



MEMORANDUM

TO: BISHOPS OF THE U.S.C.C.B.

FROM: MOST REVEREND KEVIN C. RHOADES
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CHAIRMAN, COMMITTEE ON DOCTRINE

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SUBJECT: VACCINES FOR COVID-19

DATE: 23 NOVEMBER 2020

There appears to be some confusion in the media regarding the moral permissibility of using the vaccines for COVID-19 developed by Pfizer Inc. and Moderna. We would like to offer some clarifications.

Neither the Pfizer nor the Moderna vaccine involved the use of cell lines that originated in fetal tissue taken from the body of an aborted baby at any level of design, development, or production.¹ They are not completely free from any connection to abortion, however, as both Pfizer and Moderna 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.

Some are asserting that if a vaccine is connected in any way with tainted cell lines then it is immoral to be vaccinated with them. This is an inaccurate portrayal of Catholic moral teaching.

There are three documents from the Holy See that treat the question of tainted vaccines: 1) the 2005 study by the Pontifical Academy for Life, "Moral Reflections on Vaccines Prepared from Cells Derived from Aborted Human Foetuses"; 2) paragraphs nos. 34-35 in the 2008 Instruction on Certain Bioethical Questions (*Dignitatis Personae*) by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith; 3) the 2017 Note on Italian Vaccine Issue, by the Pontifical Academy for Life.

These documents all point to the immorality of using tissue taken from an aborted child for creating cell lines. They also make distinctions in terms of the moral responsibility of the various actors involved, from those involved in designing and producing a vaccine to those receiving the vaccine. Most importantly, they all make it clear that, at the level of the recipient, it is morally permissible to accept vaccination when there are no alternatives and there is a serious risk to health.

¹ See the chart provided by the Charlotte Lozier Institute: [COVID-19-Vaccine-Candidates-and-Abortion-Derived-Cell-Lines.pdf](https://www.lozierinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/COVID-19-Vaccine-Candidates-and-Abortion-Derived-Cell-Lines.pdf) ([pcdn.co](https://www.pcdn.co)).

The Pontifical Academy for Life gives as an example the case of rubella (German measles): "We find, in such a case, a *proportional reason*, in order to accept the use of these vaccines in the presence of the danger of favouring the spread of the pathological agent, due to the lack of vaccination of children. This is particularly true in the case of vaccination against German measles."²

The Pontifical Academy does call for appropriate expressions of protest against the origins of these vaccines as well as for vigorous efforts to promote the creation of alternatives. "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." The Pontifical Academy adds, however, that public health must not be sacrificed. "The burden of this important battle cannot and must not fall on innocent children and on the health situation of the population."

² Pontifical Academy for Life, "Moral Reflections on Vaccines," (9 June 2005) in *National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* 6:3 (2006): 541-49, especially n. 16.