This is an expanded version of an article that first appeared in the April 2023 Edition of *Catholic Family News* (click HERE to subscribe; current subscribers can access the E-Edition by following the instructions posted HERE).

Opening of the Abrahamic Family House

Four years after Pope Francis signed the Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together (Feb. 4, 2019) with Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, the so-called "Abrahamic Family House" campus opened in Abu Dhabi (Feb. 16, 2023), the capital of the United Arab Emirates and the city in which the text was signed. The Document, which falsely claims that "[t]he pluralism and the diversity of religions … are willed by God in His wisdom," now has a colossal monument in stone: three cube-shaped "houses of worship — Imam Al-Tayeb Mosque, His Holiness Francis Church, and Moses Ben Maimon Synagogue," according to the AFH website, all of which share the same dimensions and feature similar designs, thus conveying a message of equality (i.e., religious indifferentism) to the world.

Design plans for the Abrahamic Family House were first unveiled at an event held in late September 2019 in New York. The gathering was hosted by the "Higher Committee of Human Fraternity," which was formed the previous month and is composed of Catholic, Muslim, and Jewish representatives whose "mission is to inspire all people to live the values of human fraternity." In the days following its formation, Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni said Pope Francis "encourages the efforts of the Committee to spread knowledge of the Document; he thanks the United Arab Emirates for the concrete commitment shown on behalf of human fraternity and he expresses the hope that similar initiatives can spring up throughout the world." Two months later, in mid-November 2019, the Higher Committee met with Pope Francis at the Vatican and showed him the plans for the interreligious campus.

The first Christian prayer service was held at the new campus a few days after the official opening in His Holiness Francis Church (Feb. 19, 2023). Three Catholic prelates were in attendance and addressed those gathered for the occasion. According to a report from Catholic News Agency:

> "Representing the pope for the first prayer service … was Cardinal Michael L. Fitzgerald, a past president of the [former] Pontifical Council [now Dicastery] for Interreligious Dialogue.
>
> 'The place of prayer should also be a place of joy, and I hope that this will be true

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for all of us here present,' Fitzgerald said at the Sunday prayer service at the new church.

Fitzgerald conveyed the pope's greetings. He said Pope Francis would encourage all those gathered 'to continue in the culture of dialogue as our path; to adopt mutual cooperation as our code of conduct; and to endeavor to make reciprocal understanding the constant method of our undertakings.'

Bishop Paolo Martinelli, the apostolic vicar of Southern Arabia, spoke at the prayer service and reflected on the meaning of the document 'Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together,' also known as the Abu Dhabi declaration, which was signed by the pope and Sunni Islam's highest legal authority.

'We have entered a new phase in the history of religions,' Martinelli said. 'With the Abu Dhabi document on human fraternity, a prophetic and far-sighted document, religions are presented in their original capacity to collaborate and contribute together to the formation of a more humane world, in which we all recognize ourselves as brothers and sisters, called to fraternity, to coexistence and tolerance, mutual acceptance, and the promotion of justice and peace.'"

…

Cardinal Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, [current] president of the [Dicastery] for Interreligious Dialogue, was present at the complex's Feb. 16 inauguration. According to Emirates News Agency, the cardinal said the Abrahamic Family House is 'a concrete example for people of different religions, cultures, traditions, and beliefs to return to the essential: love of neighbor.'

'This will be a place which promotes dialogue and mutual respect, and acts in the service of human fraternity as we walk the paths of peace together,' the cardinal said."

Document on Human Fraternity and Vatican II

As we know, the Abrahamic Family House was inspired by the Document on Human Fraternity (DHF).[1] And DHF, according to Pope Francis, is in perfect continuity with the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). He stated as much the day after he signed DHF while en route from Abu Dhabi back to Rome (Feb. 5, 2019):

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> "I openly reaffirm this: **from the Catholic point of view the *Document* does not move one millimetre away from the Second Vatican Council.** It is even cited, several times. **The *Document* was crafted in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council.** … If someone feels uncomfortable, I understand this; it is not a daily occurrence, and is not a step backward. **It is a step forward, but one that comes after 50 years, from the Council, which must be developed.** Historians say that for a Council to sink its roots in the Church it takes 100 years. We are halfway there."

