



ARCHDIOCESE OF CINCINNATI

Office of the Archbishop

archbishop@catholicaoc.org
513.263.6612

April 12, 2021

Dear Brothers in Holy Orders,

On December 3, 2020, I wrote to you outlining some of the most important principles regarding the application of the Church's moral teaching to the production, distribution and reception of COVID-19 vaccines. There have been several developments since then, so I take this opportunity to provide you with a brief update.

The vaccines developed by Moderna and Pfizer to combat COVID-19 may be taken without moral reservation. As indicated previously, the Chairmen of the U.S. Bishops' doctrine and pro-life committees said in a November 23, 2020, statement that it is not immoral to be vaccinated with the vaccines being developed by Moderna and Pfizer given the seriousness of the health risk. They went on to say, "Neither the Pfizer nor the Moderna vaccine involved the use of cell lines that originated in fetal tissue taken from the body of an aborted baby at any level of design, development, or production... They are not completely free from any connection to abortion, however, as both Pfizer and Moderna made use of a tainted cell line for one of the confirmatory lab tests of their products. There is thus a connection, but it is relatively remote... at the level of the recipient, it is morally permissible to accept vaccination when there are no alternatives and there is a serious health risk."

The Johnson & Johnson vaccine is ethically more problematic than either the Moderna or Pfizer vaccine, but may be taken if neither of the other two is available. While an abortion-derived cell line was used only for testing of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, the Johnson & Johnson vaccine was developed, tested and produced with abortion-derived cell lines. The USCCB's doctrine and pro-life committees said in a statement on March 2, 2021, "If one can choose among equally safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines, the vaccine with the least connection to abortion-derived cell lines should be chosen. Therefore, if one has the ability to choose a vaccine, Pfizer or Moderna's vaccines should be chosen over Johnson & Johnson's."

There is no moral obligation to receive a COVID-19 vaccination. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith noted on December 21, 2020, that "vaccination is not, as a rule, a moral obligation and that, therefore, it must be voluntary. In any case, from the ethical point of view, the morality of vaccination depends not only on the duty to protect one's own health but also on the duty to pursue the common good." For a vaccine to be effective in protecting society, including the weakest and most vulnerable, most people must be vaccinated in order to break the chain of person-to-person disease transmission. This should be taken into serious consideration when discerning whether or not to be vaccinated.

RADIATE CHRIST

Catholics have an ongoing obligation to advocate that vaccine development and distribution be done in a morally acceptable manner throughout every stage. This remains true even when, for the common good and lack of an available alternative, we feel compelled to receive a vaccine, the production of which is in some way linked to morally unacceptable means. Morally acceptable development means development that respects all human life, created in the image and likeness of God, from conception to natural death. Taking innocent human life to harvest such cells and create cell lines which can be scientifically propagated over time is morally unacceptable. Catholics are likewise obliged to advocate for the just distribution of any vaccine so that those most vulnerable, including our poorest communities, may have access.

If you are interested in exploring this topic more deeply, I would point you to resources from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (www.usccb.org/biomedical-research), the National Catholic Bioethics Center (www.ncbcenter.org) and the Charlotte Lozier Institute (www.lozierinstitute.org/category/genetics).

We pray that the Lord will guide us as we strive for the common good of all and a return to general health and wellbeing.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a cross symbol and the name Dennis M. Schnurr.

Most Reverend Dennis M. Schnurr
Archbishop of Cincinnati

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