. Our founder felt that all of that stemmed from Paul's theology. Whereas Jesus was killed as a political prisoner. The disciples all fell upon the same death because they were considered dangerous to the state. The Christians were outlaws because they felt that somehow they were dangerous to the Roman order, that's a completely different kind of faith. One that is trying to bring about real change in the real world because they believe in doing the will of God in the real world it calls upon believers to be active in the real world in a real way. I think that our church has soften on Paul somewhat in the sense that the line isn't as hard as we once made it because Paul was a great organizer and Paul was building churches. So many of his instructions of how you build a church, how you teach people to accept the faith, how you hold a church together, those teachings are valid because they were taken from traditional wisdom of the day. They weren't something he created in the backyard or something. So they are valuable lessons for us too. But Paul's theology is still a problem because it leans to much on the individual to have an individual relationship with god. Where a person can have a relationship with an invisible God and feel that that justifies whatever they want to do. And the other horizontal relationship with community, friends, family, community, feeling some social responsibility for a group of people being bond together in some kind of fellowship of faith, do something real in the world. That really is not mandated, that's why mega-churches are so successful, because they actually allows Paul's theology to be celebrated at its full expression. You can worship God in, that the church is so large that you really don't know anybody. You have no other ties to the church, no organizational ties, or

involvement ties, you just come. And because of the massive numbers, there are able to get world class musicians and world class accommodations and put on a great show, but your relationship with the church is just that you show up like you would go to the movies. There's no study involved in the programs, mentoring, services that are required. There are no programs that the church is trying to carry out in the larger world that requires your energies and your efforts and more of your life that you would have to dedicate more than just Sundays. So, that makes the church fall far below its potential. And it kind of gives Christianity a bad name because a church can dwell in a community that is falling apart and the problems of the community are not the problems of the church. Everybody in the church keeps their job, they are all well paid. Their accommodations are nice, the fact that that they have people that are losing their homes while they are paying the pastors salary, those issues, the church doesn't feel any responsibility for other than to pray for you. Even in a prosperity ministry they pray for you to have prosperity but they expect you to go someplace else and find it. And then bring us our cut, when you find it. There is a, all those extensions of Paul's logic. That the church existed, an alternative universe, that's what we are leading you to is individual salvation there's no group salvation or group thing that we're doing which is going to make your life better and make the world we live in better. It's all about you and your individual relationship with Jesus. So, _____ (intentionally left blank) who wrote a number of books about the subject of Paul said that Paul took a religion of Jesus and made it a religion about Jesus. And that's basically our issue, it's not that we don't recognize. They raised Jesus to a divinity so that he is not an example for you to follow but an object for you to worship. And how is a divinity going to be an example?

Because, that's God, you can't be like God. So what should have let us become our best selves and be active in the world and the best way to be trying to accomplish the greatest goods with our lives if we can, and develop our talents and our potentials to put our shoulders to the wheel and to help accomplish the greater good that would make a difference in the world, we kind of take that and throw it away. And say well, everything is cool as long as I'm straight with Jesus. And we think our people have suffered from that and we think that even with Paul's theology, the most progressive expressions of the Black church tradition have been where the kind of threw that away. I said, "Wait a minute we got real problems of the real world, we can deal with them," and that was when we were harping back to actually the ministry of Jesus and the disciples and the early Orthodox church out of necessity. When we were discriminated, excluded and all of that the church became everything to everybody, it became, it would loan money to bury people, it was an insurance company, it provided all these services because it had to. That was really harping back to the theology of Jesus and we never really felt very comfortable trying to take that to its full expression. People like Martin Luther King would become renegades within the church because they were trying to make the church a vehicle for social change and people who would die called "Paulineans" said this is not the rules of the church. And that's were the big debate with Martin Luther King and the Johnson's of Chicago. Martin Luther King was trying to make the church a vehicle of social change at the height of the civil rights struggle where it could actually be that. And Johnson was so opposed to it that they almost, well actually they did tear up the Baptist convention over it. And you end up with the progressive Baptist because they followed King's vision, while Johnson took the church, matter of fact when they changed the street

name that Johnson's church was on when he renamed it Martin Luther King in Chicago he bricked up the front door and opened a door on the side street so that his address to his church would not be Martin Luther King Blvd. (Group talking) But the whole idea, King's idea was an outgrowth of the Jesus church, the Jesus tradition and they couldn't let go of Paul.

