

PASTORAL LETTER
Is it Moral to Accept Current Covid – 19 Vaccinations?

Dear Sisters and Brothers

One of the great things about current debates on Covid – 19 vaccinations has been Catholics expressing concern about the morality of receiving an injection. It is good that so many are looking at the issue from the perspective of faith.

As we know, views differ sincerely and strongly. For many it is a matter of conscience. My exclusive focus in this Letter is the moral dimension. I do not intend to comment upon any other issues directly or indirectly.

My concern

I am concerned that many Catholics seem unclear about what actually is Catholic teaching as it relates to currently available anti-Covid – 19 vaccines. Some believe that they need to give up their employment if vaccination is required.

This can be a traumatic decision that is not required according to traditional Catholic teaching. My hope is that what follows will be helpful and that all Catholics will understand it to share Catholic moral teaching with others.

The Fifth Commandment

The moral dimension relates to the application of the Fifth Commandment – ***You shall not kill*** - to anti-Covid vaccines. It relates to God’s teachings about the protection of human life from conception to natural death in the Law of the Old Testament. It forbids also the deliberate killing of another human being, born or unborn.

Current vaccines available in Australia were developed from stem cells grown in laboratories. Experts in the field tell us that these cell lines were hundreds of generations from the cells of two embryos aborted four and five decades ago.

The Fifth Commandment requires the protection of human life

Traditional Catholic teaching is that life and physical health are gifts entrusted to us by God and that we must recognise ‘the needs of others and of the common good’ of society ¹

Many Catholics have accepted Covid – 19 injections because of their conscience obligation to protect their own lives and those of others, especially the more vulnerable in families and society.

The Fifth Commandment forbids the deliberate killing of human life

Human life begins at conception. *Someone’s* life begins. It is a *person* who is conceived, not just a group of cells.

Abortion first of all is the deliberate killing of a person during his or her earliest stages of human development. It is a grave violation and a crime against the Fifth Commandment.

Second, a person breaks this Commandment if they cooperate materially with the abortion of an unborn child. This includes anyone assisting or a parent or spouse pressuring the mother to have her unborn child aborted.

It was morally wrong, therefore, that the embryos whose stem cells were used to generate laboratory stem cells over the decades since were aborted. This was a crime according to the law of God. The same is true for anyone who assisted materially in their deaths.

¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church 2288

Anti-Covid 19 – vaccines

As the embryonic human persons whose stem cells were used to general laboratory stem cells were aborted decades ago, they were not killed to develop Covid – 19 vaccines. Nor was there any material cooperation.

This is why it is morally acceptable to receive a current Covid – 19 vaccine injection for the protection of one's health. No other option is yet available, though hopefully one developed with a different technology will become available soon. Then it will be morally preferably to receive injections from this vaccine.

Other moral concerns

Some Catholics are concerned that the currently available vaccines use laboratory stem cells generated ultimately from the remains of aborted human beings. The Fifth Commandment requires that the 'bodies of the dead must be treated with respect and love'.²

Traditional Catholic teaching is that saving life must be the priority when no alternatives are available. It is acceptable morally, therefore, to take from the dead to save the living. This is why transplanting organs from the dead for the health of the living, for example, is morally acceptable.

Pope Francis

To guide his disciples in such situations as we face at present, Jesus instituted the Office of Peter. Through this office, *the Risen Jesus*, through the Holy Spirit, would guide his Church.³

The terms 'to bind' and 'to loose' were terms in Jesus' time that included teaching authority.

Pope Francis, the current Successor of St Peter to this Office, has made Catholic teaching clear on many occasions. I encourage Catholics to Google the Vatican Statement: 'Note on the Morality of using some anti-Covid – 19 vaccines'.

I urge those who do not accept traditional Catholic teaching on Covid vaccines to pray for faith in the promise of Jesus about this office and to accept the guidance of the Vicar of Christ in the Church.

Conclusion

In conclusion, traditional Catholic moral teaching is that current Covid – 19 vaccines are morally permissible – though, if other vaccines developed from stem cells not generated from embryos will be morally preferable when they become available.

Let us pray that divisions over Covid vaccines will not divide our parish communities. Let us remember that Jesus said his followers will be known by their love for one another.⁴

St Paul reminded us that we need to take on the mind of Christ who surrendered his divine rights during his mission in the world.⁵ He stressed further that Christian love does not insist on its own way.⁶

Let us pray that the Lord will lead our medical scientists to conquer this virus which has killed millions and caused so much suffering to many more.

Most Rev Gerard J Holohan

Bishop of Bunbury

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² Catechism of the Catholic Church 2300

³ Matthew 16:18

⁴ John 13:35

⁵ Philippians 2:6-8

⁶ 1 Corinthians 13:5