



# A True Disciple in Our Times

A tribute to the Rev. Dr. Archie deSouza  
(1942-2006)

Islamic Scholar of Pakistan

*A eulogy delivered at a memorial service held at  
St. Aidan RC Church in Scarborough, Ontario, Canada April 2006*

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**Rev. Dr. Archie deSouza (1942-2006)**

*Friend and a Leading Islamic Scholar in Pakistan  
Former Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Karachi and Professor  
at the Notre Dame Institute for Education (NDIE)*

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On Saturday, March 25, 2006, Father Archie deSouza passed away in Karachi, Pakistan. The death was quite unexpected and thus leaves a huge vacuum in the Archdiocese, at the Notre Dame Institute of Education (NDIE), and in the Christian-Islamic dialogue process that he had initiated and nurtured in that country.

I had the honour of being able to call Archie a colleague during my short teaching engagement at the Notre Dame Institute for Education (NDIE) in 1995. I found him to possess a brilliant mind, a warm heart, and a deep sense of mission. These qualities were matched only by his great oratory which he commanded in

several languages including Urdu, Hindi, German, French, Italian, and Arabic.

Having lived through the racial and religious strife caused by the partition of India in 1947 as a young boy, Archie developed early on in his life a keen interest in the promotion of interfaith communication among the Muslims, Christians and Hindus. In 1969, not long after he was ordained a priest, Archie enrolled in an undergraduate program in Islamic studies at Jamia Millia in Malia where he received a BA in that field. He subsequently attended the University of Edinburgh, Scotland where he obtained an MA in Islamic Theology. Eventually he went to Rome to study at the prestigious Gregorian University where in 1976 he obtained his PhD in Islamic Theology.

In 1996 he established the Rabita Centre at Malik Manzil in Saddar in Karachi where Sunnis, Shias, Hindus, Bahais, Parsis, and Christians could dialogue about a whole range of issues relating to their respective faiths. While recognizing that real differences existed among these various faith groups, he had the greatest respect for the distinctive religious traditions that they represented. It could not be otherwise since all these religious streams had their origin in the same mystical experience of the transcendent, a Sufi belief that Archie knew and keenly appreciated. But he also wanted people to realize that there were also sets of basic beliefs and values that they shared in common and on which they could base their interpersonal relations, and joint initiatives on a variety of fronts, especially in the area of social justice, a field for which Archie was a foremost advocate and promoter not only in Pakistan but in other parts of the world as well.

Father Archie deSouza was also a great educator. His exceptional communication skills, affable personality, and generous heart easily endeared him to the hundreds of teachers that went through the halls of NDIE, where for many years Archie taught the course on *Perspectives of Education in Pakistan*. This course focused on education during the British Raj and on educational developments since the 1947 partition, as well as on the philosophical streams of thought that impacted on the former tradition and on the more recent developments. He will be fondly missed by all the NDIE graduates, Christian and Muslim, now applying their teaching craft they honed while at NDIE for the benefit of the children and youth of Pakistan.

From 1982 to 1992 he was Dean of Studies at Christ the King Seminary where he assisted in the formation of the future priests of the Archdiocese. For a time, he lectured on Christian Philosophy at the Aga Khan Academy, during which time he nurtured a very long and lasting relationship with members of the Ismaili community. Lastly, it should be noted that he was a professor of Islamic Studies at the Collegio di Propaganda Fidei in Rome, a college founded by Urban VIII in 1627 to train missionaries for the Church.

### **Who was Archie deSouza the priest?**

Archie was a true disciple of Jesus Christ. And it was through his deep sense of discipleship that he defined his role as a priest and as a person. For as a true disciple, he tended to see the world through the eyes of his master and hoped that the institutional Church could also do likewise. He realized very early on in his ministry that it was the image of Jesus as the 'suffering servant' that most appealed to the people of Asia since it was through this image that they came to value the fact that God had personally

immersed himself, through the incarnation, into the human condition that seemed to weigh more heavily on them than on any of their fellow human beings in more developed parts of the world. And the streets of Karachi and Saddar offered the perfect settings in which to exercise this special kind of discipleship for they very much mirror the amalgam of conditions and people that Jesus himself encountered walking through the streets of Jerusalem two thousand years ago. Moreover, as one who has personally walked through those same streets many a time, I have no difficulty in visualizing the kind of images that they must have evoked for a devoted follower of Christ like Archie deSouza.

