

Zion Christian Church

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Chairperson, Archbishop Tutu, members of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, brothers and sisters we greet you in the name of peace, the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank the commission for inviting our Church to publicly share our experience and suffering during the dark years of apartheid, our contribution in the spiritual war against hatred amongst fellow South Africans and our vision for the future of our country.

Chairperson, the ZION CHRISTIAN Church was born after the Anglo Boer War just before union in 1910. The founder of the Church, Bishop Engenas Barnabas Lekoanyane had by then become acutely aware of the attempt by missionaries to erode African value systems and cultural beliefs. He realized that unless Christianity was interpreted in a context suitable to the African lifestyle, cultural and political development, Africans would in due course find themselves as a nation alienated from its roots, rich history and religious foundation.

Without the infrastructure available to the so-called "main stream Churches" at the time, Bishop Engenas worked tirelessly for the spiritual upliftment of his people and by 1948 when he passed away - (*May his soul rest in peace*), the Zion Christian Church was approximately 120,000 people strong, in spite of the propaganda war which was waged against him and his followers. Fellow /pp.1-2/

Africans in the mainstream Churches in those days derided him and expressed sentiments like "*O Aile wa bona kilie Bishop wa motho moso!*" Engenas was less concerned about comments from his detractors. In 1924 when one of his followers asked him what colour he thought God was – Engenas retorted and said:

"We are made in the image of God, and if this is true, then I assure you friends that when you enter

the kingdom of heaven you will find a God of your colour."

When his critics heard this, they immediately spread a rumour to the effect that Lekganyane claimed that he is God. The reason for this was simply that people at that stage sincerely believed the God was white and nothing else.

Mention must be made of the fact that Lekganyane's missionary work started in the rural areas of the present day Northern Province. He showed great respect for African chieftaincy

and because of this, many chiefs allowed him to preach the gospel of Christ in their areas. So great was his respect for African chieftaincy that when he established the Church, one of the first buildings he built was a guest house for chiefs who called from time to time to join him in prayer for rain and good harvest.

When the ANC adopted its first constitutions in 1919 and established the upper house of chiefs, Engenas was among the first people to applaud because in his view "when our educated young leaders recognized our historical background, the African was on a path to somewhere .in 1927 when the status of African chieftaincy was downgraded by the Native Administrative Act.

Engenas refused to recognise that African chieftaincy was subject to the whims and likes of the white government. To him the African chieftaincy was an institution not to be tempered with, least of all, by foreign people who understand very little or nothing about African culture. From the beginning our Church viewed habits such as drinking liquor, smoking tobacco or dagga /pp. 2-3

and violence as against the gospel of Christ. As such tobacco, dagga (now lately including narcotic drugs), liquor and all forms of violence were and are still prohibited in the ZION CHRISTIAN Church.

Engenas proclaimed Peace to all people on earth. So dedicated to peace was he that he even taught his followers to precede their greetings by proclaiming peace to each other. From 1910 to date when we greet each other we first proclaim Peace and then proceed with our greetings. Similarly, our sermons are punctuated by proclaiming peace on earth, a doctrine for which we are now so popular.

By 1948 the Church had spread to virtually all corners of South Africa and it was growing even faster in the urban areas. At the same time Apartheid was tightening its grip around the neck of the African. At that time Bishop Edward Lekganyane was the spiritual head of the Church. Young people asked him if they were free to join African political movements agitating for the betterment of their lot. Edward advised them that as long as their extra Church activities were not in conflict with the practices of the Church, they were free to participate. Most members of the Church then felt free to participate in the broader community resistance programmes against Apartheid.

In 1959 Bishop Edward built a primary school in Moria - the school was open to members of the community of the area at large. Already at the time Lekganyane was urging for the economic independence of African people. He requested the Church Council to establish a mill which at the time employed one hundred and fifty people. Subsistence farmers from nearby villages sold their harvest at the mill which continued to grow to this day. The present staff complement at the mill is one hundred and eighty people who would otherwise have been unemployed.

in 1969 the Church realized the acute lack of transport in Pietersburg and its outlying rural areas for African people. A bus company was established to serve the area. Until 1985 the company /pp.3-4/

received no subsidy from the government and was running at a loss hopelessly. The Church, however, felt that the needs of the community were above profit and continued to run the company out of its coffers.

