

Fr. Perozich comments —

JESUS, JESUS, JESUS, the only Name in heaven or on earth by which man can be saved. (Acts 4:12)

JESUS, JESUS, JESUS, in Whom we live, move, and have our being. (Acts 17:28)

JESUS, JESUS, JESUS: God wishes that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, and that truth is that God is One, so also One with God is Jesus, the man, the only mediator between God and man. (1 Tim 2:4ff)

Jesus is the unique salvation of all men. He works most clearly through us united to Him for our own salvation, and our outreach to others to proclaim His Holy Name.

He works in His own ways to reach out to all men to save them, but only Jesus can save.

This article may be a bit technical to lay faithful not accustomed to reading theological texts, but don't let that stop you.

Fr. Weinandy is brilliant.

Bishops all are not theologians of the same caliber. Some studied dogma, others the secular sciences. When major statements are being made by bishops, those who do so should not rely on their own understanding, rather, they should seek out the advice of the most faithful and educated charged to help bishops express clarity for the sake of the salvation of the hearer.

Ambiguity can then be avoided. Clarity can bring the light of truth to those who hear trusted bishops speak to the faithful for their salvation, as well as to non believers in order to plant the seed of faith to be nurtured to full faith by the Holy Spirit.

In defense of Francis, the statement signed by Muslim leaders at least acknowledges that Christianity would be a religion willed by God. Was it worth it, however, to fail to promote the uniqueness of Jesus, the only begotten Son of God who died to save man from sin, from eternal death, from isolation for goodness, eternal life, and for communion with God and one another?

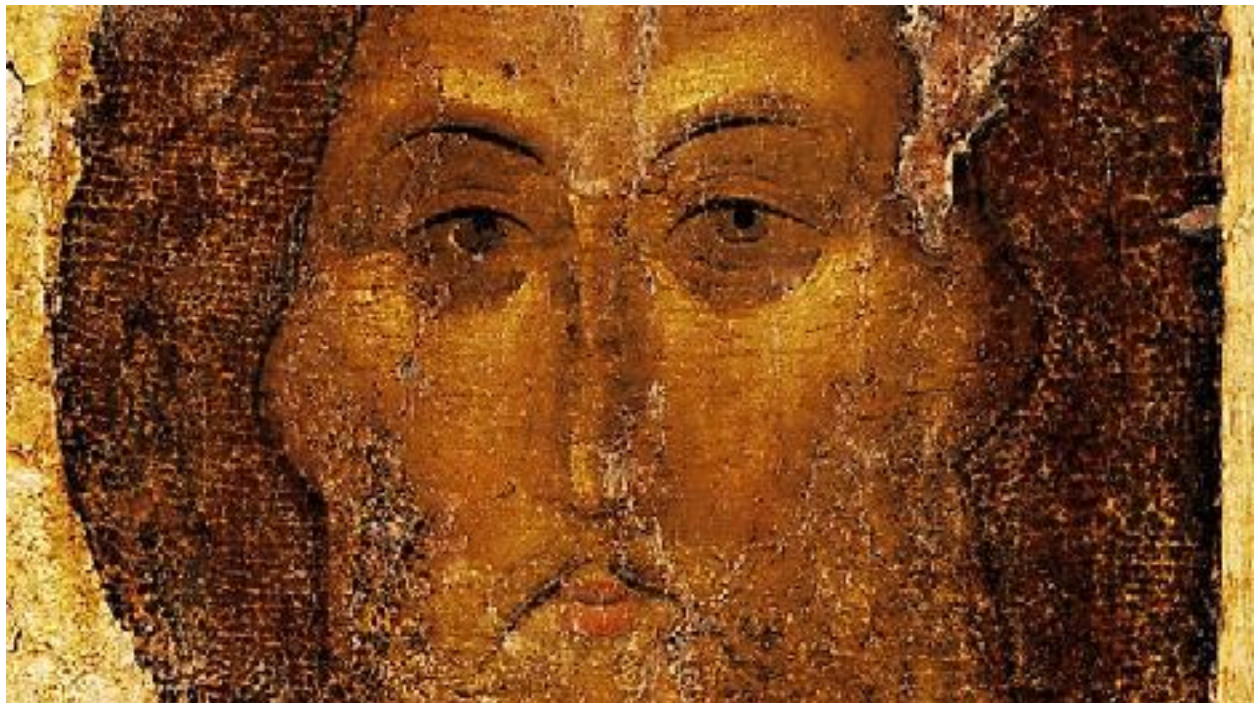
In Fr. Weinandy's article here, ambiguity gives way to clarity and to the Truth of the person of Jesus Christ so that all know Him and be saved by Jesus.

