

Zion Christian Church. Testimony before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, East London, 19 November 1999. [disclaimer](#)

We now want to call Bishop Barnabas Lekganyane to come to the witness stand, please.

As I have already done at the beginning, I want to welcome you very warmly on behalf of the TRC. You are one of the outstanding leaders, religious leaders, in our country. Your church is one of the largest and it is clear you have a very significant influence on a very, very large section of the population of this country. This was shown by the fact that a former State President has been to see you, at the time of your Easter celebrations, and other political leaders. We are looking forward to hearing from you the submission that you are going to be making to the TRC as we look to what happened in the past and in what manner you may have suffered and what contributions you believe you may be wanting to make, or able to make to the healing and reconciliation of this beautiful country which we all so love very much. Thank you Ndade.

Is it Bishop Lekganyane who is going to testify, or are you going to do so? Just switch on - now I'm not quite certain. Bishop are you going to say anything?

EMMANUEL MOTOLLA: Chairperson, the Church Council has resolved that Reverend Emmanuel Motolla, who is in the Bishop's council, will present our submission before this commission. Emmanuel Motolla, he is going to take the oath...

CHAIRPERSON: Yes, your council is free to determine how you want to do this...but if at the end of this we are asking questions, is the Bishop going to reply?

EMMANUEL MOTOLLA: Chairperson, the speaker Thomas Mahope will reply to the questions.

CHAIRPERSON: Only he?

EMMANUEL MOTOLLA: I will reply to the questions as part of this panel.

CHAIRPERSON: We want to know who, you see, if it is the two of you are going to be spokespersons.

EMMANUEL MOTOLLA: That is correct, yes.

CHAIRPERSON: Now I don't know, some of your congregation are here. I don't know whether they will be happy to go away without hearing a word from their leader.

EMMANUEL MOTOLLA: Chairperson, thanks for your concern, but that has already been addressed, the congregation is aware of the situation and I can assure this commission that they are more than happy.

CHAIRPERSON: Yes, all right, I wish I had such a congregation. Thank you very much and will the two of you then please stand.

ADMINISTERS THE OATH.

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you very much then. What we have is a total of 30 minutes and perhaps, if you are able to make the submission in about 20 minutes or so to give ten minutes for the question and answer at the end, we will be very grateful. Thank you very much.

EMMANUEL MOTOLLA: 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 firstly apologise for any inconvenience caused to this very commission for our failure to have entered into this submission yesterday because of some certain technical problems, particularly the flights that really delayed our appearing before this honourable commission. 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 ambition 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 Agnus Barnabas Lekganyane had by then become acutely aware of the attempt by missionaries to erode African value systems and cultural beliefs. He realised 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 so-called "main stream" churches at the time, Bishop Agnus worked tirelessly for the spiritual upliftment of his people and by 1948, when he passed away, let me pause to say: 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 Africans in the mainstream churches in those days derided him and expressed sentiments like ...[inaudible]. Agnus was less concerned about comments from his critics. In 1924 when one of his followers asked him what colour he thought God was Agnus retorted and said, and I quote, "We are made in the image of God and if this is true, then I assure you friends that when we enter the kingdom of heaven, you will find a God of your colour". When his critics read 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 clearly believed that God was white and nothing else. Mention must be made of the fact that Lekganyane missionary work started in the rural areas of the present day Northern Province. He showed great respect for African chieftancy. And because of this, many chiefs allowed him to preach the gospel of Christ in their areas. So great was his respect for African chieftancy that when he established the church, one of the very 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 constitution in 1919, and established the upper house of chiefs, Agnus was among the first people to applaud, because in his view and I quote: "When our educated young leaders recognised our historical background the African was on a path to somewhere".

In 1927, when the status of African chieftancy was downgraded by the Native Administration Act, Agnus refused to recognise that African chieftancy was subject to the whims and life of the white government. To him, the African chieftancy was an institution not to be tampered with, least of all by a 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 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. Agnus 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 Africans. 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 Morea. The school was opened 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 150 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 180 people who would otherwise have been unemployed.

In 1969 the church realised 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 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 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 funds support.