In his editorial, “What Is the Face of Jesus in Asia?”, appearing in the August 18, 1996 issue of *The Christian Voice*, the weekly newspaper put out by the Archdiocese of Karachi and which he edited for a time, he writes:

“As the human portrait of Jesus attracts the people of Asia, especially its suffering and marginalized masses, our community is being called upon to assume a truly human face: a Church that does not resist being incarnated in weak humanity, a Church that will not turn away from the crosses of history, a Church that does not hold back in emptying itself, a Church that is not scandalized in being poor, a Church that dares to be the Church of the poor. Through this Church, the face of Jesus who loves the poor with predilection will shine forth in Asia, in Pakistan.”<sup>1</sup>

For Archie the exercise of this kind of discipleship involved striving to create an inclusive community one “that does not discriminate in terms of culture, language, social class or gender, when it comes to the question of equality and mutuality within

the Church".<sup>2</sup> It also involved, in line with the teachings of John Paul II, working to develop a *culture of life* defined not solely in relationship to the abortion debate, as was and still is the case in developed countries, but also in terms of all those socio-economic conditions that are necessary for the improvement of the quality of life for the poor and the marginalized in society.

He was also very aware that poverty comes in different forms and that the marginalized can be found in both developing and developed countries. For this reason, he strongly believed that the Church itself could best manifest the face of Jesus, of God, to the rest of the world by becoming, like the early Church, a community of disciples, modelling their every action on those of their master:

"As a community of disciples, the Church will work with churches and other Christian communities and other people of good will, even those whose religious vision differs from its own by involvement in secular movements that promote life...."<sup>3</sup>

He goes on to indicate in the same editorial that for the Church to assume this new role, especially for the people of Asia, it must be able to let go of its authoritarian and highly bureaucratic and hierarchical structures and become a community of disciples. For the image of Jesus, of God, cannot be made visible by buildings, by bureaucracies, by the external facings and trappings of institutions, and by the institutional roles its members are required to play out daily. And certainly, the face of Jesus cannot be assumed to be made visible or assumed to be reincarnated in the juridical and political structures of a city state. Only people, only individuals can make the face of Jesus visible to

others. Writing particularly about the state of the Church in Asia and Pakistan, he continues:

“What is the face of Jesus in Asia, in Pakistan? We envision a serious need to rectify the image of pomp and power, of authoritarianism within the Church, which is contrary to the image of a church of the poor and a church of dialogue.”<sup>4</sup>

In issuing this message, Archie was simply echoing the words of the Vatican II *Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church* in which the Council Fathers very clearly state that "the pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature."<sup>5</sup> It follows, they go on to declare, that the Church:

“...must walk the same road Christ walked: a road of poverty and obedience, of service and self-sacrifice to the death, from which death He came forth a victor by His resurrection. For thus did all the apostles walk in hope. On behalf of Christ’s body, which is the Church, they supplied what was wanting of the sufferings of Christ by their own trials and sufferings.”<sup>6</sup>

We hope that his message will not go unheeded, and that the leadership of the Church will come to realize that its every decision and action must be driven by this sense of discipleship. They must come to realize also and accept that this form of discipleship is fraught with risk. It is the kind of risk that Jesus undertook on Palm Sunday as he entered triumphantly through the streets of Jerusalem clearly knowing what awaited him in the end. But what a victorious end for all those who have faith!