Pope Francis, the uniqueness of Christ, and the will of the Father

Pope Francis is noted for his ambiguous statements, but I find the indeterminate meaning contained in the Abu Dhabi statement the most egregious. Here is why.

June 2, 2019 Fr. Thomas G. Weinandy, OFM., Cap. [Essay](#), [Features](#) [23](#)

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Detail from "Christ the Redeemer" (c 1410) by Andrei Rublev [WikiArt.org]

Given the pluralism of world religions, many contemporary academics and pundits argue that Christianity can no longer claim itself to be the one true religion. Not only do those who profess other religious beliefs question Christianity's uniqueness, but Christians, lay and ecclesial, do so as well. The ultimate question

is: Is Jesus singular or is he merely one of many founders of various world religions? This issue assumed new prominence and urgency when in Abu Dhabi Pope Francis and Sheik Ahmad el-Tayeb **co-signed a document on February 4, 2019.**

This **document stated:** “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.” God positively willed the sexual complementarity of male and female, as well as different races and nations. Did he, in the same overt positive manner, will Christianity and Islam and so absolutely will not only Jesus as the founder of Christianity, but also Mohammed as the founder of Islam?

Pope Francis is noted for his ambiguous statements, but I find the indeterminate meaning contained in the Abu Dhabi statement the most egregious. By implication, it not only devalues the person of Jesus, but it also, and more so, strikes at the very heart of God the Father’s eternal will. Thus, such studied ambiguity undermines the very Gospel itself. Such implicit doctrinal subversion of so foundational a mystery of the faith on the part of Peter’s successor is for me and for many in the Church, particularly the laity, not simply inexcusable, but it most of all evokes profound sadness, for it imperils the supreme love that Jesus rightly deserves and merits.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in its 2000 Declaration *Dominus Iesus*, had already directly addressed such questions. The Congregation wished to clarify ambiguities and to identify flawed misunderstandings and erroneous conceptions of Jesus in relation to other “religious traditions of the world” which risked compromising “the evangelizing mission of the Church”. Thus, *Dominus Iesus* professed, in accordance with Sacred Scripture and the Magisterium of the Church, that Jesus, as the Father’s only begotten Son, is alone the fullness of divine revelation who singularly possesses the completeness of divine truth. Likewise, being the Father’s Spirit-anointed Son, Jesus

taught the Gospel of salvation and through his saving passion and sacrificial death reconciled all to his Father. The Father, in the love and power of the Holy Spirit, raised Jesus from the dead, thus liberating humankind from sin's curse (cf. Rom 1:3-4). These conjoined saving acts on the part of Jesus and of his Father, both of whom acted in the Holy Spirit, established Jesus as the preeminent Savior of all and the sole Lord of both heaven and earth. Consequently, *Dominus Iesus* declared that "Jesus Christ has a significance and a value for the human race and its history, which is unique and singular, proper to him alone, exclusive, universal, and absolute."

Although *Dominus Iesus* rightly addressed the singularity of Jesus among other religious founders and so the uniqueness of Christianity, I do not think it did so fully and, therefore, adequately. Because of this inadequacy, missing is the full truth and beauty of who Jesus is; and so, what is not fully appreciated is the manner in which he is the universal Savior and definitive Lord. I want in this essay to make evident what is lacking in *Dominus Iesus*, and in so doing, further nullify any interpretation of the Abu Dhabi document which could affirm, or even suggest, that Jesus and other religious founders are of equal salvific value, and thus that God willed all religions in the same manner as he willed Christianity. I will address then two related complementary aspects of Jesus' salvific primacy.

