

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?

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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

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

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.