Several years ago, not long after I had returned from Pakistan, my wife, Eleanor, and I had the pleasure of having Archie at our home for dinner here in Toronto. Archie was in the area visiting his sisters Doreen Fernandes and Sylvia D'Souza and their families. Knowing that during my stay in Karachi I had developed a serious interest in Sufism, he had brought a fascinating video that had been recently produced by some German film makers about the province of Sindh, historically known for its thousands of Hindu and Sufi saints. For this reason, Sindh is also called "the cradle of love and peace".<sup>7</sup> The film focused on the Sufi mystical traditions which still exert an overwhelming influence on the people of Sindh. It has been argued that it is these mystical traditions, which advocate a spirit of universalism and brotherly love, that account for the peaceful coexistence of the different faith groups and Islamic sects in the province.<sup>8</sup>

While my wife was preparing dinner, we had an opportunity to watch the video and to discuss its various themes. And as we were watching the video we both commented about the fact that there exists such a vast potential for achieving greater interfaith and interracial harmony in the world if only the different groups involved were more open to the transcendent, to those primordial mystical streams from which all the great religions originate. The sounds of these spiritual streams can still be heard reverberating loudly throughout the province of Sindh, where Archie was making significant progress in promoting dialogue among the more prominent faith groups, particularly in the city of Karachi.

In reminiscing about the life of Father deSouza, I cannot help but think of the title of one of my favourite books written by Leonardo Felice Buscaglia, *The Way of the Bull* (1973).<sup>9</sup> The book consists of a series of articles in which Dr. Buscaglia, in his



entertaining and colourful ways, describes the journey he took in the early 1970s through many of the countries of Asia. In his "Introduction" he gives a short explanation about why he had entitled his book *The Way of the Bull*.<sup>10</sup> He mentions that the title was suggested to him by a Zen book written in the 12th century entitled *10 Bulls* and authored by a Zen master, Kakuan. He tells us that in this book, Kakuan uses the bull to symbolize life energy, truth, and action. These elements in turn represented steps, the way that someone might take to seek self-knowledge and realize his or her true nature.

Archie was indeed bullish in the manner in which he exercised his discipleship, full of energy, truth, and action in the very sense that Buscaglia understood the way of the bull. However, Buscaglia's metaphor stops here when it comes to describing Archie deSouza. For in Zen Buddhism, the way leads nowhere, as Buscaglia tells us, but simply underlines the need to follow the way creatively "in wonder, in joy, in peace and in love".<sup>11</sup> The fulfillment is in the journey. In the case of Archie, he had already found the way very early in life and it did have a destination, and he employed all his energy, and took whatever action that was necessary to ensure that he follow it most faithfully. He is now home; he has reached his destination. In closing, we want to thank him for pointing the way to us, and for modelling for us and the Church the true meaning of discipleship.

Like St. Paul, he "fought the good fight", and he has "finished the course", and he "kept the faith" until the end. May God grant him the "crown of justice" which, like St. Paul, he so richly deserves.<sup>12</sup>

November 18, 2014

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Archie deSouza, "What is the Face of Jesus on Asia," editorial in *The Christian Voice*, Vol. 47, No. 33, Karachi, Pakistan, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid*

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid*

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid*

<sup>5</sup>*Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church*, in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. by Walter M. Abbott, An Angelus Book, New York: America Press, 1966, p. 585.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 590

<sup>7</sup>See "Sufism" in <http://www.sufisattari.com/soofism.html>.

<sup>8</sup>Niranjan Dudani. "Sindh's Resistance against Fundamentalism through Sufism", published on the South Asia Analysis Group's web site: <http://www.saag.org/papers8/paper797.html>, 2002. In his conclusion he writes: "Sindhi Sufism remains a vigorous manifestation of Sindhi aspirations--the legacy of love, tolerance, universalism and a beacon of peaceful relations among all faiths and communities. Fundamentalism cannot countenance Sindhi Sufism, synonymous with the national spirit and aspirations of Sindhis."

<sup>9</sup>Leonardo Felice Buscaglia, *The Way of the Bull*, New York: Fawcett Crest, 1973.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. vii-ix

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, p. vii

<sup>12</sup>2 Timothy, 4:7-8