

Ethical Questions Surrounding the COVID-19 Vaccine

Fr. Roger J. Landry
Catholic NYC
Archdiocese of New York
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Overview

- Many questions concerning the ethics of receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, especially with regard to those vaccines that involve some use of cell lines from fetuses previously aborted.
- The principles of Church teaching on vaccines have been clear for many years.
- What is confusing is that there are some voices, including otherwise authoritative and respectful voices, who do not accept Church teaching and use their office to promote different conclusions.



The Questions to be Answered

- We will tackle four questions:
 - What are the principles of the Church with regard to receiving vaccines that in their development, production or testing have involved cell lines derived from aborted fetuses?
 - Is it ethical to receive the Pfizer, Moderna or Johnson & Johnson vaccines?
 - Is there a moral obligation to receive a COVID-19 vaccination?
 - Is it moral to require COVID-19 vaccinations?



Cooperation in Evil

- Cooperation in evil
 - One's involvement in another's wrongdoing by an act that is distinct from the other's wrongdoing.
 - There is *formal cooperation* when one concurs in the bad will of the other; this is sinful
 - There is *material cooperation* when one concurs only in the bad action of the other, apart from the other's intention. Material cooperation is licit when the action is good or indifferent in itself; and when one has a reason for doing it that is both just and proportioned to the gravity of the other's sin and to the closeness of the assistance which is thereby given to the carrying out of that sin.



Cooperation in Evil

- Material cooperation in another's evil can be licit:
 - *When the action is good or indifferent in itself* – it cannot be sinful
 - *When one has a reason for doing it that is*
 - *Just* – The reason must be morally acceptable in itself
 - *Proportionate to the gravity of the other's sin* – the reason for cooperating must be substantially grave in comparison to the seriousness of the sin committed by the other.
 - *Proportioned to the closeness of the assistance that is given to the carrying out of that sin* – if the sin could not be carried out except through one's cooperation in it, the reasons must be proportionately graver to justify the material cooperation.



Cooperation in Evil

- Thus, provided that the action of the cooperator is not in itself sinful and provided that one's reasons for cooperating in the act are proportionately grave with regard to the other's sin and the level of one's assistance to that sin, one can licitly cooperate materially in another's sinful act.
- With regard to COVID-19 vaccines that involve aborted cell lines:
 - The action of taking a vaccine is in general good and at least indifferent
 - There is a just reason: to protect one's own and others' health
 - The assistance given to the original abortion by a vaccine taker today is nil. There is also little evidence that it will promote other illicit cell lines.
 - Is it proportionate to the gravity of the sin of abortion? Is saving life proportionate to taking it?



Principles

- It is wrong to create abortion-derived cell lines and for pharmaceutical companies to use them.
- The use of vaccines produced with such cell lines should be avoided if comparable alternatives with no connection to abortion are available.
- Grave reasons (serious health danger) may justify the use of vaccines produced with these cell lines when there are no such alternatives.
- If it is possible to choose among a number of equally safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines, the vaccine with the least connection to abortion-derived cell lines should be chosen. Vaccines that use such cell lines only for testing would be preferable to those that use such cell lines for production.



Principles

- But such choices may not be possible. In that case, one may receive any of the clinically recommended vaccines in good conscience with the assurance that reception of such vaccines does not involve immoral cooperation in abortion.
- It should be emphasized that the morally licit use of these types of vaccines, in the particular conditions that make it so, does not in itself constitute a legitimation, even indirect, of the practice of abortion
- Everyone concerned for the sanctity of life should protest the use of these cell lines and advocate for the development of vaccines with no connection to abortion.



The Liceity of Covid-19 Vaccines

- So under present circumstances, because of the seriousness of COVID-19, both the Vatican and the US Bishops have been clear that it is possible to receive Pfizer, Modern and J&J vaccines, with preference given to the first two where possible.
- This does not constitute formal or proximate material cooperation in the abortions that led to the cell lines that were involved in some part in their development or testing.
- There remains, however, a duty to try to push for ethically untainted vaccines. Some are presently being developed.



Some Challenges

- Bishop Joseph Strickland, Tyler, TX
 - “As your shepherd, I cannot in good conscience receive a vaccine that has been produced using an aborted child. There are ethical vaccines in development which are worth waiting for.”
 - “Too many have accepted the exploitation of aborted children. I urge you to reject any vaccine that uses the remains of aborted children in research, testing, development, or production. Testify to the truth that abortion must be rejected and make a choice that is consistent with the dignity of every human life from conception to natural death and is rooted in a mature faith and trust in eternal life, not fear of suffering in this life.”



