



**THE JOY AND JUSTICE OF ARCHBISHOP TUTU:
IN REMEMBRANCE, REFLECTION AND HONOR**

Los Angeles Sentinel, 01-06-22, p.C-1

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

SURELY, WE AS AFRICAN PERSONS AND AN African people, join our South African sisters and brothers, other Africans everywhere, and other freedom and justice loving people of the world in paying rightful and reverent homage at this moment of the grievous passing and joyous rising of Archbishop Desmond Mpilo Tutu; son of Zacharias and Aletha Matlare Tutu; husband of Nomalizo Leah Schenxane Tutu; father of Trevor Thamsanga, Naomi Nontombi, Mpho Andrea and Theresa Thandeka. We honor him in his name and work, as honored priest and prophet of his faith; self-giving servant of his people; theologian who placed at the center of his thought and practice the good of humanity and the well-being of the world; human rights activist who taught and fought for the dignity and rights of human beings in all their differences and diversities; and highly esteemed, eminent and essential African witness to the peoples of the world.

We praise him in his name *Mpilo*, life and health, which was a sign of the work he would do and the struggle he would wage in the interests of the life and health of the people. A sign too of the life of joy he would live and the struggle he would wage in the midst and movement of his people to end the racist sickness and savagery of apartheid and achieve with them liberation, justice and a good life, a life of health, happiness, well-being and flourishing. May the joy he brought and the good he left last forever. *Hotep. Ashe. Heri. Makube njalo phakade* (May it be so forever.)

I had met and briefly talked with Archbishop Tutu twice: once at a reception for him at Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley's house, May 1985, during the apartheid period and afterwards, May 1990 when he visit-

ed and lectured at California State University, Long Beach where I serve as professor and chair of the Department of Africana Studies. And I've read his works and listened to interviews and lectures by him, and his joy of life and struggle and his profound commitment to justice were at all times vital, visceral and visible. His joyful approach recalls the sacred teachings of our ancestors in the *Odu Ifa* that says, "Let's do things with joy. . . For surely humans have been divinely chosen to bring good into the world" and this is the fundamental mission and meaning of human life.

Our beloved brother thought and talked in world-encompassing ways, for he knew with Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune that "Our task is to rebuild the world. It is nothing less than this." But he asked us to work for justice, peace and good wherever we are and know that will add up and affect the way of the world. Thus, he tells us, "Do your little bit of good where you are; (for) it is the little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world." He considered silence complicity and claims of neutrality in the struggles for liberation and justice sinister and self-deceptive. For he said, "Those who turn a blind eye to injustice actually perpetuate injustice. If you are neutral in situations of injustice you have chosen the side of the oppressor."

Clearly Nana Mpilo was deeply rooted in his Christian faith and understood that the moral measure of our work and societies is defined and determined by how we treat the most vulnerable among us. Indeed, this is an ancient African moral imperative, summed up in the sacred teachings of our ancestors in the *Husia* which says we are morally obligated "to bear witness to truth and set the

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scales of justice in their proper place, especially among those who have no voice,” the devalued, the disempowered, the poor, the downtrodden and the oppressed. Reaffirming this principle in the context of his faith, he declared that he serves “a God notoriously biased in favor of the weak, of the oppressed, of the suffering, of the orphan, of the widow, of the alien,” i.e., the stranger, the immigrant, the different and vulnerable.

Indeed, he not only criticized and condemned the racist and brutish White apartheid rulers and regime for their savage suppression and denial of the rights and dignity of African people, he also criticized the post-apartheid ANC government for not delivering the anticipated and deserved benefits of liberation and ending the grinding poverty of the masses. He criticized all schemes and policies which in his assessment fell short of substantive freedom and justice. Thus, in his visit to the U.S. during the height of internal and world-wide resistance to apartheid, he told the House Foreign Affairs Committee, “We do not want to make our chains more comfortable. We want to remove them.” This recalls Nana Frederick Douglass’ liberational contention that the need and way forward is not to hug our chains, but to break them.

Again, Nana Tutu worked and struggled for liberation, justice and peace, not only in South Africa, but in the whole world. Although the corporate media did not cover or praise him for it, of all his audacious and uncompromising positions taken, none was more consistent and definitive than his stand for the liberation of Palestine and the Palestinian people from what he described as a brutal apartheid Israeli occupation with parallels to apartheid South Africa. And as President Nelson Mandela before him, he would not retract or relent in his support of the self-determination and human rights of the Palestinian people. He maintained that

“Goodness will prevail in the end.” And in this hard-won, carefully and caringly built and constantly defended space, real freedom, justice and peace will emerge, not only for the Palestinian people, but for each and every one everywhere, in a word, all the peoples of the world.

Archbishop Tutu stressed our shared humanity, using the Zulu concept of *ubuntu* which he defined as “the essence of being human.” Like similar communitarian concepts in other African cultures, it, he says, “speaks particularly about the fact you can’t exist as a human being in isolation; it speaks about our interconnectedness,” our interdependence and our capacity for collectively creating and sharing good. Against vulgar isolationist individualism, he maintains that “You can’t be human all by yourself.” Indeed, he affirms, “we can only be human together in relationships.” This is expressed in the essential ubuntu affirmation, “*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* – a human being is a human being through other human beings!”

Thus, Nana Mpilo wants us to see ourselves in each other, in how we relate to and treat each other, and how we work and share goodness with each other. If we are self-consciously related and interconnected, and we think and act in other-directed ways, he teaches us, we become generous and just, gentle, kind, compassionate and considerate, in a word, we do good in the world. And he taught “when you do well, it spreads out; it is for the whole of humanity.” This recalls and raises up the sacred teaching of *Odu Ifa* that says, “Doing good worldwide is the best example (expression) of character.”

His assertion that “My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up in what is yours” recalls Dr. Martin L. King’s earlier statement “We are caught up in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.” Nana Mpilo tells us that “No human made problems are intractable

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ble when humans put their heads together with their earnest desire to overcome them.” And “no peace is impossible when people are determined to achieve it.” But he knew, as Nana King rightly asserted, “True peace is not merely the absence of tension; it is the presence of justice” for all of us.

ARCHBISHOP TUTU, IT IS REPORTED, when asked how he would like to be remembered, said we should say: “He loved. He laughed. He cried. He was forgiven. He forgave. Greatly privileged.” Clearly, he felt greatly privileged and honored by the mission which heaven and history had assigned him and he carried it out with deep

sensitivity, sagacity, compassion and courage. He loved the people and the struggle. He laughed with joy at the presence and possibility of the good. He cried about injustice and resisted it. And he posed solving the problem of forgiving and being forgiven as key to our future. We don’t have to agree with every point he made, but we must concede he was a model and mirror in the best of African and human traditions of work and struggle to bring and sustain good in the world and leaving a legacy worthy of both preservation through self-conscious commitment and emulation through sincere and sustained practice.▲

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