Clergy #5: And that's one of the names of Scornfield's book, The Jesus Party, right?

Weldon McWilliams IV: The Jesus Party? Okay, thank you. Just a few more questions, man I'm getting full, I love it. In the book "Black Christian Nationalism" _____ (intentionally left blank) also stated several times that while preparing for liberation here that the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church was also trying to liberate the African continent, so I wanted to know if that's still a goal or what's currently being done now in the spirit of Pan-Africanism to help liberate continental and Africans as well?

H.P.: Well we have a relationship, it's kind of minute. But I think over the years what has happened is we do not see the struggles of African people apart from, well we don't see the struggles of African people on the continent as being separate and distinct of the struggle of African people anywhere else. So it's all one thing and I think at the time when _____ (intentionally left blank) wrote those things and there was a sweeping liberation effort across Africa. That being involved in that was both a source of relevance and a source of offering direction to what we had to do in this country. I don't think we do; we do some aid and help things in Africa, we support schools, (Clergy # 5: There's a school in Benin, where we support 2 of the students.) We are apart of an effort to provide water in villages that don't have water. Up until a couple of years ago we had a relationship with the Benin government. We were trying to do some joint things but the

principle people past away and so now trying to do that is more difficult but I think that we have an eye toward trying to solve some of the problems in Africa. But I think that, so much about our struggle has changed in recent times where it's no longer that we're lending support to Africans or to various groups that are fighting against white oppression. The nature of our oppression has changed and it's not really white oppression that we are fighting. We are fighting oppression but many times that oppression is created by our own people and by people where the people in power that can make decisions may look like us. So, it's not the same struggle and that's created some complications for us. Most complications have expanded, now that we have a Black President. However we talk about liberation when the head of the country looks like us. We're experiencing some cities where we fought for a Black Mayors and once we got a Black Mayor we couldn't cut the protest button off. We didn't understand that we had to move from being on the outside, being excluded and protesting our exclusion to now we're included now what can we do in a concrete and positive way to impact the reality that we want to change. That kind of work, we find as a people difficult to do that kind of work. That's our challenge as a church right now, is that as long as we were able to rail against what was wrong in the country, we were understood so much better. That hard line of racism was there, we were understood so much better. But today as things have evolved and that hard line isn't there anymore and it's, you know it's still there and it's still influence them but how it works needing a new analysis. We would have to switch from railing against an injustice in the world to try to do the things we can do, to control what we can control, to build what we can build. To try to focus on self determination and become self reliant people. And to build the things we need to build to

change our community. Not to talk about South Africa being free but what about the 50% of kids dropping out of school right here. What concrete things can we do about that? What concrete things can we do about people losing their homes? What concrete things can we do about the real problems facing our people because to tell you the truth people don't want to hear about an injustice on the other side of the world. Now for enlighten and education sake, you can talk about but the question becomes what we can do about it. And we have to go to a point to advance our support to another level we have to talk about those things we can do something about and try to do it. And have the programs and the leadership and the resources to get the things that we have identified done. Because it's very easy to sit in a pulpit or anywhere else and talk about the ills of the world or the ills down through time. Racism and how terrible it was and all of that but that doesn't do anything. Same thing is true about history, talking about the glories of African history doesn't make it any easier for me to inspire this kid right here to go to school on time, get an education so that he can compete in a competition society. So the things that we spend time on, they have to have some value on the things that we are trying to do right now, and I think that there is much confusion among people who were once Black revolutionaries or progressive Black minds because so much of their existence had to do with complaining and railing against the whole Black/white paradigm, the whole Black/White history of Black folks and white folks fighting. Now you have multi-ethnic, multi-cultures, multi-religious society, people all mixed together and it's much more complicated. What we have to do is be able to switch from this long argument with white people, to hell with white people, why even think about them. We have to do the best things for us, the best things that we can do to impact our reality, our