First, while implicit within *Dominus Iesus*, the Declaration did not explicitly state that Jesus' saving actions established a new salvific order, that is, that his saving actions brought about the possibility for humankind to enter into a radically new relationship with the Father in the Holy Spirit. Second, *Dominus Iesus* did not emphasize that to partake of the saving benefits of Jesus' death and resurrection, one must personally be united to him. These two complementary truths further accentuate the singularity of Jesus as the universal Savior and his uniqueness as the definitive Lord.

As to our first point, founders of other religions or other religions as such, other than Judaism and Christianity, simply intend to inform “the believer” what he or she must do in order to have a proper relation to God or “the divine.” The person progresses from a state of religious ignorance to a state of knowing what is religiously required. Such an understanding of “revelation” as merely a source of religious knowledge does not adequately address the evils of sin and death, nor effectively offer a new kind of relationship with God that is truly liberating and life-giving.

Moreover, within religions that profess to offer saving knowledge, the founder of that religion no longer is central once the salvific knowledge is imparted, for he has achieved his salvific purpose – that of revealing a previously absent salvific knowledge. The founder may be revered, as is Mohammed or Buddha, by those who adhere to his teaching, but this adherence is to a founder who has imparted the revealed religious, philosophical, moral and spiritual tenets to be believed and practiced. All religions, except for Judaism and Christianity, are then, by their very nature, Gnostic for they only provide what is considered to be saving knowledge. Thus, while Vatican II, in its Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, states that “the Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions [such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam],” for they “often reflect a ray of truth which enlightens all men,” yet the Church has the duty to proclaim that in Jesus, “in whom God reconciled all things to himself (2 Cor. 5:18-19), men find the fullness of the religious life.”

Unlike the gnostic nature of other world religions, within Judaism God acted in such a manner that the Israelites did not simply come to know God more fully, but because of his covenantal action, they came to possess a new kind of relationship with him, a relationship that was not possible prior to his action and to which other peoples and nations did not have access. As the fulfillment of God’s saving actions within the Old Testament,

Jesus, as the Father's incarnate Son, fully addressed the evil of sin, for in the loving act of offering his sinless and holy life to the Father on humankind's behalf, he redeemed humankind from sin's condemnation and so reconciled men and women to God. Moreover, by rising from the dead, Jesus conquered death and restored life. Through his death and resurrection Jesus thus established a new salvific order, one in which all evil is vanquished and a new and righteous relationship with God is now possible. Thus, Christianity is principally founded upon the saving actions of God; first anticipated and prefigured within his saving actions among the Israelites and fulfilled in the sending of his Son into the world – the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Moreover, as humankind's Savior and Lord, Jesus never loses his personal saving significance, for only by being personally united to Jesus is one freed from sin and death, and only by being personally united to him does one newly abide with the all-holy and all-loving God. In accordance with *Dominus Iesus*, Jesus' saving actions with their salvific effects further differentiate and so accentuate Jesus as the singular universal Savior and unique definitive Lord, for no one other than him has accomplished "so great a salvation" (cf. Heb 2:3). Likewise, the need to be personally united to Jesus in order to partake of his saving benefits emphasizes his continual, unending, and ever-present saving importance, and thus his singular significance as the universal Savior. St. John Paul II in his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* stated: "It is precisely this uniqueness of Christ which gives him an absolute and universal significance, whereby, while belonging to history, he remains history's center and goal: 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end' (Rv 22:13)". Such an understanding of Jesus' salvific importance is found within the whole Sacred Scripture and within the Church's authentic teaching.

St. Paul, in the opening hymn of his Letter to the Ephesians, expresses this saving mystery – the centrality of Jesus' saving acts

and for all to be united to him. Paul invites all to bless “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us *in Christ* with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us *in him* before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.” From before the creation of the world, the Father “destined us in love to be his sons *through Jesus Christ*, according to the purpose of *his will*, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed upon us *in the Beloved*.” For in Jesus “we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses.” In all of these lavish blessings the Father “made known to us in all wisdom and insight *the mystery of his will*, according to his purpose which he set forth *in Christ* as a plan for the fullness of time, *to unite all things in him*, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph 1:3-10). From all eternity the Father positively willed that all of humankind and the whole of creation, even angels, are to be united in Jesus Christ, his incarnate Son.

