



Statement of Most Reverend Peter Baldacchino *Bishop of the Diocese of Las Cruces*

Moral Permissibility of COVID-19 Vaccines Recently Approved for Emergency Use

The State of New Mexico has begun to provide the first doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, beginning with healthcare workers.

Some individuals and groups are publicly asserting that if the vaccine is connected in any way with tainted cell lines then it is immoral to be vaccinated with it. This is an inaccurate presentation of Catholic moral doctrine and I offer some clarifications regarding the moral permissibility of using the COVID-19 vaccines developed by Pfizer and Moderna.

Neither the Pfizer or the Moderna vaccine involved the use of cell lines that originated in tissue taken from the body of an aborted baby at any level of design, development or production. However, these vaccines are not completely free from any connection to abortion, as both 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 and should not be the basis for refusing to receive the vaccine.

A third possible vaccine, under development by AstraZeneca, is morally concerning because of its origins. However, according to Catholic moral teaching it is also acceptable to receive it for the sake of our own health and the health of others if it is the only vaccine available in a given place.

It is morally permissible to receive the COVID-19 vaccines which are expected to be available for distribution in New Mexico. Please understand that the Catholic Church is not endorsing any particular vaccine but is confirming that there is no moral reason to avoid being vaccinated through the use of the available, or soon to be available, vaccines for the virus.

The Pontifical Academy for Life, an advisory body to the Holy See, issued a joint statement with two Italian organizations in 2017 highlighting the urgent need for people to accept vaccination to protect the health of others who would benefit from “herd immunity,” that is, enough people have protection — either from previous infection or from vaccination — that it is unlikely a virus or bacteria can spread and cause disease. As a result, everyone within the community would be protected even if some people don’t have any protection themselves.

Beyond the issue of the cell lines used for development of COVID-19 vaccines, other significant factors to consider in making a decision include one’s own health needs and underlying conditions, one’s responsibility for the health of others, and relevant requirements in one’s line of work.

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