

Some Notes re. Covid-19 Vaccinations

1. Some of the vaccines against Covid-19 have used cell lines from aborted fetuses in their research and production process. Addressing the ethical issues this raises, the 'Note on the morality of using some anti-Covid-19 vaccines', [henceforth 'the Note'] published by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on 21st December 2020, makes use of a traditional distinction in moral theology between *formal cooperation* in evil and *material cooperation* in evil.
2. *Formal cooperation* is where one externally agrees with the evil action of another and at the same time internally consents to it. This kind of cooperation is always sinful.
3. *Material cooperation* means one externally agrees with the evil action of another without internally consenting to it.
4. When speaking of material cooperation, a further distinction is made between whether it be *proximate* or *remote* cooperation, depending on how close the cooperation is with the evil action.
5. In the kind of world in which we live it is not always possible to escape some material cooperation in the evil actions of others in order to avoid still greater evils.
6. Following from the above, the Note states that there are differing degrees of responsibility in cooperation in evil; in particular the responsibility of organisations in deciding to make use of cell lines from an aborted foetus is not the same as the responsibility of those who have no voice in such a decision.¹
7. The Note then clearly states that it is morally acceptable to receive Covid-19 vaccines which have used cell lines from aborted fetuses in their research and production process, provided Covid-19 vaccines which raise no such ethical problems are unavailable.²
8. The reason why this is morally permissible is because of the remoteness of the material cooperation from the abortion itself of those utilising the cell lines from the aborted foetus to develop vaccines. They took no direct or active part in the abortion. Furthermore, they are acting in a situation of grave danger to the common good posed by the present pandemic.
9. The Note makes clear that provided the vaccines are clinically safe and effective they 'can be used in good conscience with *the certain knowledge that the use of such vaccines does not constitute formal cooperation with the abortion* from which the cells used in production of the vaccine derive.'³
10. However such use does not mean approval of abortion. The onus is on pharmaceutical companies to produce vaccines which do not cause ethical dilemmas for those providing or receiving them.
11. With regard to the common good, to avoid being vaccinated is itself a serious moral issue, given the dangerous and grave consequences this will have for those who are most vulnerable and at risk in our society.⁴

¹ Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, [henceforth CDF] Instruction *Dignitas Personae*, 8th December 2008, n.35; AAS (100), 884.

² Cf. CDF, *Note on the morality of using some anti-Covid 19 vaccines*, Rome, 21st December 2020, No 2.

³ Cf. *Ibid* No 3.

⁴ Statement by Bishop Paul Mason and Bishop John Sherrington, August 11th 2020, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.