Unlike other religious founders, such as Buddha or Mohammed, Jesus’ resurrection, body and soul, is here foundational. After the Fall, human beings were in the need of salvation, freedom from sin and liberation from the curse of death. The Son of God saved humankind by becoming fully human (cf. Heb. 4:15) and offering himself, “through the eternal Spirit” (Heb 9:14), as a pure and holy sacrifice. This sacrifice of himself reconciled human beings to the Father. Moreover, because of his saving sacrifice, the Father raised Jesus from the dead, and thus the Son of God still exists as man, though now as a glorious man, for “death no longer has dominion over him” (Rom 6:9). The salvation of humankind, freedom from sin and death, resides precisely within the risen humanity of Jesus. To be personally united to the risen humanity of Jesus is to partake of the saving benefits that reside in him.

Here the singularity of Jesus Christ, as the Father’s Son, is made manifest. Only in being personally united to Jesus, as the

risen Savior and universal Lord, do men and women share in his holiness, the very life of the Holy Spirit, and so come to live in communion with his Father as the Father's children. Thus, not only does the resurrection make Jesus unique in his manner of existence as Savior and Lord, but it also allows men and women to live, in a singular manner, in communion with him as their Savior and Lord. There is no relationship similar to the relationship between Christ and the believer. It is unique. This mystery revealed by God the Father, both as to the primacy of Jesus his Son and as to humankind's invitation to live in communion with him, is therefore singularly Christian and distinguishes Christianity from all other religious traditions.

Equally, in his Letter to the Colossians, Paul sings the primacy of Jesus. Being the perfect image of the invisible Father, the Son is "the first-born of all creation" and in so being "all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things and in him all things hold together." The whole of creation remains in existence only by being united to the Son for they are for him. As Creator he holds primacy within the created cosmos. Moreover, "he is the beginning, the first born from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross" (Col. 1:15-20). As the first to be gloriously born anew in his resurrection, Jesus is pre-eminent within the new creation for in and through his death he has made peace with his Father so that all might find reconciling communion in him. Likewise, only in communion with the risen Jesus, he in whom the fullness of God dwells, does re-created humanity share in his resurrection and the whole of the re-created cosmos everlastingly endures.

Similarly, as in St. Paul, the Gospels also bear witness to the necessity of living in Christ Jesus the Son if one is to share in the salvific benefits that accrue to him – the Spirit-filled fruit of living

within the Father's kingdom. The Synoptic Gospels emphasize that Jesus proclaims the coming of God's kingdom and that through his death and resurrection he establishes that kingdom. To enter into that kingdom Jesus declares that one "must repent and believe in the gospel" (Mk 1:15, cf. Mt 4:17). To believe in the gospel, to believe in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God (cf. Mt 16:16), is to enter into God's kingdom, for one is united to Jesus, the King who embodies the kingdom.

Thus, to be united to Jesus is to abide in God's kingdom and so share in the new and eternal life of the kingdom, that is, the holy life of God's Spirit. In the Gospel of John, Jesus informs Nicodemus: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Holy Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (Jn 3:5). To be born anew into God's kingdom is to be born anew into Christ Jesus. Throughout John's Gospel, Jesus accentuates the importance of abiding in him. Speaking of his death, he declares: "I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (Jn. 12:32). He reveals that, as the Son of God, he and the Father are one (cf. Jn 10:30) and that his salvific task is to bring those who believe in him into this divine communion. Jesus tells his apostles that when they come to believe in him, "you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you" (Jn 14:20). If a person loves Jesus by keeping his word, "my Father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him" (Jn 14:23). Jesus' final prayer is that his followers "may all be one, even as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us... that they be one even as we are one, I in them and they in me, that they may become perfectly one" (Jn 17:20-23).

Jesus illustrates this life-giving communion between him and his disciples through the analogy of a vine and its branches: "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine and you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart

from me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:4-5). To abide in Jesus, therefore, is to share in the very divine communion that exists between him and his Father, thus making those who believe one with them. The act of faith and the sacrament of baptism bring about this living and continuous union for through them Jesus and his Father come to dwell within the believer. Thus, there is a living union between Jesus and his disciples, a union that is founded on and nourished by the life-giving Holy Spirit, a union that will bear the fruit of everlasting life.

