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EXCLUSIVE: BISHOP SCHNEIDER WINS CLARIFICATION ON “DIVERSITY OF RELIGIONS” FROM POPE FRANCIS, BRANDS ABUSE SUMMIT A “FAILURE”

ROME, March 7, 2019 ([LifeSiteNews](#)) — In their recent *ad limina* visit to Rome, the bishops of Kazakhstan and Central Asia raised a number of concerns which have been widely shared in the Church over the last several years, concerning perceived ambiguities in the magisterium of Pope Francis.

Bishop Athanasius Schneider also obtained from Pope Francis a clarification that God only permits but does not positively will a “diversity of religions.”

In an exclusive interview with LifeSite, Bishop Athanasius Schneider explained that the two-hour meeting with the Holy Father included a discussion on “Communion for divorced and civilly ‘remarried’ Catholics, the issue of Communion for Protestant spouses in mixed marriages, and the issue of the practical spread of homosexuality in the Church.”

In a direct exchange between Pope Francis and Bishop Schneider, the claim that the “diversity of religions” is “willed by God” was also discussed. The expression, contained in a [joint](#)

[statement](#) on human fraternity that Pope Francis signed last month with a Grand Imam in Abu Dhabi, has incited considerable controversy.

Pope Francis explicitly stated that Bishop Schneider could share the contents of their exchange on this point. “You can say that the phrase in question on the diversity of religions means the permissive will of God.”

LifeSite sat down with Bishop Schneider in Rome following his *ad limina* visit. In a wide-ranging interview, we discussed his meeting with Pope Francis, the upcoming Amazonian Synod, and his views on the recently concluded Vatican sex abuse summit.

Schneider branded the summit a “clerical show” and a “failure” for not addressing the “deep roots” of the crisis and issuing “very precise, compelling and incisive norms.” He expounds on what he believes are the four causes of the abuse crisis and proposes two concrete norms he believes should have come out of the summit.

Asked about Cardinal Blase Cupich’s denial of a causal relationship between homosexuality and clerical sex abuse, Schneider asked despairingly: “How can I speak with a man who denies reality?”

In our interview with Bishop Schneider, he also praises the open letter issued by Cardinal Raymond Burke and Cardinal Walter Brandmüller ahead of the Vatican abuse summit and suggests further action that cardinals and bishops might take to address the current crisis in the Church.

Here below is our exclusive interview with Bishop Athanasius Schneider.

LifeSite: Your Excellency, what can you tell us about your recent *ad limina* visit and meeting with Pope Francis?

Bishop Schneider: It was for me a very spiritual experience — a pilgrimage to the tombs of Saints Peter and Paul, where we celebrated the Holy Mass. At the tomb of St Peter we sang for Pope Francis the antiphon “Oremus pro pontifice nostro” followed by the Creed. We also prayed for the intentions of the Pope to gain the plenary indulgence. We did the same at the Basilica of St Paul Outside the Walls and at the Marian Basilica of St Mary Major.

Regarding our meeting with the Pope, he is the Vicar of Christ on earth in this time, and he was very fraternal and kind to us. It was a very kind atmosphere.

Our meeting with him lasted two hours. I consider this an act of great generosity on the part of the Pope, to spend so much time with our group of 10 bishops and ordinaries of Kazakhstan and Central Asia.

During the meeting, the Pope invited us to freely express our concerns and even our criticisms. He stressed that he likes a very free conversation.

Some bishops were able to raise concerns about the life of the Church in our days. For example, the issue of Communion for divorced and civilly “remarried” Catholics; the issue of Communion for Protestant spouses in mixed marriages; and the issue of the practical spread of homosexuality in the Church. These points were discussed.

Then I also asked the Holy Father to clarify the statement in the [Abu Dhabi document](#) on the diversity of religions being “willed” by God.

The Pope was very benevolent in his response to our questions and sought to answer us from his own perspective on these problems. He answered in a more general way about principles of the Catholic Faith, but in the given circumstances we were not able to go into detail on the specific issues. Even so, I am very thankful to the Holy Father that he gave us the possibility in

a very serene atmosphere to raise several concerns and to speak with him.