An adult literacy programme in 1988 and basic skills such as bricklaying and baking were started in 1996 and from our observations are doing well. The annual budget for both is R1,5 million. In 1974 the church established Marabathuta High School with boarding facilities. The church then invited the government to run the school for the benefit of all children from surrounding areas. The church presently subsidises the school to the tune of R150 000.00 annually and the amount is expected to grow in the coming years. Recently, we built a clinic in ...[inaudible] which caters for 400 out patients, representative of the entire community, not only Zionist. The facility cost the church R2,5 million. The clinic is intended to serve all the people in ...[inaudible], Mamabulo and Molepo areas. According to the Department of Health Dynamics, the clinic is already operational. A post office which serves the general public was also built by the church at a cost of approximately R250 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 opposed to disinvestment as a means to an end. During the time when companies were disinvesting, the church encouraged its members to enter the business arena to create jobs. We established a forum to assist each group of business people to create jobs. The reason for doing so was that these people were the first to feel the brunt of investor's 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 the 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 yet another problem which requires our attention. So serious is this 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, Mr Chairperson, I am afraid our future is bleak. We also call upon the justice and 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 Department. We also unashamedly call on the government to reinstate the death sentence. On the other hand we discourage our democracy from legalising immorality such as prostitution and gangsterism.

In summation, South Africans – black, white, yellow or any colour – need one another to fight against all evils and most 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 follows:

"How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity. It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down upon the collar of his robes. It is as if the dew of heaven were falling on mount Zion, for there the Lord restores his blessing, giving life forever more". This is from Psalm 133.

May God Bless our country, may God Bless our leaders and its people. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you very much. Piet?

PROF. P MEIRING: Thank you very much, I would like to thank you for a very interesting and thought provoking statement you put on the table. I also want to again thank you for the very gracious way in which you received my colleague Tom Manthata and myself in Pietersburg sometime ago to arrange for this meeting. We really appreciate that. I know that my colleagues have a number of questions they would like to put to you. May I restrain myself to one?

The Truth Commission is about truth and also about reconciliation. We are increasingly aware of the important part that the churches, the faith communities have to play in future for reconciliation. Do we have a commitment from the ZCC that you will co-operate with all the other churches, all the other faith communities in future, to try and build reconciliation. You have expertise, you have a number of things that you told us about. You are doing much to uplift the local communities you serve, but with all the richness of your experience, your expertise, will you commit yourself to

work with the other churches and faith communities in future to help us with this enormous task of reconciliation in the country?

EMMANUEL MOTOLLA: Thank you Chairperson, thanks Professor Meiring. The Zion Christian Church is essentially about reconciliation. The Zion Christian Church has been preaching reconciliation from 1910. There is no way we can stand away from reconciliation, especially when it is so critical for rebuilding our country. May I also say, Chairperson and the honourable panel, that the door of the Zion Christian Church remains open to all peace loving South Africans, indeed any member of the human race, that wish to come and pray with us or to engage in any positive activity that will bring about improved conditions of people's lives. We, in the few words I've said, commit ourselves as we have always committed ourselves to reconciliation. More than ever now we believe that reconciliation is the turning point of the future of this country. We are not going to abandon ship at this stage, Mr Chairperson.

[|Tape 2]

MS V GCABASHE: Thank you, your Grace. I would like to add my voice of congratulations on the way in which you presented your church this morning. It was an eye-opener for most of us and I was impressed with the projects that you have undertaken and hopefully you will continue to undertake more of these projects.

I have two questions to ask. In your presentation you said that until 1985 you had a subsidy to the transport - you didn't or you did?

EMMANUEL MOTOLLA: We didn't have a subsidy - indeed we are now subsidised by the government.

MS V GCABASHE: Then my second question is there was a time when you had problems with the United Democratic Front. How did you go about trying to solve that problem? Did you seek maybe advice or help/assistance from the government?

EMMANUEL MOTOLLA: Chairperson, to tell it as it is, as some newspapers call it. We never had any problem with the United Democratic Front. Not at all. It was during a time when there was a lot of disinformation that was doing the rounds in our community. We got stories to the effect that Lekganyane formed a defence force. Newspapers spread rumours of that nature, and we did not ask - we had headlines like "ZCC Defence Force". Not true. This was quoted in the Times. Some newspapers that does the rounds in Pietersburg started these rumours and in the charged circumstances in those days, young activists without checking facts, started massing up and believing that the church was their enemy. Thanks to the wisdom that prevailed in those days, I recall that Seth Ntayi, who is now in the Northern Province Legislative Assembly, played a very significant role in joining us in reducing the tension in that area. The church never had any problem with any political organisation at all and even when we were criticised by political organisations, by any other person, the church did not respond in a way that was unchristian. In most cases, this church

simply keeps quiet, when there is no need to respond, because we believe from the teachings of Ingenasi, that when you start arguing with fools, sooner or later nobody realises who is not a fool.

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you very much. Joyce?

MS J SEROKE: I just also have two short questions. When you started presenting your submission, you mentioned that your founder, Bishop, was worried about the fact that the value systems and cultural beliefs were eroded by missionaries. What is the programme of the church in maintaining these values systems and cultural beliefs, because yesterday, ever since we started this week, there has been great concern about this moral decay within our national community, and perhaps we would like to hear how your church maintains this kind of programme.