This mystery of living in communion with Christ is most fully articulated within St. Paul’s teaching concerning the Body of Christ: Jesus is the head of the body and all who believe in him and are baptized are its living members. “You are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (1 Cor 12:27; cf. 1 Cor 6:15-17). Paul declares why this is so: “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were baptized into one body – Jew or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:12-13). By sharing in the Holy Spirit, Christians live in the Spirit-anointed Christ and so form one living body with him – they constitute and comprise one living reality. The truth that Jesus is the Head of his body accentuates that the faithful are personally united to the very person of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ so as to form one living reality in the Holy Spirit. As St. Thomas Aquinas states: “Head and members form as it were one and the same mystical person.” This doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ, wherein the person of Christ and the individual persons united to him within the communion of the Church share in the one mystical and divine life of the Holy Spirit, distinguishes the Christian Gospel from other religions. Moreover, it calls the Church and its members to proclaim the Gospel to all peoples so that everyone may share in the intimate personal love and everlasting life that resides in Christ Jesus, for as Vatican II states in *Lumen Gentium*,

“the universal Church is seen to be a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”

Dominus Iesus enunciated why Jesus, as the Son of God and Word of the Father, is the unique universal Savior and singular Lord of heaven and earth and why the Church shares in that singularity by possessing the fullness of Christ’s saving mystery. What I have articulated above not only complements and but also completes what *Dominus Iesus* declares, for the manner in which the Church and her members come to participate in the singular saving mystery that is Christ Jesus is by way of being united to Christ and living in him. Again, *Lumen Gentium* states: “All men are called to this union with Christ, who is the light of the world, from whom we go forth, through whom we live, and towards whom our whole life is directed.” Jesus is the only Savior for only by living in Spirit-filled communion with him does one share in the saving mystery that he is. This unity in Christ the Son is the eternal mystery that the Father has now revealed.

What also must be kept in mind is Vatican II’s teaching contained in *Gaudium et Spes*. Since Christ died for all and since all are called by God to one destiny which is union with him in Christ Jesus, “we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery.” The Holy Spirit is at work in the lives of all, and so, by cooperating with the Spirit’s action, all men and women, members of other religions or none, are also able to become sharing-companions with Christians in the saving mystery that is Jesus. They too are able to be subsumed into Jesus’ salvific death and resurrection and so become personally united to him.

This primacy of Christ as the universal Savior and definitive Lord will then find its fulfillment when Jesus returns in glory at the end of time, at which point the Church and all of its members will be united to and live in him perfectly and so share fully in his risen glory – the full life and love of the Holy Spirit. St. Paul declares the everlasting significance of this truth when he states:

“In him (Jesus) you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his (the Father’s) glory” (Eph 1:13-14). Having been united to Christ and sharing in the Spirit of Sonship, Christians are assured of their heavenly inheritance – eternal life and communion with God their Father.

What I have articulated here may be obvious to all faithful Christians. Nonetheless, given the ambiguity contained within the Abu Dhabi statement that Pope Francis signed, a strong reaffirmation is now necessary. One would like to think (the forever giving him the benefit of the doubt) that Pope Francis unwittingly, and so not consciously aware of the doctrinal implications of his signature, did not intend what the document seems to declare.

Regardless, no one, not even a pontiff, can undo or override the will of God the Father concerning Jesus his Son. It is God the Father who “has highly exalted him and bestowed upon him the name which is above every name.” The Father has eternally decreed that at the name of Jesus, and not at the name of Buddha, Mohammed, or the name of any other past, present, or future religious founder, that “every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.” To do so is not simply to glorify Jesus, but also “to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:9-11). In his love the Father has given the world Jesus his Son (Jn. 3:16), and “there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). In this supreme truth we are to rejoice in gratitude and praise.

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Fr. Thomas G. Weinandy, OFM., Cap. (Capuchin College, Washington DC) is a Member of the International Theological Commission. The author of several books and numerous articles for both academic and popular publications, he is the current President of the Academy of Catholic Theology, and a member of the Catholic Theological Society of America, the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars, the Catholic Theological Society of Great Britain, the North American Patristics Society, and the Association Internationale D'Etudes Patristiques.