While DHF does not actually cite the Council (Francis is mistaken), it clearly shares common ground with Conciliar themes and texts, in particular, *Nostra Aetate* (Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions) and *Dignitatis Humanae* (Declaration on Religious Freedom). DHF declares, for example, "the adoption of a culture of dialogue as the path; mutual cooperation as the code of conduct; reciprocal understanding as the method and standard," while *Nostra Aetate* similarly calls on Catholics to engage in "dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions" in order to "preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men" (NA, 2). And the reason why "dialogue and collaboration" are possible, according to *Nostra Aetate*, is that the Church "rejects nothing that is true and holy in these [non-Christian] religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men" (NA, 2).

The obvious problem with this claim is that non-Christian religions, even if they preserve certain elements of natural truth, still contain errors against divinely revealed truths and often tolerate (if not promote) moral evils, thus leading souls into error and sin. While *Nostra Aetate* says that "men may find the fullness of religious life" in Christ (NA, 2), the text does not actually exhort non-Christians to convert to Christ and His Church in order "to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). As a result, the impression is given that what unites us (e.g., our common humanity, certain elements of natural truth) is more important than what divides us, which inevitably fosters an attitude of religious indifference.

In stark contrast, Pope Leo XIII (r. 1878-1903) observed the following common-sense truth in his Encyclical *Immortale Dei*: "Men who really believe in the existence of God must, in order to be consistent with themselves and to avoid absurd conclusions, understand that differing modes of divine worship involving dissimilarity and conflict even on most important points cannot all be equally probable, equally good, and equally acceptable to God" (n. 31).

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In other words, the principle of non-contradiction applies.

When it comes to religious freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae* states that "the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits" (DH, 2).

While the text goes on to affirm that "all men should be at once impelled by nature and also bound by a moral obligation to seek the truth, especially religious truth," it ultimately says that "the right to religious freedom has its foundation not in the subjective disposition of the person, but in his very nature. In consequence, the right to this immunity continues to exist even in those who do not live up to their obligation of seeking the truth and adhering to it and the exercise of this right is not to be impeded, provided that just public order be observed" (DH, 2). And furthermore, "Religious communities also have the right not to be hindered in their public teaching and witness to their faith, whether by the spoken or by the written word" (DH, 4).

Now, it is true that "the Church is wont to take earnest heed that no one shall be forced to embrace the Catholic Faith against his will," as Leo XIII affirmed in *Immortale Dei* (n. 36). But he also affirmed in the same Encyclical that the Church "deems it unlawful to place the various forms of divine worship on the same footing as the true religion" (*ibid*.), since "it is contrary to reason that error and truth should have equal rights," as he wrote elsewhere (Encyclical *Libertas*, n. 34). Not only is such religious indifferentism "unlawful" for individuals, it is equally unacceptable "for the State not to have care for religion as a something beyond its scope, or as of no practical benefit; or out of many forms of religion to adopt that one which chimes in with the fancy; for we are bound absolutely to worship God in that way which He has shown to be His will" (*Immortale Dei*, n. 6).

One of the problems with *Dignitatis Humanae* is that, while claiming to leave "untouched traditional Catholic doctrine on the moral duty of men and societies toward the true religion and toward the one Church of Christ" (DH, 1), it simultaneously implies that governments should essentially be neutral when it comes to religion. Instead of encouraging rulers and nations to embrace "the true religion" and protect "the one Church of Christ," as the Church has always done, *Dignitatis Humanae* asserts that the proper role of government is to guarantee the fictitious "right" of individuals to practice and promote whichever religion they prefer: "The protection and promotion of the inviolable rights of man ranks among the essential duties of government. Therefore, government is to assume the safeguard of the religious freedom of all its citizens, in an effective manner, by just laws and by other appropriate means" (DH, 6).

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Contrast *Dignitatis Humanae*'s position with that of Leo XIII, who simply repeated perennial Catholic doctrine:

> "Wherefore, civil society must acknowledge God as its Founder and Parent, and must obey and reverence His power and authority. Justice therefore forbids, and reason itself forbids, the State to be godless; or to adopt a line of action which would end in godlessness — namely, to treat the various religions (as they call them) alike, and to bestow upon them promiscuously equal rights and privileges. Since, then, the profession of one religion is necessary in the State, that religion must be professed which alone is true, and which can be recognized without difficulty, especially in Catholic States, because the marks of truth are, as it were, engravers upon it. This religion, therefore, the rulers of the State must preserve and protect, if they would provide — as they should do — with prudence and usefulness for the good of the community." (*Libertas*, n. 21)

The Document on Human Fraternity, for its part, clearly agrees with *Dignitatis Humanae* that religious freedom — that is, the freedom to practice and promote false religion if one so chooses — constitutes an inviolable right of man and "has its foundation not in the subjective disposition of the person, but in his very nature" (DH, 2). DHF declares, "Freedom is a right of every person: each individual enjoys the freedom of belief, thought, expression and action." And immediately after this statement, we find the heretical claim:

> "**The pluralism and the diversity of religions**, colour, sex, race and language **are willed by God in His wisdom**, through which He created human beings. **This divine wisdom is the source from which the right to freedom of belief and the freedom to be different derives.** Therefore, the fact that people are forced to adhere to a certain religion or culture must be rejected…."

