



Dear friends,

Over the last year the world has waited with great anticipation as nations and companies work to develop a vaccine against COVID-19. With three promising candidates and others doubtlessly in the works, questions of the moral issues around vaccines have taken a prime spot in the hearts and conversations of many. Though often coming up in different ways, there are three core questions:

Using the guidelines released by the @PontAcadLife in 2005 and 2017 on the origin of vaccines, @TheCHAUSA ethicists, in collaboration with other Catholic bioethicists, find nothing morally prohibitive with the vaccines developed by @pfizer and @BioNTech_Group and @moderna_tx.
- the Pontifical Academy for Life (@PontAcadLife) posting at Twitter on November, 22, 2020

- **Is it safe** to take vaccines?
- **May we take vaccines** that have been developed using fetal stem cells obtained from abortions?
- **Should** we take vaccines?

The answer to all three of these questions is a solid 'yes'. Yes, vaccines are safe to take. Yes, vaccines developed using fetal stem cells obtained from abortions may be morally used by Christians. Yes, we should take vaccines and have a moral responsibility to do

Over the next several weeks, I will be answering some of the common concerns related to these questions. As with any Church teaching, there is a wealth of theological development behind the conclusions. The key Church documents are very accessible, weighing in at just 35 pages in total and available online (see below) - I encourage you to read them!

Our attention to these issues reflects our care for all human life. May we be emboldened to proclaim the Gospel of Life, inviting the Holy Spirit to guide us to better care for all.

- Father Maurer

Reference documents

Dignitatis Personae (On Certain Bioethical Questions), Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, 2008 - https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20081208_dignitas-personae_en.html

Moral Reflections on Vaccines Prepared from Cells Derived from Aborted Human Fetuses, Pontifical Academy for Life, 2005 [https://www.pdcnet.org/C1257D43006C9AB1/file/B3945E0E17A0025085257D94004A597D/\\$FILE/ncbq_2006_0006_0003_0145_0154.pdf](https://www.pdcnet.org/C1257D43006C9AB1/file/B3945E0E17A0025085257D94004A597D/$FILE/ncbq_2006_0006_0003_0145_0154.pdf)

Note on Italian vaccine issue, Pontifical Academy for Life, 2017 <http://www.academyforlife.va/content/pav/en/the-academy/activity-academy/note-vaccini.html>



Dear friends,

Last week we summarized the core questions around the moral issues of using vaccines. We briefly touched on the Church teaching that vaccines are safe, moral, and indeed part of our responsibility as Christians.

“From the clinical point of view, it should also be reiterated that treatment with vaccines, despite the very rare side effects (the events that occur most commonly are mild and due to an immune response to the vaccine itself), is safe and effective. No correlation exists between the administration of the vaccine and the onset of Autism.”
- *Note on Italian vaccine issue*, Pontifical Academy for Life

This week we touch on a more general but nonetheless common worry - are vaccines **safe** to use? Especially in recent years there has been much speculation about a potential link between vaccines and illness, particularly autism. In its 2017 *Note on Italian vaccine issue*, the Pontifical Academy for Life reiterated that **vaccines are safe and effective**.

One name that often comes up in this area is Dr. Theresa Deisher. Dr. Deisher is to be especially lauded for her efforts to support an ethically sound vaccine to replace the current MMR (**M**easles, **M**umps, and **R**uebella) vaccine, which has direct ties to fetal stem cells obtained from abortion. However, where Dr. Deisher loses credibility - and in fact finds herself in opposition to the Pontifical Academy for Life (among other voices) - is in her assertion that vaccines cause autism.

This claim has been addressed many times over, but for those who would like to dive into the details around why this assertion is false, I recommend the series started by the contributors of the blog ‘Rational Catholic’ ([Part I](#) & [Part II](#) are currently available, along with supplementary articles linked at the conclusion of each part). Both knowledgeable & faithful, the writers at Rational Catholic highlight many of the errors in Dr. Deisher’s studies and conclusions.

Taking in the facts of vaccine safety, may we also pray for the peace of the Christ in our hearts.
- Father Maurer

Reference documents

Dignitatis Personae (On Certain Bioethical Questions), Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, 2008 - https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20081208_dignitas-personae_en.html

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Dear friends,

Having confirmed the safety of vaccines last week, we move to the question of the morality of taking vaccines - particularly those that have ties to fetal stem cells obtained from abortion. Again we find that the Church upholds our freedom to use these vaccines without fear that we are cooperating in or supporting voluntary abortion. In short, **we may use these vaccines.**

“The technical characteristics of the production of the vaccines most commonly used in childhood lead us to exclude that there is a morally relevant cooperation between those who use these vaccines today and the practice of voluntary abortion. Hence, we believe that all clinically recommended vaccinations can be used with a clear conscience and that the use of such vaccines does not signify some sort of cooperation with voluntary abortion.”

- *Note on Italian vaccine issue*, Pontifical Academy for Life

Even as the Church testifies to this freedom - and in fact, affirms our moral responsibility to take vaccines for the safety of those around us - we are reminded that “there remains a moral duty to continue to fight and to employ every lawful means in order to make life difficult for the pharmaceutical industries which act unscrupulously and unethically” (*Moral Reflections on Vaccines Prepared from Cells Derived from Aborted Human Fetuses*). As Christians we carry a grave responsibility to call for an end to the use of the fetal stem cell lines obtained from voluntary abortions.