Can you say more about how Pope Francis responded to your concern about the Abu Dhabi statement on the diversity of religions? The controversial passage reads: “*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.*”

On the topic of my concern about the phrase used in the Abu Dhabi document – that God “wills” the diversity of religions – the Pope’s answer was very clear: he said that the diversity of religions is only the *permissive* will of God. He stressed this and told us: you can say this, too, that the diversity of religions is the *permissive* will of God.

I tried to go more deeply into the question, at least by quoting the sentence as it reads in the document. The sentence says that as God wills the diversity of sexes, color, race and language, so God wills the diversity of religions. There is an evident comparison between the diversity of religions and the diversity of sexes.

I mentioned this point to the Holy Father, and he acknowledged that, with this direct comparison, the sentence can be understood erroneously. I stressed in my response to him that the diversity of sexes is *not* the permissive will of God but is positively willed by God. And the Holy Father acknowledged this and agreed with me that the diversity of the sexes is not a matter of God’s permissive will.

But when we mention both of these phrases in the same sentence, then the diversity of religions is interpreted as positively willed by God, like the diversity of sexes. The sentence therefore leads to doubt and erroneous interpretations, and so it was my desire, and my request that the Holy Father rectify this. But he

said to us bishops: you can say that the phrase in question on the diversity of religions means the permissive will of God.

For readers who may not be familiar with the distinction between the permissive and positive will of God, can you give some examples of other things that God allows through his permissive will?

Yes, permissive will means that God *allows* certain things. God allowed or permitted Adam's sin and all its consequences; and even when we personally sin, in some sense God permits this or tolerates this. But God *does not* positively will our sin. He permits it in view of the infinitely meritorious sacrifice of Our Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross, and because he does not want to destroy our freedom. This is the meaning of the permissive will of God.

Vatican sex abuse summit

Many people, including victims of sexual abuse who had come to Rome for the February 25-27 Vatican summit on the protection of minors in the Church, were disappointed with the meeting for what they considered its lack of concrete action. Your Excellency, what do you believe would be the most effective way to solve the problem of sexual abuse and coverup in the Church?

When there is a huge problem — which the abuse of children, minors and adult subordinates by the clergy certainly is — we always have to go to the deepest root, as every good doctor and physician does.

We cannot resolve a sickness only by making a superficial diagnosis. A deep and integral diagnosis is needed. And in my opinion, this was not done at the summit, because one of the evident, observable and deepest roots of the sexual abuse of

minors is *homosexuality among the clergy*. Of course, I will not say that all homosexuals are necessarily abusing children. This would be unjust and untrue. But we are speaking about clerical abuse in the Church, and so we have to focus on this illness. It has been proven that more than 80 percent of victims were post-pubescent males. It is therefore evident that the nature of the majority of this abuse involved homosexual acts. We have to stress that this is one of the main roots.

The other main root of the abuse crisis is the *relativism on moral teaching* which began after the Second Vatican Council. Since then, we have been living in a deep crisis of doctrinal relativism, not only of dogmatics but also of morals — the moral law of God. Morals were not taught clearly in seminaries over the past 50 years; it was often not clearly taught in Seminaries and Theological faculties that a sin against the sixth commandment is a grave sin. Subjectively there may be mitigating circumstances, but objectively it is a grave sin. Every sexual act outside a valid matrimony is against the will of God. It offends God and is a serious sin, a mortal sin. This teaching was so relativized. And this is one of the other deep roots. We have to stress this. And in my opinion, this was not stressed at the summit: the relativism of moral teaching, specifically on the sixth commandment.

Another deep cause is the lack of a true, serious and authentic formation of seminarians. There was a lack of asceticism in the life and formation of seminarians. It has been proven by two thousand years, and by human nature, that without physical asceticism like fasting, praying, and even other forms of corporal mortifications, it is impossible to live a constant life in virtue without mortal sin. Due to the deep wound of original sin and the concupiscence still at work in every human being, we need corporal mortification.

St. Paul says: “Make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.” (Rom. 13:14) We can paraphrase these words, saying: do not nurture your flesh too much or concupiscence will dominate

you. And this is exactly what often happened in seminaries. Seminarians and priests nurtured the flesh through a comfortable life without asceticism, without fasting and other bodily and spiritual mortifications.

