

## COVID-19, VACCINATION AND THE CHURCH

There has been considerable excitement recently because of the news of good progress in the production and testing of vaccines to protect against COVID-19. The excitement is perfectly understandable because of the worldwide spread of the virus and the illnesses and deaths, which have resulted. COVID-19 is a threat throughout the world and we need a worldwide solution.

There are certain moral issues, which apply around vaccines and vaccination. As far as vaccination itself is concerned the Catholic Church “strongly supports vaccination and regards Catholics as having a *prima facie* (*all other things being equal*) duty to be vaccinated, not only for the sake of their own health but also out of solidarity with others, especially the most vulnerable.” (1)

A further moral issue is raised by how the vaccines are produced. There are some of the COVID-19 vaccines which are entirely uncontroversial. But some others may have involved the use of cell lines which were originally developed from abortions performed over 50 years ago. We have a moral duty to object if new cell lines from new abortions are being used today. However, our bishops have received the assurance of the Department of Health and Social Care that “no new human foetal tissue will be used in making the (COVID) vaccine ...” (2)

However, some of the researchers producing COVID vaccines may have used old cell lines. Despite reassurances, this offers us a possible moral dilemma. In accepting such a vaccine would we be condoning the original abortion? In a document published in 2017 the Pontifical Academy for Life said 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.” (3) But, in the end, it is a matter of prudent judgement of conscience.

In brief: we all have a duty to protect ourselves and others, especially against dangers as great as COVID-19. Many of the vaccines have been produced with no morally objectionable methods. Those that do, can still be accepted with a clear conscience because of the remoteness of the connection with an abortion many years ago. It is not yet clear if we will have any choice about which vaccine we will offered but “whilst many may in good conscience judge that they will accept such a vaccine, some may in good conscience judge that they will not. If the choice is made not to receive this vaccination, then the person must make other provision to mitigate the risk of harm to the life and health of others and to his or her own life and health.”(cbcew, September 2020)

(1)&(2) Bishops' Conference of England and Wales: August 2020  
<https://www.cbcew.org.uk/home/our-work/health-social-care/the-catholic-position-on-vaccination/>

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

A further document from the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales was published on 25 September 2020  
<https://www.cbcew.org.uk/home/our-work/health-social-care/coronavirus-guidelines/covid-19-and-vaccination/>