We know from Divine Revelation that God *does* positively will sexual (male/female), racial, and linguistic differences (cf. Gen. 1:27, 11:5-9; Acts 17:26). We also know that there is only "*one* Lord, *one* faith, *one* baptism" (Eph. 4:5), and that Our Lord Jesus Christ is the *only* way to God the Father (cf. John 14:6). It is thus absurd to claim that God wills a multiplicity of religions (i.e., the existence of false religions together with the one true Faith) in the same way that He wills diverse biological traits and languages.

In sum, DHF makes explicit that which is implied in *Nostra Aetate* and *Dignitatis Humanae*,

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namely, that **(1)** all religions are more or less good and that **(2)** all men have the right to practice and promote whichever religion they prefer. Once these propositions have been embraced — and then acted out on the world stage by Popes and other Catholic prelates for decades since Vatican II — it only makes sense to conclude, as DHF does, that "[t]he pluralism and the diversity of religions … are willed by God in His wisdom," and that His wisdom "is the source from which the right to freedom of belief and the freedom to be different derives." As Pope Francis has said, "The Document was crafted in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council," and the Council "must be developed."

Recalling Important Critiques: Bishop Schneider and Archbishop Viganò

In light of the opening of the Abrahamic Family House, it is worth our time to recall some important critiques of the documents on which the interreligious campus is founded, namely, the Document on Human Fraternity, *Dignitatis Humanae*, and *Nostra Aetate*. Bishop Athanasius Schneider addresses all three in *Christus Vincit*, a book-length interview with journalist Diane Montagna (published in the fall of 2019, several months after Pope Francis signed DHF).

In Chapter Six of *Christus Vincit* ("Religious indifferentism"), Bishop Schneider observes:

> "Before the Second Vatican Council, the Church had always taught the tolerance of other religions to some degree [as Pope Leo XIII did, for example, in his Encyclical *Immortale Dei*, n. 36]. However, with the Council's Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*, there was in my opinion a drastic change regarding the previous and universal Magisterium of the Church, which had always said that error does not have the same right as truth to be propagated. Error has no rights by nature, just as we have no right by nature to sin. God has not given man liberty in order to carry out a moral evil (sin) or an intellectual evil (error).
>
> The more we live in accord with God's will, with the truth, the freer we are — and the more our freedom grows. *Dignitatis Humanae* made a change that is difficult to reconcile with the perennial Magisterium of the Church. One might easily deduce from this document that truth and error have the same rights by nature, by contending that the choice of error, the choice of a false religion, is a natural right of the human person."[2]

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When asked specifically about the Document on Human Fraternity and Pope Francis' claim that "the document did not go one millimeter beyond the Second Vatican Council," Bishop Schneider responded:

> "The root of the current religious indifferentism, or the theory of the allegedly divinely-willed character of other religions, is to be found in some ambiguous phrases of the documents of the Second Vatican Council — especially in its Declaration on the Church's Relation to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*. Describing Buddhism, for example, the Council states uncritically that 'it teaches a way by which men, in a devout and confident spirit, may be able either to acquire the state of perfect liberation, or to attain, by their own efforts or through higher help, supreme illumination' (n. 2). …
>
> The other root, which we also mentioned, is to be found in the affirmation of *Dignitatis Humanae* that the choice even of a false religion — including the worship of the 'supreme divinity' (*Dignitatis Humanae*, n. 4) — is a natural right of the human person ('*in ipsa eius natura*': *Dignitatis Humanae*, n. 2). However, the natural right of the free will of the human person consists only in the choice of what is morally and intellectually good, i.e., the choice of virtue and of the one true religion, not just of the 'supreme divinity.' The abuse itself of free will, however, in choosing evil (sin) and error (false religion), is never positively willed by God. Hence the choice of a sin or of an error, such as a false religion, can never be the expression of a natural right ('*in ipsa eius natura*')."[3]