But to me, the deepest cause of the clerical sex abuse crisis is the *lack of a deep and personal relationship with Jesus Christ*. When a seminarian or a priest does not have a deep personal relationship with Jesus Christ, in constant fidelity to a life of prayer and really enjoying a personal love for Jesus, he is easy prey for the temptations of the flesh and other vices.

Furthermore, when you have a deep and personal love of Christ, you cannot deliberately commit a horrendous sin. Occasionally, because of the weakness of human nature, a priest or seminarian could commit a mortal sin against purity. But in the same moment, he is deeply repentant and decides to avoid the next sin at any cost. This is a manifestation of a true love of Christ. But it is for me completely excluded that a person who deeply loves Christ can sexually abuse minors. It is for me impossible. To my opinion, a deep love of Christ excludes this.

These are the main roots: homosexuality among the clergy, relativism of doctrine, a lack of asceticism and above all the absence of a deep and true love for Christ. And this was not stressed in the summit. Therefore, I consider the summit to be a failure, as a doctor fails to cure an illness when he fails to address its causes. This problem will break out again.

You mentioned the statistic that 80 percent of victims were post-pubescent males. How do you respond to Cardinal Blase Cupich and others who [point to the John Jay report and other studies as evidence there is no causal relationship between homosexuality and clerical sex abuse](#)?

It's a denial of reality. How can I speak with a man who denies reality? This is only explainable as an ideological position.

What concrete measures do you believe the summit should have taken to offer real solutions to the problem of clerical sexual abuse?

The summit should have issued concrete canonical norms, but it didn't, and therefore I think the summit was a failure. It was a beautiful clerical show, it was a show of *clericalism*— all the clerics with their titles came from all over the world. And many beautiful words — very emotional words — were spoken. But these deep roots were not addressed, and concrete and incisive norms were not given.

To my mind, very precise, compelling and incisive norms should be given.

The first canonical norm I would propose is this: that people with homosexual inclinations should categorically not be accepted in seminaries. And if they are discovered, of course with respect and love, they must be dismissed from the seminary and helped to be healed and to live as a good Christian layman.

Currently the [norms](#) only say that those with “deep-seated homosexual tendencies” should not be admitted to seminary, but for me this is not sufficient. What does “deep-seated” mean? If an adult man comes to the seminary and feels homosexual attraction, even if it is not yet deep-seated, it is still a homosexual attraction. And in itself it is already a condition that, in some circumstances — such as in the exclusively male atmosphere of a seminary — could develop into a deeper or more aggressive tendency.

And when he becomes a priest, he will be with seminarians, with young altar boys and so on. And so while perhaps in seminary these tendencies were not deep-seated, they can become deeper in certain circumstances.

It is for me in some way disingenuous. Let's say that a young man is not an aggressive homosexual. He does not take pleasure in having homosexual tendencies, and they are not so deeply rooted. But when he acknowledges that he has these tendencies,

or when it is proven by exterior acts or signs that he has homosexual tendencies, even if they are not deep-seated, he should be charitably sent away from the seminary. And this should be a canonical norm: that someone who acknowledges that he has homosexual tendencies, even not deep-seated, cannot be received into another seminary and cannot be ordained.

Homosexual tendencies are a kind of a personality disorder trait and a distorted perception of reality, since this signifies a desiring an object of pleasure against the natural order of the sexes. Magisterial documents call it an “objective” disorder. How can you ordain a man with a disorder in his personality or in his psycho-somatic makeup. Of course, there are other psychological disorders as well. We do not ordain men with certain psychological disorders, even when they are not so deep. It would harm the priesthood.

You mentioned exterior signs. In the canonical norm you propose, what sort of exterior signs do you have in mind?

If he were to have an exclusive and ostentatious friendship with a man, it would already be an exterior sign. Or if he looks at male pornography on the internet, this would be another sign. These are exterior, verifiable signs. Once these are discovered, such a seminarian should be forever excluded from ordination. Yes, he can be healed, but the seminary is not a sanitarium for healing people with psychological disorders or homosexual tendencies. This is naïve, and it will harm the priesthood and the person. It would be better for such a person to be a good Christian in the world and save his soul, and not to be a priest. We can and should help him, of course. But we have to be willing to say to him: you will not be ordained, it is for the salvation of your soul. Be a good Christian in the world.