community, to help our children, to stabilize our families and those are the programs that are most revolutionary today. Those are the things that are what protesting would have been in the past, these are the things now. It's not so much of being against anything, its being forward of things that are critical to us, and our existence. There is so much about, I don't know if that is sexy enough for a lot of Black people. (Clergy # 5: The same brothers and sisters that you were talking about, who made a whole program protesting viewed the work of the building as, what's so revolutionary about that. That's the most revolutionary thing you can do.) That set it off, you say I'm a Black nationalist so I'm a nation builder; okay what nation are you building. What are you building, all you're doing is dressing in African garments and reading books and complaining. You're not building anything; building means that you are actually creating a materiel difference in our existence. And that is tedious, slow, nasty work. (Clergy # 5: No TV cameras) Yeah, it's not glorious and wonderful, it may be glorious down the way when you get it build and somebody is talking about what you did. But the day to day effort to but brick upon brick, to educate children, to unmask money to do something that is going to make a difference. That is tedious and you're not going to become Stokely Carmichael and Brown or Malcolm X doing that. That's why I believe in a very real way, it's honestly sincere, that Oprah Winfrey is one of the greatest revolutionaries in American history. She hasn't ever been in a position to rail against the injustice of society because the source of her wealth and notoriety is from a broad spectrum of American society. But what she has been able to do is take that wealth and notoriety and use it for the things that she believes in. Kind of underground, and so she has actually done more then a whole lot of loud mouths, crowd drawing, so-called revolutionaries who want to be perceived in

way were they are still in the 60s. The 60s was necessary for the 60s but that was forty years ago. It's not necessary now, now it requires a different kind of leadership and it's a different kind of struggle. And the realities of the world meaning we've got to get some things done. Not be able to just talk about what we don't like and that is the fundamental challenge to the next generation to be able to cross over and be recognized that they are not really in Moses' generation, their in Joshua's generation. Their not trying to get out of Egypt and cross the wilderness, they are trying to get into the promise land. And to claim it, all this opportunity has been created so it does make a difference when you have some cities with 80% of the kids dropping out of school, what difference does it make for the rest of their lives they will not be able to participate in the struggle to claim the opportunity that we built. So as a church that has survived a long time our struggle is like a man trying to turn a big tanker ship, we're trying to turn it so that it relates to the modern world and the struggle when you turn that kind of, even when you recognize that you need to turn and you hit the steering wheel as hard as you can it still takes you five miles to turn the ship because it's so big. We're in the same situation, we're in the position where we have to turn our institutional efforts, our struggles, and where we are going in the future toward what we can do and what we can control and more individual responsibility for preparing ourselves to participate in the things that those protesters and martyrs have made possible. But because we have lived so long, 55 years is a long time to do the kind of thing that we are doing, it's a tedious process of trying to turn an institution and black liberation theology has to be redefined for another age. It's not the Black liberation theology of the 60s or the 70s or the 80s or even the 90s. It's a completely new kind of liberation theology because new situation bring about different

kinds of oppressions most depressions we're dealing with today are historical because the legacy of racism, discrimination and exclusion are largely personal that we have to be able to overcome regular beliefs and a sense of hopelessness and the way of life that we have created within the Black community that is self destructive. We have to overcome those things; if the church can't help us overcome those things then we're through. The Black youth culture becomes the way that we decide we are going to live from now on, then we are through as a people. We don't have any family's young Black families growing up together raising children. Like I asked a question one time in church, "How many young people, how many young families do you know how many can you name?" People labored to name 2 or 3 that the actually know young people, a mother and a father raising children when it use to be the most natural thing in the word but that does not go well for our future as a people. We have to get back to those things that we can control and we can do. A lot of it is individual responsibility (Clergy # 5: And also like you've said before that whole mindset right now, where we have a culture that celebrates ignorance and insanity and so that goes back to what you were saying about dealing with what we control because there's always this group that says there is a conspiracy to do this, a conspiracy to keep us down but that whole argument is basically saying that there is nothing that we can do. And that takes the power out of our hands, we're saying we don't have any power to change our conditions and so we have to attack that from all different ends to get our young people and old people too so that we can make a difference, we can do something.) And that's why Barack Obama is such an important symbol. He symbolizes even being Black there are things you can do, and if done in the right way you can have amazing results. (Clergy # 5: Black, fatherless...) Yeah, yeah to