Recalling Pope John Paul II's "World Day of Prayer for Peace" events held in 1986 and 2002 in Assisi, Bishop Schneider goes on to state:

> "The interreligious meetings held in Assisi by Pope John Paul II greatly contributed to a further growth and spread of religious indifferentism and of the view, even within the Church, that all religions are ultimately equal. These interreligious meetings in Assisi attained their logical consequences in the interreligious document of Abu Dhabi, dated February 4, 2019 and signed by Pope Francis, which says that 'the pluralism and the diversity of religions, color, sex, race and language are willed by God in His wisdom.'"[4]

On June 1, 2020, Bishop Schneider published an additional text in which he affirms that "a

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cause and effect relationship exists between the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae*, and the *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*," explaining:

> "*Dignitatis Humanae* reaffirms the Church's traditional doctrine, stating: 'We believe that this one true religion subsists in the Catholic and Apostolic Church,' and it reasserts the 'moral duty of men and societies toward the true religion and toward the one Church of Christ' (n. 1). Unfortunately, just a few sentences later, the Council undermines this truth by setting forth a theory never before taught by the constant Magisterium of the Church, i.e., that man has the right founded in his own nature, 'not to be prevented from acting in religious matters according to his own conscience, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits' (*ut in re religiosa neque impediatur, quominus iuxta suam conscientiam agat privatim et publice, vel solus vel aliis consociatus, intra debitos limites*, n. 2). According to this statement, man would have the right, based on nature itself (and therefore positively willed by God) not to be prevented from choosing, practicing and spreading, also collectively, the worship of an idol, and even the worship of Satan, since there are religions that worship Satan, for instance, the 'church of Satan.' Indeed, in some countries, the 'church of Satan' is recognized with the same legal value as all other religions.
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> …
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> For anyone who is intellectually honest, and is not seeking to square the circle, it is clear that the assertion made in *Dignitatis Humanae*, according to which every man has the right based on his own nature (and therefore positively willed by God) to practice and spread a religion according to his own conscience, does not differ substantially from the statement in the Abu Dhabi Declaration, which says: 'The pluralism and the diversity of religions, color, sex, race and language are willed by God in His wisdom, through which He created human beings. This divine wisdom is the source from which the right to freedom of belief and the freedom to be different derives.'"

In regard to the Abrahamic Family House itself, Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò forcefully condemned the project a few days after members of the "Higher Committee of Human Fraternity" met with Pope Francis at the Vatican (Nov. 15, 2019) and showed him the plans for the interreligious campus:

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> "The building of the House of the Abramitic Family seems to be a Babelic enterprise, concocted by the enemies of God, of the Catholic Church and of the only true religion capable of saving man and the whole creation from destruction, both now and in eternity, and definitively. The foundations of this 'House,' destined to give way and collapse, arise where, by the hands of the builders themselves, the One Cornerstone is about to be incredibly removed: Jesus Christ, Savior and Lord, on whom is built the House of God. 'Therefore,' warns the Apostle Paul, 'let everyone be careful how he builds. Indeed, no one can lay a foundation other than the one already found there, which is Jesus Christ' (1 Cor 3:10).
>
> In the garden of Abu Dhabi, the temple of the world syncretistic Neo-Religion is about to rise with its anti-Christian dogmas. Not even the most hopeful of the Freemasons would have imagined so much!"[5]

Like Bishop Schneider, Archbishop Viganò sees a clear connection between what he calls "the apostasy of Abu Dhabi" and certain Vatican II texts, which he says manifest "a terrible discontinuity" with pre-conciliar teaching:

> "Pope Bergoglio thus proceeds to further implement the apostasy of Abu Dhabi, the fruit of pantheistic and agnostic neo-modernism that tyrannizes the Roman Church, germinated by the conciliar document *Nostra Aetate*. We are compelled to recognize it: the poisoned fruits of the 'Conciliar springtime' are before the eyes of anyone who does not allow himself to be blinded by the dominant Lie.
>
> Pius XI had alerted and warned us [in *Mortalium Animos*, for example, from which Archbishop Viganò quotes in his text]. But the teachings that preceded Vatican II have been thrown to the winds, as intolerant and obsolete. The comparison between the pre-conciliar Magisterium and the new teachings of *Nostra aetate* and *Dignitatis humanae* — to mention only those — manifest a terrible discontinuity, which must be acknowledged and which must be amended as soon as possible. *Adjuvante Deo* ('with God's help')."