EMMANUEL MOTOLLA: Thanks Mam. It is true that when the missionaries came to this country, their agenda was slightly more than just converting us and being good Christians. In fact, Lord Renwick recently said in all those years when he met Bishop Tutu, Bishop Tutu used to say to him, you know when the missionaries came here, we welcomed them. They gave us bibles. In no time we realised that we had more bibles, and they had more land. This is the situation from which this church was born and we recognised that our values were going down the drain and we started building up a religion that was Afro-centric and not Eurocentric and even today, I doubt if there is any church in this country that has the number of youth that this church has. Our latest statistics show that 60% of our membership are people under the age of 24 and I can tell you that without boasting, we do have our problems, we do have aberrations, children who will go out of their way and not respect parents, but this church is a bigger family. A child belongs to the wider community and not to two people. When a child gets out of step and the parents don't take care of that child, in reprimanding him or in creating a spiritual guided way to lead the child forward, the church steps in and we contribute substantially. I think if Nkosazana Zuma was here she would clap her hands. We contribute substantially in making the young people to refrain from using habit forming drugs, including cigarettes. We consider that as a habit forming drug. Including liquor. We feel that these are the things that are decaying the moral values of our children. We are building on that our leadership ...[indistinct] right now, that's from young women in the age of 17 up to the age of 100, we've got a streak of leadership that starts from that level, right up to the highest age, because we are a church that basically relies on the passing of traditional African values by way of mouth, because we don't have books. There are a few books written by Mbithi, and the Ethiopians, but essentially they do not deal so much about African culture per say. We take it from the grey heads you see in this hall today. They tell us which way to go, most of the time. We blend that with the teaching of Christ. We blend that with the modern outlook that we have today, and for as long as it does not interfere in the moral fabric of our people we are happy to accept any suggestions.

MR T MANTHATA: Yes, accepting what has been said already, that you are keeping an open door policy, but realising the times, moral decay and whatnot. Isn't it time

that the church can open up and begin to dialogue with other churches without necessarily waiting for other churches to come to it? I mean already there are structures, there are ecumenical structures that are in existence and once the church can enter or work together with those ecumenical structures, then we can begin to spread these that are the tenants of your church.

EMMANUEL MOTOLLA: As I have said, the Zion Christian Church is open to any suggestion. We interact with many religious leaders. We share ideas with many political leaders. We share ideas with economists, but we believe that we have got a specific missionary work to preserve what we guard closely as what belongs to us as Africans.

We've got no problem in meeting any person to help in bringing down the level of moral decay that is permeating our society. We've got no problem with that at all. Any organisation, be it political, be it economic, be it - you'd be surprised Mr Manthata that you know we even have a group of ...[inaudible] coming from KwaManthata in Pietersburg. They come to our church, we welcome them, they dance there and we appreciate...they are not members of any church, they are not members of our church. We are glad to work with anybody for the betterment of our people and we have always said that.

REV. M XUNDU: Thank you, your Grace. There is one area in your presentation which I would like you to amplify. Indeed it was a powerful presentation and I want to congratulate you on that, but the area which I'm concerned about is the area of the reinstatement of the death sentence. We are dealing as the commission with amnesty. That is perpetrators which have killed, and yet we talk about amnesty. We are dealing with the ...[inaudible] it was said of old, "an eye for an eye" but I say forgive. Give the opportunity for repentance. It seems to me that we might want to learn from what you are saying and find out how you handle this in this kind of context in which the bible itself speaks strongly: Thou shalt not kill. Because you reinstate the death sentence, somebody is going to be the killer. Somebody is going to switch the button and kill and so you are saying there must be official killings and non-official killings.

I would like to understand you properly when you say that.

EMMANUEL MOTOLLA: Indeed the question of the death sentence is a hot potato debate that troubles the conscience of all people in our country today. Without even going deep into the word of scripture, the constitution itself, the Constitutional Court which is the supreme interpreter of our law, has outlawed it. The reality here, Mr Chairperson, the church feels that he who lives by the sword shall perish by the sword. The church feels that he who disregards human values and rights of other people can hardly claim that reserve as his own for purposes of elongating his existence on earth.