Better to have fewer priests but healthy, psychologically healthy men. And deep lovers of Christ, deeply spiritual men. It

would be better for the entire Church. Better to leave some parishes without a priest and some dioceses without a bishop for several years than to ordain a man who has a disorder, either homosexual or other personality disorders.

What other concrete norms do you believe the Vatican sex abuse summit should have issued?

In a case when a priest or a bishop commits sexual abuse, even one case, he has to be dismissed from the clerical state. There should be “zero-tolerance” in this case, and it should be established in Canon Law. There should be no exception. Of course, the fact of the sexual abuse must be proven and verified by a true canonical process, but when it is, he has to be dismissed from the clerical state.

These two norms (the categorical non-admittance to the seminary and to ordination of men with homosexual tendencies, and the dismissal from the clerical state), in my view, should have been explicitly mentioned in the summit, if it is to have a concrete impact. Otherwise it was a beautiful meeting, but more or less a clerical show with sentimental words and statements.

Should a priest who has abused minors receive any money from the Church?

I think yes. We have to be merciful and should not be cruel. We must always still be human and Christian, and I think the Church should at least temporarily give these clerics who are dismissed financial help – maybe for the first two years.

Open Letter of Cardinals Burke and Brandmüller

Prior to the summit, Cardinal Raymond Burke and Cardinal Walter Brandmüller issued an [open](#)

letter calling on the bishops attending the summit to end their silence on the moral corruption in the Church and to uphold divine and natural law. How much do you think their open letter was listened to and heeded at the meeting?

I think the letter of the two cardinals was meritorious and very timely, and history will regard it as a truly positive contribution in this very delicate crisis of abuse on the universal level of the Church. It was a beautiful witness, and I believe this letter honored the College of Cardinals.

But I think it was heard more by the simple people than by the clerics: again, *clericalism*.

Some have suggested that the Vatican sex abuse summit was the greatest example of clericalism.

They failed to listen to the voices of the lay people. The voice of the laity was not heard sufficiently by clerics. Is this not clericalism?

What do you believe explains the obvious and repeated refusal to address the issue of homosexuality at the summit? Some have argued it might be due to a desire to protect homosexual networks within the hierarchy. Others have suggested it comes from bishops being afraid to say anything negative about homosexuality for fear of repercussions from the State.

I think that the first argument does not have considerable weight in the context of the summit. There are homosexual groups, but in this summit it was not decisive, in my opinion.

The second argument which you mentioned does have some weight but was not decisive. Fear on the part of bishops to confront the world is a factor; the fear of the world. Even though they may personally be against homosexuality, they fear a

confrontation with the world. Clerical cowardice: again, *clericalism*.

But the deepest reason, in my opinion, is that there are mighty clerical clans among bishops and cardinals who want to promote and change in the Church the divine moral law on the intrinsic evil of homosexual acts and of the homosexual lifestyle. They want to make homosexuality acceptable as a legitimate variant of sexual life. In my view, this is the deepest and perhaps the decisive reason why they were silent and failed to address this.

Amazonian Synod

In October a Synod on the Amazon will be held at the Vatican. Your Excellency, you lived in Brazil for a time and are familiar with the region. It's been said there is a shortage of priests in the Amazon, which some say justifies introducing *virī probati*. Is it true that such a sacramental crisis and shortage of priests exist?

Well, there is a shortage of priests in Amazonia, but there is also a shortage elsewhere. There is an increasing shortage of priests in Europe. But the shortage of priests is only an obvious pretext to abolish practically (not theoretically) celibacy in the Latin Church. This has been the aim since Luther. Among the enemies of the Church and sects, the first step is always to abolish celibacy. Priestly celibacy is the last stronghold to abolish in the Church. The sacramental life is only the pretext for doing so.

In my own experience in the Soviet Union, we had several years go by with no Holy Mass. And we survived strong in faith. The faith was lived in the domestic Church which is the family. The faith was handed on through the Catechism. We prayed. We made spiritual communions, through which we received many graces. When suddenly a priest came after one or two years, it was

really a feast, and we were so happy, and we sacramentally confessed, and God guided us. So I have had personal experience of this in my life, in the Soviet Union.

