

# For Desmond Tutu

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The stars lament his passing  
From Soweto's seething streets to Bora Bora  
Kings, Queens, and Presidents flood the sky  
With tributes and purple garlands  
There goes a man  
In whose middling physical frame  
Throbbled a giant heart. Prophet who divined  
One complex rainbow in a land  
Ripped a-p-a-r-t by the colour creed  
He saw the Buddha in his Bible  
The fallow intersection between  
The Cross and the Crescent  
The Healing Wisdom of Orunmila\*  
Whose universe is a house with a thousand rooms,  
His metaphor came from the sky  
That looming umbrella above our common heads

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Truth and Reconciliation  
Reconciliation without Truth?  
When a savaged country needed a brave man  
To clean up its monumental mess  
It unleashed an avalanche of horrors

Whose telling un-plugged the tongue:  
Widows embraced their husbands' killers  
Orphans shook hands with those who dispatched their fathers  
Between the Forgiver and the Forgiven  
Between the incubus of partial amnesty  
And the absolution of evil  
There lies the aching complexity of wrongs without redress  
To forgive and forget  
To forgive and never forget:  
Which path leads to culpable amnesia  
Which, to the endless cycle of Justice denied?

\*

Your Truth, Noble Shepherd,  
So straight, so Ubuntu, steered a troubled nation  
Away from its self-inflicted carnage. But the scars linger on  
On the stubborn landscapes of our memory.

You who taught the world  
The largeness of Love  
The inevitability of Courage  
Hope which sustains the Dream

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\*Yoruba deity of divination, philosophy, science, and wisdom

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**Niyi Osundare** is a leading African poet, dramatist, critic, essayist, and media columnist. He has authored 18 books of poetry, two books of selected poems with several literary laurels to his credits.