

Vaccine Mandates and Catholic Morality

Vaccine mandates have surfaced several moral issues and honest concerns about the origin of the vaccines from aborted fetuses and the requirement to take them from employers or the government. This article features the main ideas from the Vatican on these issues. This article also assumes that people will always check with their doctors as to their own personal health circumstances for or against taking the vaccine.

Morality of vaccines from stem cells of aborted children.

The Covid vaccines in the US developed from stem cell lines from two aborted children in the 1960's and one in the 1980's. These stem cell lines have replicated for many decades since then, and so your use of them today in a vaccine is considered very *remote cooperation* with an earlier evil act and so can be morally permissible, especially in emergency situations.

This reasoning came on December 21st 2020, when the Vatican released guidelines that are additions to a much larger 2008 document called *Dignitas Personae* (The Dignity of Persons) which addressed many bioethical issues. For accuracy, I will quote directly from the Vatican additions related to the vaccines. The quotes are in *italics* and the paragraph numbers are from the original text. These ideas are also supported by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. The intro paragraph outlines its purpose.

We do not intend to judge the safety and efficacy of these vaccines, although ethically relevant and necessary, as this evaluation is the responsibility of biomedical researchers and drug agencies. Here, our objective is only to consider the moral aspects of the use of the vaccines against Covid-19 that have been developed from cell lines derived from tissues obtained from two fetuses that were not spontaneously aborted.

1. *As the Instruction Dignitas Personae states, in cases where cells from aborted fetuses are employed to create cell lines for use in scientific research, "there exist differing degrees of responsibility" of cooperation in evil. For example, "In organizations where cell lines of illicit origin are being utilized, the responsibility of those who make the decision to use them is not the same as that of those who have no voice in such a decision".*

2. *In this sense, when ethically irreproachable Covid-19 vaccines are not available (e.g. in countries where vaccines without ethical problems are not made available to physicians and patients, or where their distribution is more difficult due to special storage and transport conditions, or when various types of vaccines are distributed in the same country but health authorities do not allow citizens to choose the vaccine with which to be inoculated) it is morally acceptable to receive Covid-19 vaccines that have used cell lines from aborted fetuses in their research and production process.*

3. *The fundamental reason for considering the use of these vaccines morally licit is that the kind of cooperation in evil (passive material cooperation) in the procured abortion from which these cell lines originate is, on the part of those making use of the resulting vaccines, remote. The moral duty to avoid such passive material cooperation is not obligatory if there is a grave*

danger, such as the otherwise uncontainable spread of a serious pathological agent--in this case, the pandemic spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes Covid-19. It must therefore be considered that, in such a case, all vaccinations recognized as clinically safe and effective can be used in good conscience with the certain knowledge that the use of such vaccines does not constitute formal cooperation with the abortion from which the cells used in production of the vaccines derive. It should be emphasized, however, that the morally licit use of these types of vaccines, in the particular conditions that make it so, does not in itself constitute a legitimation, even indirect, of the practice of abortion, and necessarily assumes the opposition to this practice by those who make use of these vaccines.

Is a vaccine mandate a moral obligation?

5. Practical reason makes evident 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. In the absence of other means to stop or even prevent the epidemic, the common good may recommend vaccination, especially to protect the weakest and most exposed. Those who, however, for reasons of conscience, refuse vaccines produced with cell lines from aborted fetuses, must do their utmost to avoid, by other prophylactic means and appropriate behavior, becoming vehicles for the transmission of the infectious agent.

Is a vaccine mandate legal?

Any mandate or coercive activity is the hardest of all events to endure, especially in a nation founded on such strong principles of personal freedom and liberty. I am sure the courts at various federal, state, and local levels will adjudicate these complex legal issues which is precisely their role in our American society. The courts can authoritatively determine the different rights and obligations of government and private companies to mandate activity for citizens in general and employees in private industry, along with how mandates are affected by a person's doctor's advice as well. Unions and other employee organizations may also weigh in.

Is there a religious exemption?

While the Catholic Church is formally not opposed to the Covid-19 vaccines it also supports conscientious objections on any personal issue based on well informed conscience grounds. Even if the Church supports something it recognizes others may have a personal objection in areas where no infallible teachings are involved. However, since the Pope and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Archdiocese of Los Angeles have all morally permitted these Covid-19 vaccines as precisely outlined in the paragraphs above, it would be hard to make the case for an institutional or formal religious exemption other than a personal conscientious objection.

Therefore, in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles we cannot provide any formal support for a religious exemption.

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