grow up without a father, to overcome all of the odds to do what he has done. Means that if he can do it other people can do it, we have to have a mind to though. We have to believe it's possible and understand that there are opportunities out here. Most people that leave school don't feel there are any opportunities and they are wasting time. But if we have a change of heart were we are going to give up the victim mentality and we're going to stop acting like we are victims of a great historical crime, which we are, but that doesn't have to be our identity. Our problem doesn't have to be our identity. I can be dyslexic without walking around saying I'm dyslexic and that's the reason for my whole blithe in life. We can be victims with our historical victims without having a victim mentality and that's what I mean by moving to the point where we do what we can do. Create self reliant people who can engage in a struggle for self determination where we build businesses, where we build the things we need that will make us stronger as we go into the future. We build school, schools require that some people take education seriously, take teaching seriously, that the individual responsibility. Unless the church is able to get people to assume individual responsibility and come to understand that the responsibility I assume as an individual is going to have an impact on my community and my people because I, only by developing my own abilities an I going to be able to participate in the kind of struggle which we are in now, I have to have some ability, I have to know something, I have to be able to do something. And that which I do, I can attach myself to a program or institution that's trying to make a difference and can magnify that program by what I bring to the table. You can bring 100 people together that can actually do something, they have dramatic impact upon a community, but that's different from carrying a sign or complaining about what's not right.

Weldon McWilliams: Okay just a couple more questions, thank you. I just want to get the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church position on something that many Black theologians, such as Cone and Robinson Hopkins, they talk about this notion of reconciliation and their construction of Black liberation theology. In Black liberation theology they say it's the oppressed vs. the oppressor that whole construction so reconciliation has to take place at some point. I guess I want to know what does that reconciliation look like, is it something deeper than just integration?

H.P.: Reconciliation means; you know it's funny but I think that process is already coming about. If over 60 % of the white population voted for Barack Obama, you got to say this whole notion of biological inferiority this whole notion of the other, the difference, which is the root to racism; they have to be in some way eroding and I think that the reconciliation isn't the great big love fest but it's a mutual respect. It's respecting that this person here is not a type and that this type is not biologically inferior, I can't just dismiss it and reject it out of hand because his skin is dark just lump him into a pile with a whole lot of other people. The way they used to say it, the worst white man is better than the best black man. Which is the whole reason for the notion uppity and all of that, that once your started looking like you were appearing to be better than the words white man, you were getting uppity. You were disrupting the social order because you were improving yourself, and speaking properly and that was messing with the theories, the foundational theories of the society. But I think that that's not true anymore, and I think that reconciliation is coming about. Now it's going to be a long time in coming but I think the biggest struggle always is in breaking the gravitational pull of an idea. That's were the energy really has to; after that it will develop on its own. The biggest efforts are

