



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

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Feast of St. Thérèse of Lisieux

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COVID-19 Vaccines & Mandates

Since the issue of vaccines remains timely and now that mandates seem to be more widespread, I want to address both issues and remind every Catholic what the Church teaches regarding both so that one's conscience can be properly formed and that a morally correct decision can be made by each person regarding vaccination.

One way to understand these issues is by the use of a few Questions.

Question #1: Is it morally acceptable for a Catholic to receive some COVID-19 vaccines?

Answer: YES. The reason being that with the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines there is sufficiently remote cooperation with evil. (cf. the December 2020 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith *Note on the Morality of using some anti-Covid 19 vaccines*, #1-4) However, the Church maintains that simply because this is morally permissible the person must be allowed the freedom to choose either to receive or not to receive the vaccine.

Question #2: Is a Catholic morally obligated to receive a COVID-19 vaccine?

Answer: NO. The vaccine is morally voluntary, that is, a Catholic is free in conscience to choose either to receive or not to receive the vaccine. However, a Catholic must make **Two Moral Considerations:** 1) To protect oneself; 2) To pursue the common good. Both of these considerations must be weighed carefully when discerning the choice to receive or not to receive the vaccine.

Because Question #2 is NO, a universal mandate is never morally permissible. A restricted mandate could be permissible in certain circumstances if a reasonable accommodation is available to a person who chooses not to receive a vaccine. For instance, a hospital or nursing home must also weigh the two moral considerations noted above and must do so in a context where the work, by its very nature, is with high risk and vulnerable persons.


Finally, the distinction between the two types of mandates is important. With a universal mandate (everyone must receive the vaccine), the conscientious and free choice of the individual noted above is violated. With a restricted mandate an individual is still free to make a conscientious choice not to receive the vaccine even if it is a requirement of employment. An employer needs to offer an alternative to vaccination which respects the consciences of employees and continues to serve the common good. To threaten one's

employment can be an act of coercion, and no one is morally bound to act under this condition.

Because **Answer #1 is YES**, it does call for an **exemption based on a conscientious objection** which is very legitimate and should be granted. For Catholics, one or the other of these statements would have to be answered in relation to the vaccine: "My Catholic faith forbids me to be vaccinated" or "My Catholic faith requires me to be vaccinated". Neither of these statements apply with regard to a COVID-19 vaccine. Thus, for a Catholic, that person's informed conscience must be followed, and that Catholic's conscience must be respected.

Since a Catholic is not morally forbidden from receiving or required to receive the two vaccines noted above, they still may weigh the ethical considerations and in good conscience choose to receive or choose not to receive the vaccine. In doing so, however, they are making that choice on the grounds of their own prudential judgment based on an informed and certain conscience.

Finally, to be clear, the Catholic Church does not issue exemptions, employers do this. Also, simply because the Catholic Church judges a vaccine morally permissible to receive, it cannot be concluded that the Catholic Church then requires a Catholic to receive that vaccine. The Catholic Church gives to Catholics its authoritative moral and social teaching. Knowing this teaching, every Catholic is obligated before God to form his or her conscience accordingly and then act. This is a human right every person possesses by the very fact of being a human being and this cannot be compromised by anyone.


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