Some Challenges

- Bishop Athanasius Schneider, Astana, Kazakhstan
- “In the case of vaccines made from the cell lines of aborted human fetuses, we see a clear contradiction between the Catholic doctrine to categorically, and beyond the shadow of any doubt, reject abortion in all cases as a grave moral evil that cries out to heaven for vengeance, and the practice of regarding vaccines derived from aborted fetal cell lines as morally acceptable in exceptional cases of ‘urgent need’ – on the grounds of remote, passive, material cooperation. To argue that such vaccines can be morally licit if there is no alternative is in itself contradictory and cannot be acceptable for Catholics.”



Some Challenges

- Bishop Athanasius Schneider, Astana, Kazakhstan
- “The theological principle of *material cooperation* ... can hardly be applied to the case of vaccines made from fetal cell lines, because those who knowingly and voluntarily receive such vaccines enter into a kind of concatenation, albeit very remote, with the process of the abortion industry. The crime of abortion is so monstrous that any kind of concatenation with this crime, even a very remote one, is immoral and cannot be accepted under any circumstances by a Catholic once he has become fully aware of it. One who uses these vaccines must realize that his body is benefitting from the “fruits” (although steps removed through a series of chemical processes) of one of mankind’s greatest crimes.”



Is there a Moral Obligation?

- Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith:
 - Vaccination is not, as a rule, a moral obligation and that, therefore, it must be voluntary.
 - 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. In the absence of other means to stop or even prevent the epidemic, the common good may recommend vaccination, especially to protect the weakest and most exposed.
 - Those who, however, for reasons of conscience, refuse vaccines produced with cell lines from aborted fetuses, must do their utmost to avoid, by other prophylactic means and appropriate behavior, becoming vehicles for the transmission of the infectious agent. In particular, they must avoid any risk to the health of those who cannot be vaccinated for medical or other reasons, and who are the most vulnerable.





Is There a Moral Obligation?

- Pope Francis: “I believe that morally everyone must take the vaccine. It is the moral choice because it is about your life but also the lives of others.”
- US Bishops: “Receiving one of the COVID-19 vaccines ought to be understood as an act of charity toward the other members of our community. In this way, being vaccinated safely against COVID-19 should be considered an act of love of our neighbor and part of our moral responsibility for the common good.”
- “Vaccination may promote the ... protection of the weakest and most exposed through breaking the chain.”
- “Some individuals, though, may need to decline vaccines if they have a compromised immune system or an allergy to one of the ingredients.”

Can One Be Compelled?

- Governments should not compel citizens to accept COVID-19 vaccinations, but rather inform them of the benefits and risks while encouraging them to carefully decide for themselves.
- Such “universal mandates” are different from “local mandates” like an immunization required for services, employment in hospitals, schooling. A local can be acceptable, and not unduly coercive, because no one is compelled to seek employment in the field of healthcare or be educated in one specific school setting.



Is There a Moral Obligation?

- The difference between a “religious exemption” and a “conscientious objection” for Catholics.
- A religious exemption would apply if the teachings of the faith of the individual to be vaccinated held that vaccines in general were immoral and contrary to God’s will.
- A conscience exemption would apply to the situation in which an individual in conscience believed that it was immoral to be vaccinated, like if they were convinced that the risks of being inoculated outweighed the potential benefits or if they thought it was wrong have any material cooperation however remote with cell lines from abortions.





Welcome!

I warmly welcome you to this website, put together at the insistence and with the assistance of friends.

During my diaconal ordination, Cardinal Edmund Szoka gave me the following instruction from the Ordination Rite as together we gripped the Book of the Gospels:

*"Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you now are.
Believe what you read,
Teach what you believe,
Practice what you teach."*

Those words have never lost their resonance.

Since that day -- October 8, 1998 -- I have tried to live up to that commission to be a "herald of the Gospel," by striving to teach what the Church believes, to practice what I preach to others, and to spread with joy and enthusiasm the truth Christ has entrusted to His church -- in and out of season, in and out of the pulpit.

This website is a chronicle of those attempts. You may also follow postings of articles, homilies and teachings on Facebook, Twitter and Youtube.

You can also subscribe to the podcast of daily homilies, lectures and talks through Apple Podcasts and Google Podcasts.