breaking the gravitational pull of the idea that we are other, different, some much distinctly different that we are inferior and that everybody in this group or everybody within our group that become mixed by this group they're inferior too that that has began to wean. The funny thing about it is we have been traditionally nationalist we've been trying to build the institutions in things which we felt would make a difference in our existence and the whole other camp was the integration camp which was trying to seek inclusion and acceptance. Our argument with that approach has always been that inclusion and acceptance is something you can't control. You can't control what's in another persons' mind or heart. But by building things, we need to build and do what we need to do what we can bring about is a situation of mutual respect. When our stuff matches your stuff, when we compete for the same goals and out do you, when we are a formidable adversary for the same prizes it becomes very difficult for you to pigeonhole us as inferior of a different; it's kind of like (Clergy # 5: And we've seen that in our lifetime with the Japanese.) Right, right or the Russians; once the Russians got equal footing it was like you can talk about a Russian but that didn't mean anything to a Russian. He wasn't going to cry and say, "Excuse me because I'm Russian" because they were just as powerful and so it was an insult. It's like they were telling the Russians "Yo' mama" and the Russians say "Yo mama". I'm not losing any sleep over that. With Black people we haven't gotten to that point yet, so anything said negative about us we are wounded and hurt. They don't have any right to define anything. But the difference is we accept their right to define things so we get upset when they define us in a way that we don't like. What we have to do is get pass that and be able to accomplish, build, grow, to the point where we can do anything you can do. So even if you got some back wood Bubba's

they're holding on to this whole idea of white privilege. That's your ignorance it's not mine, I'm not participating in it. We should be able to demonstrate, as we are more able to demonstrate that we can control our own destiny. That we can take care of ourselves and we are not asking you for anything. The whole notion of affirmative actions or even reparations; we can want it but it doesn't make any sense. And we are not getting it anyway, we'd be fools not to want it but we're not getting it so we can stop spending energy on that wasting time with it and move to build the things that we can build. How are you going to give reparations for the Black man being allowed, I mean it would be ridiculous. How are you going to argue for affirmative actions; affirmative action as presently constituted is only about race, it's not about class, it's not about providing advantages for poor people, it's about providing advantages for people simple because they are Black. They are Black and rich, and they still qualify. It doesn't make any sense and so it pass out of existence. We have to be able to compete it's a competition society on what is perceived to be a level playing field now we are kind of beat up from the past but what is true is a lot of those obstacles don't exist anymore, we are just in bad shape from the past, we have to get in better shape and we have to be able to run the present race. And compete for the things we think, we believe. That's the only kind of reconciliation you are going to get.

Weldon McWilliams: Just a couple of questions and this is just specifically about the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church in itself, how many members approximately are in the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church because I understand there are four churches, four different locations so I guess if you were to combined them all about how many members approximately?

H.P.: If you combined them all, everybody on our membership list there would be about 20,000 but when you talk about those people who are presently active I'd think actually there are about a thousand.

Weldon McWilliams: The Beulah land, if you could just explain the significance of and the purpose of Beulah land in South Carolina?

H.P.: Well Beulah land is the 1st of 4,000 acres of land so it's quite a large accomplishment in terms of just owning that amount of the country, that amount of real-estate. Our goal for Beulah land was to create an economic engine that would be able to undergird the work of the church so that we would not have to stop our programs or activities because we've reached a point where we could not finance them through membership giving. But beyond that Beulah land is a way to do a lot of the things that we do and to do them better and on a larger scale. It's a way to work with children in a way in which we could not work with children in inner cities. To provide an alternative environment, to provide a dedicated educational environment, mentoring and enrichment and early exposure programs. It allows us to; one of our dreams was to have a Pan-African boarding school where we could bring kids together from around the country and they could have a boarding school there and they can; the talented children from all over can grow up and know each other so that when they moved into their years when they went to other countries they would be able to think and collaborate together on things they might be able to do for our people in mass. Beulah land, it's just an opportunity to engage in business, and grow our own food. When we start talking about self-determination struggle first step in self-determination is being able to eat and being able to feed ourselves and to be able to develop those things. I mean I think when we first

