



ARCHDIOCESE FOR THE MILITARY SERVICES, USA
The Most Reverend Timothy P. Broglio

Statement

on Coronavirus Vaccines and the Sanctity of Conscience

Earlier this year, I affirmed that the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA (AMS), clearly encourages the faithful entrusted to her care to follow the guidance of the Holy See and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) with regard to COVID-19 vaccines.¹

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which is the Church's highest doctrinal authority, speaking for the Bishop of Rome, has made clear its position on the vaccines available to mitigate the Coronavirus pandemic. The USCCB Committees on Doctrine and on Pro-Life Activities have stated that it is morally permissible to receive the COVID-19 vaccinations currently available in the United States.²

On 24 August 2021, the Secretary of Defense issued a memorandum directing the mandatory vaccination of all services members against COVID-19. Since then, some service members have refused to take the vaccine and have requested a religious accommodation through the Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

This circumstance raises the question of whether the vaccine's moral permissibility precludes an individual from forming a sincerely held religious belief that receiving the vaccine would violate his conscience. It does not.

The Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines were tested using an abortion-derived cell line. That type of a link has been for centuries considered remote material cooperation with evil and is never sinful. The Johnson & Johnson vaccine was developed, tested, and is produced, with abortion-derived cell lines. That vaccine is, therefore, more problematic. If it were the only vaccine available, it would be morally permissible, but the faithful Catholic is to make known his or her preference for a more morally acceptable treatment.

1 Timothy P. Broglio, [Statement on Coronavirus Vaccines](#), 14 March 2021.

2 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Committees on Doctrine and Pro-Life Activities, [Moral Considerations Regarding the New COVID-19 Vaccines](#) (December 11, 2020).

<https://files.milarch.org/archbishop/bishops-statement-on-moral-concerns-of-covid-vaccine.pdf>

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith examined these moral concerns and judged that receiving these vaccines “does not constitute formal cooperation with the abortion,” and is therefore not sinful.³

Notwithstanding the moral permissibility of these vaccines, the Church treasures her teaching on the sanctity of conscience. “Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, Whose voice echoes in his depths.”⁴ St. Paul VI wrote:

In all his activity a man is *bound* to follow his conscience in order that he may come to God, the end and purpose of life. It follows that *he is not to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his conscience*. Nor, on the other hand, is he to be restrained from acting in accordance with his conscience, especially in matters religious.⁵

Accordingly, no one should be forced to receive a COVID-19 vaccine if it would violate the sanctity of his or her conscience.

Individuals possess the “civil right not to be hindered in leading their lives in accordance with their consciences.”⁶ Even if an individual’s decision seems erroneous or inconsistent to others, conscience does not lose its dignity. This belief permeates Catholic moral theology as well as First Amendment jurisprudence. As stated by the United States Supreme Court, “[R]eligious beliefs need not be acceptable, logical, consistent, or comprehensible to others in order to merit First Amendment protection.”⁷

The denial of religious accommodations, or punitive or adverse personnel actions taken against those who raise earnest, conscience-based objections, would be contrary to federal law and morally reprehensible.

Those who refuse the COVID-19 vaccine must continue to act in charity for their neighbors and for the common good by undertaking means to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 through wearing face coverings, social distancing, undergoing routine testing, quarantining, and remaining open to receiving a treatment should one become available that is not derived from, or tested with abortion-derived cell lines.

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12 October 2021

3 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, [Note on the Morality of Using Some Anti-Covid-19 Vaccines](#), no. 2.

4 Saint Paul VI, [Gaudium et Spes](#), no. 16.

5 Saint Paul VI, [Dignitatis Humanae](#), no. 3.

6 Saint Paul VI, [Dignitatis Humanae](#), no. 13.

7 *Thomas v. Review Bd. of Indiana*, 450 U.S. 707, 714 (1981).