

A Brief History of the Mother Shrine

In October 1953, Rev. Albert B. Cleage Jr. founded the Central Congregational Church in Detroit. The Central Congregational Church was perhaps best known for its popular and successful Youth Fellowship Program, Detroit's Finest Youth Program. It incorporated dance, drama, sports, social events, academics, Christian service and the "Workday for Christ," and was an integral part of the church's mission for transforming the world. This legacy of dynamic youth programming extends far into the legacy of the church. In 1971, Alkebu-Lan Academy began with a mission to prepare Black youth for leadership in the Pan African World Community. It was a holistic, self-affirming program that engaged the youth in: Sacramental worship experiences, systematic socialization for communal values, harmonious integrated development of the mind, body and spirit (aka The Science of KUA), moral and faith development, and the acquisition of basic skills as preparation for effective and creative inclusion in the emerging technological and information era.

The Black Christian Nationalist movement, program and position were developed by Rev. Albert B. Cleage Jr. at the Shrine of the Black Madonna in Detroit, MI over a period of years, and received national attention in the mid 1960's through the columns of The Illustrated News, a monthly publication. From the very beginning the Shrine offered a realistic analysis of the way society functions and began to define a position for black people in terms of the continuing power struggle in which we are engaged. *"We believe that nothing is more sacred than the liberation of Black people. We must transform the minds of black people by freeing them from dependence on white cultural values and from their unconscious acceptance of the white man's declaration of Black inferiority."* In 1957, Rev. Cleage waged a battle to save the 13th Congressional District from being redistricted, which would have denied area African Americans their first black representative. In 1964, Rev. Cleage, along with a formidable group of supporters that included James Boggs, his wife, Dr. Grace Lee Boggs, attorney Milton Henry, and his brother Richard Henry, all joined forces with the Harlem, New York-based Freedom Now Party (FNP). Rev. Cleage was inextricably connected to the needs of his congregation and community. Together they attacked injustice, racism, and inequality in local businesses, city schools, and state

politics.

After co-founding the **Freedom Now Party** he ran for governor of Michigan, becoming the first black man to do so since the Reconstruction era. The Michigan campaign, which ran candidates for city, county, and state offices, was the most successful FNP effort in the country. In 1965, Rev. Cleage ran for the Detroit Common (now City) Council, and two years later, he ran for the U.S. Congress. Though he did not win any of these races, these pioneering political efforts bore fruit a decade later with the formation of the powerful Black Slate, Inc. Rev. Cleage shared platforms with **Dr. Martin Luther King** and **Malcolm X** and provided Shrine #1 as a forum for many who spoke out against the oppression of black people. As a theologian, Rev. Cleage gained national and international prominence. In the early 1950s, he coined the phrase "*Black theology*," making him the pioneer of a new field of religious studies. He provided his thoughts on the subject in *The Black Messiah*, a book of sermons published in 1968. A national bestseller, it was eventually translated into fourteen languages. His theological views and opinions were further developed and published in his 1972 work, *Black Christian Nationalism: New Directions for the Black Church*. These works are still required reading in seminaries and schools of religion throughout the world. Subsequently, he wrote many essays and articles that appeared in a wide variety of publications, which stripped the mystical distortions of Christianity and made it relevant to the lives of black people.

Guided for forty-seven extraordinary years by our Founder and 1st Holy Patriarch, the late Rev. Albert B. Cleage Jr. (Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman), the Shrines of the Black Madonna, of the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church vigorously dedicated its mission and ministries to the liberation of the Pan African World Community. With the unveiling of the eighteen-foot chancel mural of the Black Madonna and child, which reflected the church's precepts that the historical Jesus was black, he launched a new movement. During the past seventy-two years, the organization has developed "*the theological, philosophical, and programmatic foundation required to build 'institutional power' for Black people.*" In 1981, an amazing and courageous event occurred – the establishment of the first Mtoto

House, a twenty-four hour kibbutz-like children's community. Children lived in dormitory settings with others of the same age and gender. Each age level group had its 'house parents' who along with their birth parents, were responsible for the children's training and supervision.

The objective was to develop a generation whose experiences and training would lead them to embrace communalism as a way of life, open themselves to the experience of GOD and become future leaders for Black people. Many of other institutional mechanisms were developed between 1981 and 1999, after having established five churches in Detroit, one in Kalamazoo, and another in Flint, MI, with thirteen college cadres across Michigan. Most notably, the Shrine Cultural Center & Bookstore in Detroit, became one of the most well-respected black business and center of black art, culture and history in the nation. With thousands of books, African artifacts, and memorabilia, authors, writers, entertainers, athletes, politicians, historians, lecturers, teachers, parents, students and children frequented the store for over fifty years between 1970 and 2,000. However, one of the Shrine greatest accomplishments came in the fall of 1999. After twenty years of fund-raising and investing we acquired our very own Promised Land. *"Beulah Land is the nation-within-a-nation for which we have always longed. It makes possible the entire range of counter-institutions necessary to raise our struggle to new levels. Beulah Land catapults the BCN Program into a brand new era!"* (Presiding Bishop Menelik Nelson) The Shrine started the Black Star Food Co-op in the early 1970's. Scott Caudel (Bro. Baye), a member owned the land in Belleville, Michigan where started the early farm. Belleville, Michigan.

Members of the Shrine and the community participated in the harvest and distribution of the food. This farm program was designed to aid those in need in the community and was the microcosm of what was to come. In 1981, Jaramogi launched the fundraiser for the Beulah Land Farm Project to purchase 5,000 acres of land as a phase of the BCN Program. In 1999, the Shrine purchased 2,700 acres of land in Calhoun Falls, SC. Cardinal Nkosi (Dr. Ernest Martin) negotiated the contract and purchase of the land. He was instrumental in the farm start-up operations by contracting for farm equipment and acting as the business liaison. This 2,700-acre site is located along a five-mile

stretch of Secession Lakefront property on the Georgia-South Carolina border. Beulah Land is a multi-faceted complex, with agriculture, aquaculture (fisheries), timber, poultry, dairy, hog and cattle operations, and sod farming. Projections of canneries, food processing plants, school, a church, summer camp and retreats. In 2005, over 1,000 additional acres were purchased, making Beulah Land the largest black farm complex in the country.

Rev. Cleage made his transition on February 20, 2000, leaving his rich and powerful legacy to the same young people he had trained and mentored since the early 1970's. Thanks to the guidance and direction of our Presiding Bishop Kimathi, the Shrines in Detroit, Atlanta and Houston continue to operate as strong pillars in their local communities. Here in Detroit, the legacy of the Shrine continues under the dedicated leadership of its Senior Pastor, Bishop Mbiyu Chui (Rev. William Moore), who has for the past twenty-five years, extended the works of Rev. Cleage across the metro-Detroit area, and through several dynamic local, national and international ministries and initiatives, spreading our shared faith through the establishment of churches in Monrovia and Ganta City, Liberia, in West Africa. In 2023 a documentary film entitled: "A Pan African Mission" was released by the Swedish Film Institute, featuring Bishop Chui, and highlighting the Shrine's life-changing missionary works in the Motherland.