started, Beulah land was an effort to simple that to feed ourselves. But since then we've realized that 4,000 acres of land give you way more than the just the ability to just be able to eat. It also gives you the ability to be able to engage in entrepreneurial enterprises which not only provides you funds but also becomes a way to expand skill. To secure your own talent the people that you trained, the kids that come through your system where they don't have to go to the open market to work because they can work for you. The constellation of the various types of jobs that would be generated by a 4,000 acre farm pretty much includes everything. So you have room under the tent for every person from every profession. It doesn't make a difference what you studied in school pretty much there is something that you can do which can be a part of what we do out of Beulah land. So we kind of look at Beulah land as a nation with in a nation. When we started talking about build the nation of Beulah land; we didn't go to the promise land we bought it. Now we have to develop it which is a big, big challenge because for all those years we thought buying Beulah land was really the end goal. I guess the same as the people with Moses thought about getting to the promise land was the end goal the fact that they had to go in and fight for it that was another struggle that took another generation another mindset. Well, just getting to the point we purchased Beulah land was one mindset but now developing it is another one and it takes people that think differently and can see the possibilities. See what you can expand this into being seeing how we don't have to limit ourselves to just one Beulah land we can continue to amass land, it doesn't have to be the next Beulah land it can be a Mississippi. It can be anywhere but each one of them strengthens our ability to determine our own destiny. Which is what we were struggling for all along anyway. We weren't struggling for heaven we were struggling for an

opportunity to control our own destiny. We actually have that in front of us but I guess people sitting up there looking at the promise land didn't think that this was such a great blessing to come all the way out here now and be presented with this challenge. Well we are kind of the same way; we come all this way and we have all this stuff and we are presented with the challenge of doing something with it and a lot of times people don't perceive this as a blessing. I think that we have an opportunity; and I haven't really talked about this; we have an opportunity to turn Beulah land into a wind farm which I've been working on. As a matter of fact I'll be going down there next week to try to discuss this with some people who; I have an acquaintance that is being appointed to Barack Obama's energy commission and the money to buy the windmills is readily available because that is a big part of his program so we find out we can make Beulah land a wind farm and it doesn't interfere with anything else that we are doing. We'll just have windmills around but it doesn't interfere with our ability to deal with cattle, fish, or timber or any recreational programs or educational programs that we would like to do with Beulah land. As a matter of fact, we've even talked about there being a bio-fuel facility there where we can deal with various bio-fuels. So Beulah land becomes an alternative hub is what we are looking at because there is a lot of money to support that type of thing. We've gotten Georgia Power to agree to buy to all of the electricity that we might generate because they have the capacity that we can tap into and sell that power to them. If we can get that together, it's good for us because it give us the dollars to work in the church in a way where we don't have to limit what we do to what our members can afford. The scope of possibilities are broad because we can pay for whatever our imagination decides to do.

Weldon McWilliams: You kind of answered this question in the last question but what are some other projects that the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church is working on along side the development of Beulah land?

H.P.: Well we really think that education is the key to the future. We start talking about personal development, personal responsibility, that you have to have knowledge to be able to tap in and help the struggle that we are engage in. People that know something and we can't have a whole movement where a whole generation runs from education because of school. We have to encourage and expand educational opportunities. Encourage and find new ways to keep people in school so that they might eventually be able to reap the harvest of the development. There's no point of opening the door and you can't go in so the things that are happening now are creating opportunities but if we are not qualified, if we are not prepared to take advantage of the opportunity then everything that we have done before is wasted. So we think of education and providing education as an opportunity as key. We're presently in an effort to try and build seven schools in five years in conjunction with KIPP Academy well KIPP Incorporated would be the current group. And we discussing that in Houston and in Detroit and out of Beulah land. Something's we'll try to do through them and some things we'll try to do on our own. Some things we'll try to do through a group in Detroit called Evan Solutions which deals with providing educational opportunities to children that have entered criminal justice system. Evan Solutions operates out of our community center in Detroit, right now they run nine schools which we have a number of member employed through that company who are trying to figure out how to provide educational opportunities to at risk children, that will be very important because criminology has become so pervasive that