The church feels that strange as it sounds, the death sentence is a necessary evil. However, in its way of doing things, the church has never climbed on any political

platform and said reinstate the death sentence. No, no, no the church doesn't do that. The church has communicated its concern to our political leaders and all people who have visited or invited us to one discussion or another. We appreciate the death sentence was a tool that was abused mercilessly in the past. And as a result, many African people have got sad memories about the death sentence. In fact when you say death sentence to any African you bring very, very terrible memories. But if we have to build and protect our democracy, there is now way, Mr Chairperson, we can continue to witness women raped, children abused, people killed with almost amazing insolence, with no feelings of warmth at all. We cannot, Mr Chairperson, and members of the commission, allow the situation that exists in this country right now. You have people who just simply kill people for the fun of killing people. Not that killing people has in any way ever had any justification. You still have judges, even today in this country, who would comment that these people should not be sent to jail because they killed this person in a humane manner. They shot him once, they didn't assault him. Now if you look at the type of attitude we have in this country today, maybe we can look at scrapping the death sentence ten years down the line. Not now. It is a necessary evil. And I appreciate the theological and scriptural wisdom you enfused into your question, but I regrettably have to say we still feel it is a necessary evil. Thanks.

REV. K MGOJO: Thank you Sir. I am very much impressed by this presentation which is full of theological ...[indistinct], like black empowerment etc. But I find something very lacking in this presentation, vis a vis, the presentations of other churches. We have been in South Africa and there are many sins of omissions which were committed. I don't see when I'm reading this thesis, anywhere, where this church says that we think we are sorry because there are certain things we should have done to help the situation in South Africa during the times which were very painful to everybody. The painful journey that you feel that you could have helped the situation and somewhere you have mentioned that most members of the church were left free to participate in the broader community in resistance programmes against apartheid.

I would have liked to have heard about what programmes were those which your church was involved in, in fighting against apartheid.

EMMANUEL MOTOLLA: Thanks Mr Chairperson, thanks Reverend Mgojo.

Chairperson, as a church, the Zion Christian Church did not lead people into a mode of resistance against apartheid. But as a church the ZCC taught its people to love themselves more than ever, to stand upright and face the future, to defy the laws of apartheid. And that all these teachings are not known in the press, in the general public at large can hardly be the problem of the Zion Christian Church. The ZCC taught its people continuously to follow the path of justice, to fight against injustice. Many of our members died in the struggle. We are not going to stand on this platform now and start name dropping because it was a painful experience in our lives. Some of our members are even in the present leading structures of this government, indeed no less than President Mandela acknowledged it when he delivered a speech to our

Easter Conference some two or three years ago. We have not, as a church, stood up and said let's go and fight the white government, and for that omission, if it was an omission, because we thought genuinely we needed to teach our people to be able to stand upright, not to hurt others, but to refuse to be hurt by others. And that is why, Mr Chairperson, of all the perpetrators that appeared before this commission, you will realise that you have never seen one who is a member of our church, because if those members of the police force who were in our church, we made them aware that if they were enforcing unjust laws, finally the law of God will reckon with them. And if by non-participation, it is meant that Bishop Lekganyane did not go and stand up in the street and say, let us fight, let us go to war, then as far as that is concerned, if that is the omission you are referring to, we plead guilty, Chairperson.

But we taught our people, all these people who are members of this church, listen to his Grace's sermons regularly and they are taught nothing less than rejecting that which is evil and unjust.

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you very much. We would have liked to go on. Some of my colleagues are wanting to chew me up, because I have had to restrain them...thank you for your presentation.

Quite a number of churches, certainly the church to which I belong, complain about how difficult it is to raise funds. Could you give us your secret? (Laughter)

EMMANUEL MOTOLLA: Chairperson, there is no secret at all. It is the basic teaching of pride in our people, self-reliance to appreciate that their future lies in their hands. That if we want to start a project, we are not as you said one time, Archbishop Tutu, we are not going to have God dropping a Calvin Klein from heaven to us on earth, we've got to stand up and work and I can tell you Archbishop Tutu and the panel, or all these people who are listening here, the Zion Christian Church raises funds from its own people and nothing else. If there is any belief that we have a funder who is secretly giving us money, let us kill that myth today. These people you see here are responsible for the funds that make this church run. This bursary fund we are talking about which spends R2 million per annum to educate African children comes from these people who sweep the floors, comes from these people who dig manholes, come from these people who paint walls in the suburbs, they do not come from any other person, but if I must say Bishop Tutu, anybody wants to give us funds you are welcome.

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you very, very much we are very deeply grateful.

Bishop Lekganyane and his entourage are about to leave. I was saying we are sorry but also maybe half glad because we are going to have a few more seats available. For those who are still here, we just want to apologise to our brothers here from the Evangelical Alliance for being disturbed a little bit. I am sure you will be able to take it in your stride. We are enormously grateful to you and thank you for all your patience. People I asked last time whether you could try to occupy the chairs up front. Don't

become Anglican congregants and leave the back just in case....and I can assure you I am sure that we are going to be getting some more people coming in a little later for other attractions.

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