

Q&A from “Is it Moral to Take the COVID-19 Vaccine?” Webinar February 13, 2021

Note: Responses in blue with (MM) are from Dr. Moschella.

Question from Dave 09:20 AM

Orthopedic Surgeon Sherri Tenpenny is being recorded in Social Media. Her, considered opinion discussions point out the potential lethal effect of manufactured ingredients, used in the vaccines Moderna and Pfizer manufacture and distribute, injected into the blood and muscle of recipients. This is a different ethical question than is being discussed. But, the reports of people dropping dead, including people who recently took the vaccine, raise this question to one, in my poor opinion.

- All vaccines have very small amounts of ingredients that could be harmful in large doses, but the trials indicate that only a tiny percentage of patients have serious reactions, usually serious allergic reactions. But these vaccines are no different from other common vaccines in that respect – all vaccines involve some risk of side effects. (MM)

Question from Francis 09:29 AM

Since the origin of HEK293 is unknown (a.k.a illicit), why not suspend its use entirely? After all, Aquinas cautions that in the presence of doubt, one should suspend action. Can't we as humans pave another path with more moral purity and discard these morally compromised cell lines?

Answered during webinar

Question from Francis 09:30 AM

Instead of "cooperation", we might think more about "appropriation" of the fruits of evil.

- Agreed. (MM)

Question from Dcn. John Cantirino 09:30 AM

Why does the fact that it happened in the past enter into the justification that it is acceptable?

- The fact that the evil happened in the past means that nothing we do now can change what happened. That doesn't mean that what happened is acceptable. It just means that our actions now can't possibly contribute to that evil, and therefore shouldn't actually be considered cooperation with evil, strictly speaking. However, as I noted, there are also moral concerns with benefiting from past evils. We should never ratify a past evil, and need to take care to avoid being desensitized to it. (MM)

Question from Dcn. John Cantirino 09:30 AM

Can something immorally gotten or stolen ever be rightly used by those receiving it?

- Yes. As long as your action is not creating further demand for a continuation of the immoral action, and it's not possible to restore the stolen goods to the rightful owners. For instance, much of the land we now use was originally obtained unjustly, but using that land now doesn't perpetuate that injustice, and it's impossible at this point to actually make restore the

land to descendants of the original rightful owners. (However, acknowledgement of the prior injustice and some form of restitution – even if only symbolic – is called for.) (MM)

Question from Dcn. John Cantirino 09:34 AM

Wouldn't proportionate reason depend upon the particular person's state of health? If one is young and in good health there is limited risk.

- Yes, in part. But even if one is not personally at high risk, if one is not vaccinated one may transmit the disease to others who *are* at high risk, and contribute in general to the spread of the disease among the population. (Indeed, those at low risk are probably more likely to have asymptomatic infections and therefore unwittingly spread the disease to many people; they are also more likely to be less cautious in their behavior and therefore pose a greater risk to others. In other words, vaccination is a duty not primarily for the sake of one's own, but for the sake of protecting the vulnerable and contributing to herd immunity. (MM)

Question from Boris Coto 09:37 AM

It is being mentioned that the use of the vaccine helps develop the herd immunity. Wouldn't a best way to develop that herd immunity the fact of allowing some level of gathering instead of a full isolation/lockdown?

- Isolation/lockdown will not enable us to develop herd immunity. It will simply make the disease spread more slowly among the population. And isolation/lockdown takes a terrible toll on society, leading to job loss, poverty, education loss for the young, skyrocketing rates of mental illness and suicidality (recent studies indicated that one in four young people considered suicide this past summer in the midst of the lockdowns), etc. Remaining in continual lockdown is not a viable option; the toll on human well-being would be enormous. (MM)

Question from Anonymous Attendee 09:37 AM

How can we say that the vaccine is for the common good if we cannot say with any sense of assurance that the vaccine in fact provides sterilizing immunity which prevents one from getting and transmitting the virus? That is, those who tell us that the vaccine is necessary are also telling us that we must continue to mask and continue to social distance because they do not know whether the vaccine prevents transmission.

- They are saying that we should continue to mask/distance out an "abundance of caution," as people now say... It will take more time before we can be sure that vaccinated people are unable to transmit the disease, but to the extent that vaccination prevents infection, it means that those who are vaccinated are extremely unlikely to be able to transmit the virus. (MM)

Question from Anonymous Attendee 09:42 AM

Assuming that the vaccine does not prevent transmission (which we must currently assume), if there is in fact a safe alternative which reduces symptoms and which successfully treats COVID-19 (e.g., Ivermectin with Vitamin C, Vitamin D and Zinc), why would we be morally permitted to use the vaccine?

Answered during webinar

Question from Anonymous Attendee 09:57 AM

What other tool do we Catholics have to oppose, if at a point in time we can be forced to take the vaccine by imposing things like a vaccination passport?

- One is still free not to be vaccinated, even if things like vaccination passports are adopted by companies. The adoption of such measures is actually not unreasonable, because if you are not vaccinated you pose a greater risk to others, particularly in situations of prolonged indoor exposure like air travel. (MM)

Question from Anonymous Attendee 09:58 AM

I am a prayer advocate at our state's only abortion facility, and it grieves me to think that I would be "one" with the abortion workers in being complicit in any phase of abortion. How can you appease this weight on my conscience? I appreciate Dr. Trasancos' helping me understand the possible scandal I feel in this.

