



Office of the Bishop

Diocese of Brownsville

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To the Catholic Faithful in the Diocese of Brownsville,

News of plans in the State of Texas for the distribution of effective vaccines against the deadly COVID-19 virus is a source of hope and encouragement. It is important, however, for all of us in the Rio Grande Valley to continue to be vigilant in observing health safety protocols urged by public health officials. We can expect that it will be a considerable time before the vaccines will have a positive effect on the vulnerability of the general population. Our churches and schools in particular must continue to observe the strict protocols in place for the celebration of Mass and the other Sacraments, and for classroom instruction until such time as they are modified by the bishop.

I particularly want to assure Catholics that it is morally permissible for us to make use of the various vaccines when they become available. Some have suggested that the vaccines currently being prepared for orderly distribution are all morally tainted because of their association with cells derived from aborted children, and thus a Catholic may not receive them. This is an inaccurate appraisal.

It is important to note that neither the Pfizer nor the Moderna vaccines, which are now being prepared for distribution, used aborted fetal cells in the development or production of their vaccines. Early lab testing, though, seems to have involved use of a tainted cell line. Church teaching traditionally distinguishes between proximate, mediate and remote participation in an evil. The early testing regime is considered a remote association to the tainted lines. Given the seriousness of the evil posed by the virus, and the common good protected by use of an effective vaccine, the remote association to tainted cell lines during the testing regime does not constitute a sufficient reason to object to the moral permissibility of the vaccine.

The AstraZeneca vaccine, (and perhaps others that will follow) involves more direct use of cell lines tainted with immorally derived human tissue in the design, development and production stages. At the level of the recipient of the vaccine, cooperation with original immorally obtained cells is remote. It is morally permissible to accept vaccination from a morally objectionable cell line when there are no accessible alternatives and when there is a serious risk to public health. Clearly, the evil posed by the COVID-19 virus is a serious threat to public health. If one had a viable option otherwise, it would be better not to use

such compromised vaccines; however, it seems unlikely that the general public will have many options available to them. *

The Catholic Church rightly and strenuously objects to any research and pharmaceutical use of cells derived from the abortion of unborn children. And Catholics should be aware of the danger of moral complacency in our society in the face of such research regimes. We cannot build a healthier world on cells derived from aborted children. No reasonable public policy wants an industry that profits from and creates a demand for aborted fetal cells. As Catholics we continue to urge the observance of the highest ethical and moral standards in all fields of medical research.

Finally, as civil authorities make plans for distribution of the vaccines, they rightly consider the priority of the populations most vulnerable to the virus, including the elderly, health care workers, and those who work daily to keep health care institutions as safe and disinfected as possible. We should also find ways, at the appropriate time, to make the vaccines as accessible as possible to the poor, and to the isolated in our communities.

Let us commend the sick and the vulnerable to the maternal care of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, and to her Son, the Savior, God made flesh, whose birth we soon celebrate.

Yours in Christ,



Most Rev. Daniel E. Flores, S.T.D.
Bishop of Brownsville

* For more information about the moral evaluation of vaccine production, see the following documents:

USCCB joint statement of the Committee on Pro-Life Activities and the Committee on Doctrine, addressing moral concerns about the creation of a vaccine for COVID-19. (11 December 2020) ([Link](#))

Committee of Doctrine and the Committee for Pro-Life Activities clarification on the moral permissibility for taking newly developed vaccines for the treatment of COVID-19. (20 November 2020) ([Link](#))

2017 Note on Italian Vaccine Issue, by the Pontifical Academy for Life. ([Link](#))

Paragraphs nos. 34-35 in the 2008 Instruction on Certain Bioethical Questions (Dignitatis Personae) by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. ([Link](#))

2005 study by the Pontifical Academy for Life, "Moral Reflections on Vaccines Prepared from Cells Derived from Aborted Human Fetuses." ([Link](#))