Regarding Brazil: I also lived and worked in Brazil for 7 years. And I know the Brazilians. They are very pious people, simple people. They would never think up married clergy. No, this is an idea put into their heads not by indigenous peoples but by white people, by priests who themselves are not living a deep apostolic and sacrificial life. Without the true sacrificial life of an apostle you cannot build up the Church. Jesus Christ gave us the example of the sacrificial offering of himself, as did the Apostles, the Fathers of the Church, the Saints, the Missionaries. This built up the Church with lasting spiritual fruits for entire generations.

The shortage of priests in the Amazon is for me an example of the contrary: perhaps priests lack a deeply committed and sacrificial life in the spirit of Jesus and the Apostles and the Saints. They therefore seek human substitutes. Indigenous married clergy will not lead to a deepening and growth in the Amazonian Church. Other problems will surely arise with the advent of married clergy in the indigenous culture of the Amazon and in other parts of the world of the Latin Rite.

What is most needed is to deepen the roots of the faith and to strengthen the domestic church in the Amazon. We need to begin a crusade in the Amazon among these indigenous families, among Christian Catholics, for vocations – imploring God for vocations to the celibate priesthood, and they will come.

Our Lord said to “pray,” so this lack is a sign that we are not praying enough. And people will be tempted to pray even less because men are filling their heads with the promise that in October they will receive the possibility of having married priests. So they no longer pray for their sons to be priests like Jesus, who was celibate. And Jesus is the model for all cultures.

Even one good indigenous celibate priest, a spiritual man, could transform tribes, as the saints did. St. John Marie Vianney

transformed almost all of France. Padre Pio is another example. I am not saying that we must expect this standard of holiness but am offering them as examples of the supernatural fruitfulness that can come through one holy priest. Even a simple, deep spiritual man who is dedicated to Jesus and to souls in celibacy, an indigenous priest from Amazonia, will surely build up the Church so much there, and awaken new vocations by his example.

This has been the Church's method since the time of the Apostles. And this method has been tried and proven through 2000 years of the Church's missionary experience. And this will be true until Christ comes. There is no other way. Adapting to purely humanistic, naturalistic approaches will not enrich the Amazonian Church. We have 2000 years of history to prove this.

I repeat: Brazilian people are deeply aware of the sacredness of the priesthood. This is what the Amazonian Synod should do: deepen the awareness of the sacredness of the celibate priesthood. The Church has such beautiful examples of missionaries. It should deepen and strengthen the domestic Church, i.e. family life. And the synod should start Eucharistic adoration and prayer campaigns for priests and new priestly vocations. Without the sacrifice of love, without prayer, we will not build up a local Church. With married clergy, no.

I am not speaking against the married clergy in the Orthodox Churches or Eastern Catholic Churches. I am speaking of the Latin tradition in America and Europe. We have to keep this treasure without weakening it though the introduction of a married clergy, because it has been proven by so much fruitfulness when we look at it from a comprehensive point of view.

Cardinals and the current crisis

Do you believe it's important for the Cardinals to speak up about the crisis in the Church, and if so what form do you believe this should take?

Yes, it's very timely and very necessary because the confusion is only increasing.

I think the cardinals should address the issue of the Abu Dhabi document and the phrase on the diversity of religions, because this statement leads ultimately to a denial of the truth of the unique and obligatory character of the Faith in Christ, which is commanded by Divine Revelation. In my view, the Abu Dhabi statement is the most dangerous from the doctrinal point of view. The cardinals ought respectfully to ask the Holy Father to correct this phrase officially.

I believe it would also be very timely and needed for cardinals or bishops to issue a kind of profession of faith, of truths, while also rejecting the most widespread errors of our time. In my view, they should make a very specific, enumerated profession of truths, saying for example: "I hold firmly that ..." followed by the refutation of an error. I believe such a profession should include all of the main dangerous errors which are spreading through the life of the Church in our day.

A profession reaffirming the faith but also refuting the error?

Yes, in the same sentence. Such a text should be published and widely disseminated to priests and bishops, perhaps asking them to make a public profession with this text in parishes and cathedrals. There would be no novelties. It would only state what the Church has always professed.