It constitutes the "five loaves and two fish" (or even less!) that I have placed into the hands of the Lord as an attempt to feed a hungry crowd, confident that, if He wishes, He can multiply and supplement that meager offering to nourish many more (Jn 6:1-14).

In Christ,
Fr. Roger J. Landry



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Listening to and Acting on the Long Awaited One's Words, First Thursday of Advent, December 3, 2020

Going Hungry to Meet Christ in a Three-Fold Banquet, First Wednesday of Advent, December 2, 2020

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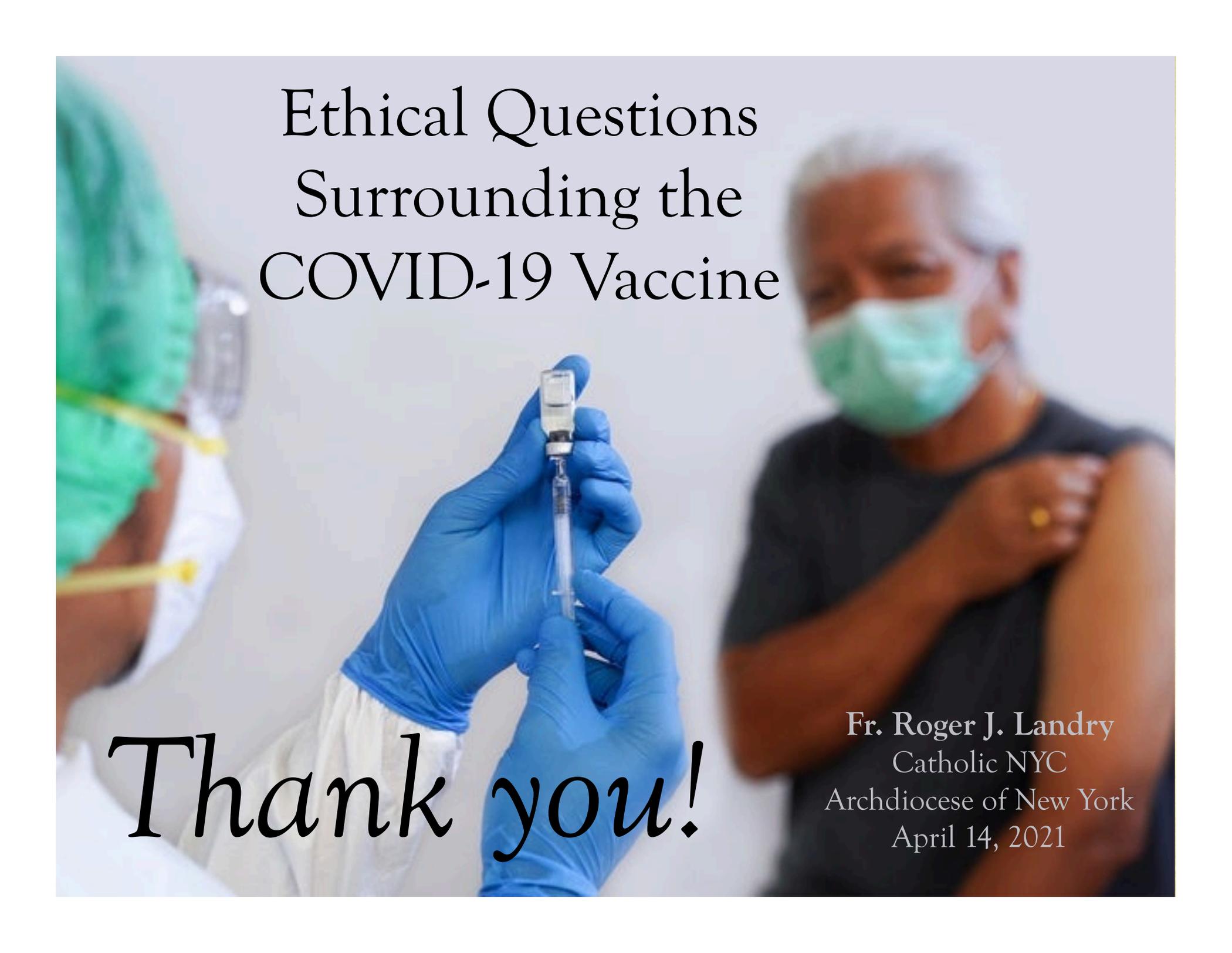
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Email: fatherlandry@catholicpreaching.com

YouTube: www.youtube.com/c/FrRogerLandry

Twitter: [@FrRogerLandry](https://twitter.com/FrRogerLandry)

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