We find the key to *why* we may use these vaccines in the Church’s teaching in *Moral Reflections on Vaccines Prepared from Cells Derived from Aborted Human Fetuses* in the section titled “The Principle of Licit Cooperation in Evil”. We are reminded that using these vaccines constitutes remote (far away or long ago) mediate (many steps separated) material (not sharing the evil intent) cooperation. As such, using vaccines is morally permissible without fear that we are voluntarily supporting evil.

As we renew our commitment to promoting the good of human life, may we ask the Lord to give us the courage and fortitude to call for greater respect for life in all areas of society and science.

- Father Maurer

Reference documents

Dignitatis Personae (On Certain Bioethical Questions), Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, 2008 - https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20081208_dignitas-personae_en.html

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Dear friends,

Reassured by the Church that remote mediate material cooperation in evil is morally licit - that we may indeed take vaccines - we come to the question of whether or not we should actually take them. To this, the Church

has a nuanced but firm 'yes'! **We have a moral responsibility to vaccinate** not only in care for ourselves but for the safety of others, particularly those who are most vulnerable in society.

The Church is careful not to require any particular vaccine - and indeed allows for the varying calls of conscience among the faithful. The document *Dignitatis Personae* reminds us that "Of course, within this general picture there exist differing degrees of responsibility", prompting careful discernment in these decisions though always attentive to the health of the most vulnerable. Through the Pontifical Academy for Life, the Church reminds us that there is a **moral obligation to guarantee the vaccination coverage** necessary for the safety of others.

In short, we may not claim a blanket exemption from participating in the work of safeguarding others, though we rightly discern how we will do so with each vaccine. Given the nature of vaccines - that the more people are vaccinated, the more all are protected (even those who can not be vaccinated) - the Church strongly encourages all to receive vaccinations where possible so as to contribute to the health of all those around us. May we pray for wisdom in how we do our part.

Reference documents

Dignitatis Personae (On Certain Bioethical Questions), Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, 2008 - https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20081208_dignitas-personae_en.html

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✠ JMJ ✠

WHY DO CATHOLICS DO THAT?

- Father Jacob Maurer

Dear friends,

Over the last several weeks we have examined in brief some of the most common questions around vaccines - if they are safe, if they can be taken morally, and if we ought to take them. To each of these questions we find the Church answering in the affirmative: **vaccines are safe, they can be morally taken, and they ought to be taken** when it is reasonable to do so.

“We are called to an attitude of hope, beyond the paralyzing effect of two opposite temptations: on the one hand, the resignation that passively undergoes events; on the other, the nostalgia for a return to the past, only longing for what was there before. Instead, it is time to imagine and implement a project of human coexistence that allows a better future for each and every one.”

- *Humana Communitas in the Age of Pandemic: Untimely Meditations on Life's Rebirth*, Pontifical Academy for Life

As I'm sure you have realized by now, this series is by no means comprehensive! It is my hope that by addressing the most common concerns, highlighting the teachings of the Church, and providing references for further research, we all may be empowered to dive deeper into the wisdom of the Church personally and as a community.

We are blessed with unprecedented access to the riches of Church teaching and tradition, we can engage it both individually and together. With that same technology, we can debate, discuss, and learn from each other in-person & online. Through it all, we invite the Holy Spirit to enlighten us and guide us in the work given to us by the Lord.

In many ways these times prompt us to more fully commit ourselves to proclaiming the gospel in word and deed. May we continue to pray that God may make fruitful our efforts - in our own lives and in the lives of all.

- Father Maurer

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Dignitatis Personae (On Certain Bioethical Questions), Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, 2008 - https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20081208_dignitas-personae_en.html

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✠ JMJ ✠

WHY DO CATHOLICS DO THAT?

- Father Jacob Maurer

Dear friends,

A brief addendum to my bulletin series on common concerns about vaccines and the development of vaccines against COVID-19. When

I started, there had not been any official publications from Rome or from the bishops. Happily, the Washington State Catholic Conference, the USCCB, and Rome have all since then weighed in - **each offering support of receiving the available vaccines**, albeit with some important considerations & reflections.

“ . . . when ethically irreproachable Covid-19 vaccines are not available . . . it is morally acceptable to receive Covid-19 vaccines that have used cell lines from aborted fetuses in their research and production process.”

- *Note on the morality of using some anti-Covid-19 vaccines*, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

Their writings and commentary are too much to include here, but they are all worth reading. Between the new documents, there is about 12 pages of reading and all of it very approachable. If you have been following along with this series, you'll notice that all three rely heavily on the documents we have been reviewing over the previous weeks.

I hope you will take the time to read these most recent publications from our bishops and from Rome. Though the conclusions are the familiar - that it is morally acceptable to receive the COVID-19 vaccines (though not necessarily obligatory) - the support of our local bishops, the unified message of the United States bishops, and the teaching of the Church through the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith are a helpful reassurance to us all. Together may we embrace the encouragement and wisdom of our Catholic faith.

- Father Maurer

COVID-19 vaccine documents

The Washington State Catholic Conference, Catholic Charities and Catholic Health Care

Support COVID-19 Vaccinations, Washington State Catholic Conference, December 12, 2020

<https://www.wacatholics.org/stay-informed/wsccl-charities-catholic-health-care-support-covid-19-vaccinations>

Moral Considerations Regarding the New COVID-19 Vaccines, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, December 11, 2020 <https://www.usccb.org/resources/moral-considerations-regarding-new-covid-19-vaccines>

Note on the morality of using some anti-Covid-19 vaccines, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, December 21, 2020 http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20201221_nota-vaccini-anticovid_en.html