Education is seen as a high priority in our Church. Immediately after the University of the North was established, the Church resolved to establish the Khotso Bursary Fund which assisted children from all backgrounds in their quest to achieve higher education. Due to its own growth and demand for higher education by its own youth, the Church established a new bursary fund in 1985 known as The Bishop Edward Lekganyane Bursary Fund. The present annual budget thereof is R2 million. The fund is unique in that it considers the disadvantaged background from whence we come. For instance, we recognise that due to our past history, most black children find adjustment in the traditional white tertiary institutions sometimes uncomfortable. When such a child fails to achieve desired results, the Church does not withdraw the bursary, but rather encourages the child to achieve better results with the fund's support. An adult literacy programme in 1988 and a basic skills such as bricklaying and baking was started in 1996 and from our observation are doing quite well. The annual budget for both is R 1,5 million. In 1974 the Church established Maroba Thota High School with boarding facilities. The Church then invited the government to run the school for the benefit of all children from the surrounding areas. The Church presently subsidises the school to the tune of R 150,000.00 annually and the amount is expected to grow in the coming years.

Recently we built a clinic in Boyne which caters for 400 outpatients representative of the entire community not only Zionists. The facility cost the Church R 2,5 million. The clinic is intended to serve all people in the Boyne, Marnabolo and Molepo areas. According to Department of Health dynamics the clinic is already operational. A post office which serves the general public was also built by the Church at the cost of approximately R 250,000.00. Telkom was invited to upgrade the telephone exchange capacity of the post office and the result thereof is that all the nearby rural areas have access to telephones either in their homes or public. We place on record that we were and are still opposed to disinvestment as a means to an end. During the time when companies were /pp. 4-5/

disinvesting, the Church encouraged its members to enter the business arena to create jobs. We established a forum to assist its group of business people to create jobs. The reason for doing so was that these people were the first to feel the brunt of the investors' withdrawal of capital from the Republic of South Africa.

Chairperson, the aforementioned are some of the projects the ZION CHRISTIAN Church established. Insofar as our vision for the future of our country is concerned we urge our business community and the government to assist in the rapid creation of jobs. The high crime rate which is presently ravaging our country is partly due to lack of employment.

Our Church, like other institutions, encourages our youth to value education as a key to a brighter tomorrow. We are, however, disappointed to notice - regrettably, that some of our young graduates are walking the streets with degrees without any prospect of employment in sight.

Chairperson, this problem needs to be addressed as a matter of national priority. If we continue to produce graduates who find difficulty in entering the job market - it will soon become difficult to urge children to go to school. Crime is another problem which requires our attention. So serious is this malady that we feel that the police, the army and the

community at large must join forces to reclaim our freedom from criminals. Unless the three aforesaid forces join hands in fighting crime, chairperson, I am afraid our future is bleak.

We also call upon the justice and the correctional service departments to play their role in the war against crime. There is no point in arresting criminals only to let them loose due to lack of proper attention paid to cases by the justice system. We also unashamedly call on the government to reinstate the death sentence. On the other hand, we discourage our democracy from legalizing immorality such as prostitution and gangsterism. /pp5-6/

In summation, South Africans- black, white, yellow or any colour - need one another to fight against all evils and more significantly, to bring about the betterment of all people across the board. As long as LOVE, PEACE, ACCEPTANCE, FORGIVENESS and TRUE RECONCILIATION remain pillars of strength for all Christians, then with God's help everything will be possible.

In conclusion, chairperson and honourable members of the commission, I am tempted to quote wise words from the Holy book which read as follow:

"A botse le thatego ge bana ba motho ba dula ba kwana! Go bjalo ka makhura a mabotse mo hlogong, ge a elela maledung a Arone, ge a elela morumong wa kobo ya gagwe. Go bjale ka phoka ya thaba ya Herimone, ge e elela dithabeng tó a Sione, gobane gona mo Morena o laetó e tó hegofató o, bophelo neng le neng.

(PESALOME 133)

May God bless our country, its leaders and its people.

Kgotso a ebe le lena.

signed:

THE RT REV. BISHOP BE LEKGANYANE

(LEADER OF THE ZION CHRISTIAN CHURCH)