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PASTORAL STATEMENT

Dear Parishioners

From next Monday, a vaccine against COVID-19 will become available to people over 70 years of age. Prior to this, a vaccine has been available to those who help prevent or treat the spread of the virus. Currently there is the AstraZeneca vaccine and the Pfizer vaccine.

I have been asked by a number of people about the morality of being vaccinated with a vaccine which was developed with the use of stem cell lines derived from one of two embryos aborted in 1973 or 1985 (dates vary slightly in different scientific articles). This question has been asked in relation to other vaccines developed over the decades for other diseases. They include chicken pox, shingles, rubella, hepatitis A and rabies.

I offer the following, which tries to blend Catholic teachings with scientific information to which the teachings relate. It seems the best way to respond to concerns expressed to me.

Official Catholic teaching statements

Official Church statements have been issued in the pontificates of Popes St John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis. The most relevant of these in relation to anti-COVID 19 vaccines are

- *Instruction Dignitas Personae (Dignity of the Person): On Certain Bioethical Questions, CDF 2008*
- *Note on the Morality of using Some Anti-Covid-19 Vaccines, December 21, 2020.*

What are the basic teachings?

In short, official Catholic teachings in the latter document are that

- 'cell lines from aborted fetuses in their research and production is morally acceptable'. (Cell lines are not foetal tissue. Indeed, they are replicated cells thousands of generations removed from the original foetal tissue. Cell lines are used at the start of the vaccine development process and then removed. No foetal material is used in the process: nor are the cells injected into a person, having been removed before the completion of the vaccine).
- 'All vaccines recognised as clinically safe and effective 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 derive (The abortions which killed the two new human lives occurred at least 35 years ago: no one today cooperated directly or indirectly with these evil acts).
- Use of these vaccines does not in itself constitute a legitimisation, even indirect, of the practice of abortion.
- People are required morally to protect their health and the common good.

So Catholics can in good conscience receive one of the COVID-19 vaccines. All are encouraged to do so as the Fifth Commandment requires taking all reasonable means in this pandemic to protect and preserve human life, our own and the lives of others.

Social media

We all know at this stage that anyone can post an opinion or claim to be fact on social media. 'Fake media' is now a well-accepted term.

It is important for Catholics to differentiate official Catholic teaching authorised by the last three Popes from other opinions.

No abortions have been committed to obtain anti-COVID-19 vaccines: the capacity of cell lines to replicate endlessly means that there would be no purpose in performing further abortions for vaccine development purposes. Also, no foetal material is ever used for the development of vaccines. It is cell lines that are needed.

Further reading

In addition to the two official Vatican documents mentioned above, two easily accessible articles are

Vatican news: Vatican CDF says use of anti-Covid vaccines 'morally acceptable'
GPs can: Does the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine contain aborted foetal cells?

God bless

Bishop Gerard Holohan
Bishop of Bunbury

18th March 2021