you can't just try to keep people out of the criminal justice system, you have to try to be able to recover them as early as you can once they get in so having that dimension to provide educational opportunities is very important. I think that what our biggest challenge is in that mentality thing. To get our people involved to understand that we are in a self-determination struggle, to deal with that you self-reliant people like on the Booker T. Washington motto. Where we can build what we need to build, do what we need to do, control what we need to control, there are no excuses, there is no one to blame you are not going to get help from someplace else, we have to be able to accomplish it. That is our struggle and we have to be involved in equipping and preparing people for that and we have to be able to facilitate the development of entrepreneur enterprises which frees our people up from the system so that we control what we control. That we are not waiting to get laid off, we run what we run. Now it's best to have a job if that's the only way you have to get along but we would consider it a religious obligation to move from a job to something that you can control and if you couldn't deal with anybody else you can deal with us. So we can sustain ourselves and we believe that is the key to the future. The technology has made it possible so that if we can't sell it to anybody in the country, we can sell it around the world. We have to be able to turn our members into employees who are estate holders in an interlocking system of enterprises which have global reach so that we're able to offer more than spiritual deliverance, we are also able to offer practical economic survival. Member joining, not just joining a church but becoming apart of a comprehensive system, a nation that isn't necessarily a separate geographical thing but more like a corporate nation or a spiritual corporate nation but has the ability to practice all of the things that we believe. We would take care of each other, we're a

fellowship of faith that doesn't mean that everybody working for us would have to be members of our church because we would be able to provide jobs and opportunities for people throughout the community but we create a model for how other churches might use the considerable resources not just to enrich the pastor or a few key member but to recycle the money not just to build bigger churches but to use it in a way where it's self sustaining where it can provide for other people and is self sustaining. As a matter of fact, it grows because the more people you bring into it the bigger and better it becomes. And it becomes in a way in which e don't leave our people out there hanging praying that there next won't have a pick slip in it. We are able to do and finance the things that not just provide for the general community but they are able to participate in growing skill and growing wealth and growing sense of power about what we can do for ourselves. I think if we can create that model that other people in a sense will adopt it and that will empower an entire community and once they are empowered that way then they will be in the promise land so it will be difficult to backtrack people who have a taste of controlling there own destiny. To their own brain, their own work, their own labor, their own faith, their ability to stuck together and work together we can do that and nobody can take it away, then we have done what we are trying to do. Our liberation is complete.

Weldon McWilliams: I would like to thank you _____ and _____
(intentionally left blank) with giving me your time.

H.P: Thank you.

Research Questionnaire

1. Please check:

Male

Female

2. What is your age? _____

3. Please indicate your race/ethnic background.

4. Do you consider yourself a Christian?

Yes

No

5. If you answered yes to the previous question, what is your Christian denomination (i.e. Catholic, Protestant, Lutheran, Baptist, etc.)?

6. Which income group do you belong to?

A. \$10,000-\$20,000/year B. \$20,000-\$30,000/year C. \$30,000-\$40,000/year

D. \$40,000-\$50,000/year E. \$50,000+/year F. Under \$10,000/year

7. Please circle the letter that represents the statement do you agree with most?

A. Christianity is a religion that should focus strictly with the spiritual, divine, heavenly realm of the afterlife.

B. Christianity is a religion that should focus strictly on the social, political, and economical conditions of this life.

C. Christianity is a religion that should show the connection and relevance between the spiritual realm of the afterlife and the social realm of this life.

8. Generally has Christianity in its promotion and work, met the criteria of the statement statement you agreed with the most in the previous question?

Yes

No

9. In your opinion can one's position in society influence his/her interpretation of Christ's message (Ex. Can someone's wealth, age, race, sex, etc., influence his/her interpretation of what it means to be a follower of Jesus the Christ)? Please explain why.

_____ Yes _____ No

10. A church should have various programs and/or workshops open to the public community it resides in.

A. Strongly Agree B. Agree C. Disagree D. Strongly Disagree

11. Which statement best describes how you feel about your place of worship?

- A. My Church is very active within the community it resides
- B. My Church does little to support the community in which it resides and should do more.
- C. My Church is very inactive and does nothing to support and uplift the community in which it resides.

12. Please complete this statement: I feel the majority of people in my church congregation...

- A. makes less income than I do.
- B. makes about the same amount of income as I do.
- C. makes more income than I do.

13. Is your church congregation a primarily racially mixed congregation?

A. Yes B. No

14. If you answered no to the previous question, please identify the dominate racial make up of your congregants.
