

Moral Guidance regarding Vaccines and COVID-19 (23 Nov 2020)

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With the prospect of the FDA approving one (or more) COVID-19 vaccines within the next few weeks, many questions have been raised regarding the ethical status of these vaccines (particularly questioning whether embryonic stem cells or tissue from aborted fetuses were used in their creation, and whether Catholics can morally receive such vaccines). The following is a brief moral analysis to help provide you some guidance when these questions arise. Be mindful that this analysis is dependent on current information, and therefore could change once more information is released. It has only been within the last few days that the findings of some of the vaccines have been submitted to the FDA for approval, so more information will be forthcoming in the upcoming weeks as the government and independent researchers have access to data. •At this point, it appears as if the vaccine created by Pfizer/Biontech, along with the vaccine created by Moderna have not been created using material of illicit origin (i.e., embryonic stem cells and/or the tissue of aborted children.) For Catholics, this is great news. Theologically speaking, there are no moral or religious grounds that would restrict the consciences of Catholics from receiving these vaccines. •There have been articles and press releases that affirm that, while these above vaccines were not created with material of illicit origin, there is good reason to believe that these vaccines may have been tested (post production) utilizing the tissue of aborted fetuses.

These articles and statements, therefore, conclude that it is immoral to use them. This sweeping conclusion is inconsistent with Catholic moral teaching. A critical question is: "Are Catholics always forbidden to perform an action if it touches upon evil, or cooperates, somehow, with the evil action of another?" The answer is 'no'. There certainly are instances when Catholics must refrain from immoral cooperation. However, Catholic teaching on moral cooperation makes critical distinctions (mediate/immediate, proximate/remote, etc) to determine the degree or level to which one cooperates in evil. In some cases, some forms of cooperation, while unfortunate, can be allowed in certain circumstances. Unfortunately, we live in a fallen world. Dig deep enough, and one finds that many of our actions somehow touch upon evil and the evil actions of others.

While the Church draws a firm line in delineating certain acts of cooperation as immoral, it does not condemn all actions of cooperation as such. It challenges us to be aware of evil around us, to always choose the option that involves less evil (or no evil), and to speak and challenge others to desist from evil. It is for this reason that the Church, in the early months of vaccine development for COVID 19, boldly challenged (and continues to challenge) researchers and the medical industry to seek moral means of vaccine production

(and to reject the use of material of illicit origin that involved the destruction of unborn life).

Regarding the previous statement regarding the immorality of taking the vaccine because of immoral post-production testing, or even statements from some bishops that have forbidden vaccines derived from material of illicit origin, the following paragraph from *Dignitas Personae*, issued from the CDF under Pope Benedict XVI, offers critical (and perhaps surprising) conclusions. In speaking of the use of embryonic stem cell lines or the tissue of aborted children, the document states in no. 35: “Grave reasons may be morally proportionate to justify the use of such ‘biological material’.

Thus, for example, danger to the health of children could permit parents to use a vaccine which was developed using cell lines of illicit origin, while keeping in mind that everyone has the duty to make known their disagreement and to ask that their healthcare system make other types of vaccines available.” While the statement uses the example of the danger to the health of children, the dangers of COVID-19 particularly to our vulnerable elderly or those with compromised health could reasonably be presumed as grave reason for vaccination. While the Church unequivocally condemns researchers and the medical industry for the creation, production, and distribution of vaccines produced from embryonic stem cells and from the tissue of aborted children, the receiving of these vaccines is in another moral category.

•In conclusion, at this point there appears to be no moral issues to prohibit a Catholic from receiving vaccines produced by Pfizer or Moderna. If other vaccines are released which do have recourse to material of illicit origin, Catholic moral teaching would direct Catholics to utilize the option that is least morally problematic (i.e., the vaccines that were not created via such immoral means). Providentially, these two listed vaccines satisfy that criteria. As more vaccines are produced, we recommend that you visit the following website, which provides a fairly complete list of all vaccines, and how they were produced and tested.

Update: COVID-19 Vaccine Candidates and Abortion-Derived Cell Lines | Charlotte Lozier Institute