

DIOCESE OF GALLUP

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A Pastoral Response Concerning Conscientious Objection and Vaccinations

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As the world continues to experience the effects of the COVID-19 virus, I have received several inquiries about the obligation one has concerning the available vaccinations. It is my hope that the following information will help the faithful in the Diocese of Gallup to better understand this complex subject and give guidance on how to approach the issue.

The vaccines available in the United States can be taken with a clear conscience. This has been the consistent guidance given to the Church from the Holy See and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). There are, however, a significant number of people who have not received it and do not want to receive it because of reasons of conscience. One of the main objections to vaccination against the COVID-19 virus is the fact that the manufacturers used cells, in the past, taken from aborted fetuses in research, and, in some cases, in development of the vaccines. Both the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) and the Pontifical Academy for Life have clarified 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"*. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith further clarified in its *"Note on the morality of using some anti-COVID-19 vaccines"* that when *"health authorities do not allow citizens to choose the vaccine with which to be inoculated, it is morally acceptable to receive COVID-19 vaccines that have used cell lines from aborted fetuses in their research and production process."* (n.2)¹

The vaccine is morally acceptable because the collaboration in the evil of abortion (passive material cooperation) is remote. *Remote* cooperation means to do something that is connected in some way to an evil but does not imply willing the evil and is not necessary to the evil itself. An example could be a janitor of a hospital which provides abortion procedures along with routine surgical care. He is opposed to abortion and hates, in fact, what is going on there but is required by his job to clean the operating room before or after the abortion. He could find another job and should, if that is available, but that may not be possible and to support his family is an important reason to keep the job. In such a case, he can continue to do his job with a good conscience, his cooperation is material

¹ *Neither Pfizer nor Moderna used an abortion-derived cell line in the development or production of the vaccine. However, such a cell line was used to test the efficacy of both vaccines. Thus, while neither vaccine is completely free from any use of abortion-derived cell lines, in these two cases the use is very remote from the initial evil of the abortion. The AstraZeneca and Janssen vaccines raise additional moral concerns because an abortion-derived cell line is used not only for testing, but also in development and production"*. (USCCB, Secretariate of Pro Life Activities, January 2021) The Johnson and Johnson vaccine appears to have used fetal cells in the development and production as well: *"Johnson & Johnson used a human fetal cell line called PER.C6, developed from the retinal cells of an 18-week-old fetus aborted in 1985 in its production and manufacturing stages."* (Reuters Fact Check, April 1, 2021.) The clarification of the CDF implies that any of these vaccines can be received, with a clear conscience, **but, if given the choice**, until a vaccine is produced completely free of "tainted cells", it is preferable to take the Moderna or Pfizer vaccine.

and remote from the evil of abortion. This is very different from a person working on the abortion itself, and whose cooperation is necessary for the abortion to take place. This is what is called *formal* cooperation. The formal cooperation need not be the doctor performing the procedure, but could be a scrub nurse assisting, the family member who insisted the woman go through with the abortion or anyone else directly and formally involved making the abortion possible by their cooperation.

There is no formal or proximate cooperation with abortion involved by taking the vaccine - and there is a serious reason to take it. The grave danger (especially for some) that COVID-19 entails certainly justifies this passive material cooperation. It should be pointed out, however, that the inverse is not true; that is, if the cooperation were formal or proximate, no amount of danger would justify such cooperation in evil. Therefore, regardless of the remoteness, aborted fetuses should not be used in the elaboration or the testing of these vaccines. It is to be hoped that soon there will be available effective vaccines, untainted by the use of aborted fetus cells in their research and development. At the moment, this is not the case. For this reason, the remoteness of the material cooperation and because of the benefit to the common good, the Church has encouraged all eligible to receive the vaccines available.

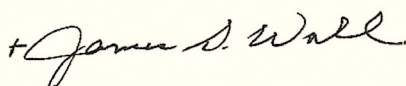
There are those who have reasoned and concluded that the evil of abortion is so grave that even this remote, material and passive cooperation is too much and in conscience feel that they cannot take the vaccine. There may be other reasons a person may conclude that they cannot in conscience receive it. The Church clearly teaches that one must always follow one's conscience that has been sincerely reasoned and formed, even if, for no fault of their own, that conscience is erroneous. We have a grave obligation to carefully form our conscience according to the Teaching of the Church and the Scriptures and, once formed, to follow it because it is for each one, as St. John Henry Newman put it: "the aboriginal Vicar of Christ".

The CDF also stated in its same note: "*vaccination is not, as a rule, a moral obligation and that, therefore, it must be voluntary.*" The State should not therefore universally mandate the vaccine without allowing for conscientious objection.

Finally, the CDF reminds us that vaccination is not only for our own health but forms a part in our concern for others: "*In any case, from the ethical point of view, the morality of vaccination depends not only on the duty to protect one's own health but also on the duty to pursue the common good.*" If a person should decide in conscience not to take the vaccine, there is a moral requirement to take the necessary steps to protect themselves and others from contracting the virus. There may be social or economic consequences for the decision that the person must be willing to accept such as work and travel restrictions.

Let us continue to pray for and support one another during the pandemic. May Our Lady wrap us in her mantle of protection.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "James S. Wall". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a small cross-like mark at the beginning.

+James S. Wall
Bishop of Gallup