True Children of Abraham

As we lament the opening of the interreligious campus in Abu Dhabi, let us conclude by asking a crucial question: Who are the true children of Abraham? Those who designed and

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promote the Abrahamic Family House believe that Jews, Christians, and Muslims are all children of Abraham, but is that really the case?

Our Lord discussed this very subject during His public ministry. We read in St. John's Gospel: "Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him: If you continue in My word, you shall be My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. They answered him: We are the seed of Abraham, and we have never been slaves to any man: how sayest thou: you shall be free?" (John 8:31-33)

Although He acknowledged that they were "the children of Abraham" (John 8:36) according to the flesh, Our Lord ultimately told them, "If you be the children of Abraham, do the works of Abraham" (John 8:39) — namely, believe in Him, the promised Messiah, as Abraham did: "Abraham your father rejoiced that he might see My day: he saw it and was glad. … Amen, amen I say to you, before Abraham was made, I AM" (John 8:56, 58).

St. Paul, who once gloried in being a descendent of Abraham, explains that "they who are of faith [i.e., faith in Christ], the same are the children of Abraham. … Therefore, they that are of faith shall be blessed with faithful Abraham. … That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Christ Jesus…" (Gal. 3:7, 9, 14).

As true children of Abraham — and members of the true Abrahamic Family House, i.e., the Catholic Church — let us imitate Abraham's faith and proclaim to all men, including Jews and Muslims, that his "seed, which is Christ" (Gal. 3:16), has come. And let us pray, as Holy Mother Church does during the Solemn Easter Vigil, that God may "grant that all the nations of the world may become children of Abraham, and partake of the dignity of the people of Israel. Through our Lord Jesus Christ,"[6] as St. Paul says: "And if you be Christ's, then are you the seed of Abraham, heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29).

And finally, whereas the Document on Human Fraternity seeks to establish "a universal peace that all can enjoy in this life" through religious pluralism, let us proclaim with Pope Pius XI (r. 1922-1939) that "true peace, the peace of Christ, is impossible unless we are willing and ready to accept the fundamental principles of Christianity, unless we are willing to observe the teachings and obey the law of Christ, both in public and private life" (Encyclical *Ubi Arcano*, n. 47); and further, that "the true peace of Christ can only exist in the Kingdom of Christ — 'the peace of Christ in the Kingdom of Christ'" (*ibid*., n. 49).

UPDATE (4/26/2023): Matt Gaspers appeared on the Dr. Taylor Marshall Podcast today to discuss his article:

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[1] The day after the Document was signed, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan (then-crown prince of Abu Dhabi) announced that he ordered "the construction of the Abrahamic Family House in Abu Dhabi to commemorate the historic visit of Pope Francis and Grand Imam Ahmad Al Tayyeb, and to reflect the peaceful coexistence of different communities in the UAE."

[2] Bishop Athanasius Schneider in conversation with Diane Montagna, *Christus Vincit: Christ's Triumph Over the Darkness of the Age* (Brooklyn: Angelico Press, 2019), p. 86.

[3] *Ibid*., pp. 95-96.

[4] *Ibid*., p. 96.

[5] Regarding Archbishop Viganò's reference to Freemasonry, the Catholic Encyclopedia explains that it "systematically promotes religious indifferentism and undermines true, i.e., orthodox Christian and Catholic Faith and life. Freemasonry is essentially Naturalism and hence opposed to all supernaturalism." This is one reason why it stands condemned by the Church, as Pope Leo XIII explains in *Humanum Genus*, his Encyclical on Freemasonry (n. 16): "If those who are admitted as members are not commanded to abjure by any form of words the Catholic doctrines, this omission, so far from being adverse to the designs of the Freemasons, is more useful for their purposes. First, in this way they easily deceive the simple-minded and the heedless, and can induce a far greater number to become members. Again, as all who offer themselves are received whatever may be their form of religion, they thereby teach the great error of this age — that a regard for religion should be held as an indifferent matter, and that all religions are alike. This manner of reasoning is calculated to bring about the ruin of all forms of religion, and especially of the Catholic religion, which, as it is the only one that is true, cannot, without great injustice, be regarded as merely equal to other religions."

[6] Solemn Easter Vigil (1956), Prayer after the Second Lesson and Canticle. Taken from *The Daily Missal (1962) and Liturgical Manual* (London: Baronius Press, 2007), p. 607. The same prayer appears in the pre-1955 Easter Vigil.

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