Answered during webinar

Question from Anonymous Attendee 10:00 AM

Might the moral calculation in Dr. Moschella's reasoning be affected by growing evidence of an effective prophylaxis and treatment for Covid in the medication Ivermectin? This medication has a long-established safety profile, is inexpensive and is available orally so those at risk and patients are able to take at home.

Answer: Evidence of its efficacy for Covid started to be reported in international studies in the late spring, and, as of early winter, is starting to be studied and used in the US (See website flccc.net for more information on this medication).

Comment from Mary Anne Serra 10:03 AM

remember the term "abortion" in medical terminology is used for a miscarriage (spontaneous) or surgical/chemical.

- Right. This means that the testimony indicating that HEK 293 came from an aborted fetus is ambiguous. It might refer to an elective abortion (and most likely does), but it could also be referring to a spontaneous miscarriage. (MM)

Comment from michaelmahfood 10:06 AM

No question. Just a very good dissertation of your view. Thank you, Dr. Stacy for your explanation.

Question from Mama C 10:10 AM

What is the status of a 'moral vaccine'?

Question from Dr. Mary Anne Urlakis 10:10 AM

First, I'd like to thank Dr. Moschella for the excellent presentation. I do have a specific question regarding the concept of proportionate reason. Dr. Moschella, you mention that there is perhaps a duty to be vaccinated to ensure the common good. My question relates to that definition of the common good, and with the vast number of unknowns that exist with these vaccines- esp. the mRNA biologicals. My question relates to the concept of truly informed consent. For example, we now have evidence of a significant number (double digits) of stillbirths and miscarriages that are related in proximity to receiving the mRNA injection. Yet, in the US there continues to be a push to

vaccinate pregnant women. This particular instance is a dramatic inconsistency with decades of caution regarding the vulnerable population of pregnant women observed since the Belmont Report. Can we rightly make the statement that the common good is best achieved by mass vaccination when there are so many unknowns regarding these entities?

Answered during webinar

Question from William 10:10 AM

Are there any vaccines coming out that do not use fetal tissue?

Comment from sr.deirdrebyrne 10:10 AM

There is also a question about the safety of these vaccines...inflammatory response, since it is new. This is not a question but rather an insight.

- Right, all vaccines have risks. But the trials seem to indicate that the risks of these vaccines are low. Arguably the mRNA vaccines should have even lower risk than most other vaccines, since they do not actually contain any viral material. (MM)

Question from Tim Millea 10:11 AM

It is nearly impossible to find a medication of any class that has not been developed and/or produced without the use of abortion-derived cell lines. Is this a similarly remote cooperation with evil as with vaccines?

- Yes, taking almost any medication or availing yourself of modern medical knowledge means that you are at least indirectly appropriation the fruits of evil – i.e. benefiting from research done with cell lines derived from aborted fetal tissue, or from research that is even more directly problematic, like research on human embryos.

Question from Mariette Baxendale 10:11 AM

Is it fair to assume that the "popularity" of using fetal cells are due to stem cell potency or perhaps ease of access? Or both? I didn't see the efficacy of use of adult stem cells in vaccine research or even why the study at the University of Pittsburg didn't choose to use adult stem cells rather chose to use aborted fetal cells. What is the research out there using adult stem cells on Covid-19 vaccine research?

Answered during webinar

Question from Ken 10:11 AM

Dr. Moschella, while your discussion of scandal may hold true in an academic setting like this, I doubt seriously the average Catholic or average American will understand the distinction. Don't you think scandal will, realistically, still occur?

Answered during webinar

Question from William 10:11 AM

Can we get a list of companies that do NOT support Planned Parenthood, by industry? What bank should we use?

- The indirect contribution that one makes to Planned Parenthood by buying from companies that donate to them is negligible. I would, however, recommend avoiding investing in such companies to the extent possible. Ave Maria Mutual Funds is the only fund that does not

invest in any company that donates to Planned Parenthood, is involved in embryonic stem cell research, or has any other involvement with abortion.

Question from Rhonda Jones 10:13 AM

1. What does it mean and what does it matter to worry about our stronger stance harming the pro-life movement? (I have heard that twice today and it seems to me to be worrying about what other humans think.)
 - If it were inherently wrong to take the vaccine, then it wouldn't matter how the public reacts to the refusal – we'd be morally required to refuse regardless of the reaction. But since it's not inherently immoral, we're in a situation in which we need to consider which course of action is actually more likely to contribute to the pro-life cause.
2. Do other aspects of the Covid vaccines (e.g., serious side effects, the mutating of the virus, the mRNA not being well-tested for long term effects) enter at all into the moral decisions?
 - Yes, these are morally relevant considerations with regard to our personal health/safety, which of course are very important. However, nothing I have seen indicates that these vaccines are any riskier than any other vaccine; on the contrary, we have reason to believe that some of the vaccines (the mRNA ones) are probably actually less risky.

Question from Mary Anne Serra 10:13 AM

Though no one here is a virologist, I have tested positive with no symptoms (thanks be to God) I now have my own antibodies now, yet some doctors are still pushing me to get the vaccine when I have my own immunity and would like to try to wait for an ethical vaccine. I have heard that Sanofi has now stopped its vaccine which I was waiting for.

- Evidence indicates that even if you tested positive, you may not be immune especially if you had a very mild or asymptomatic case. Evidence also indicates that immunity from getting the disease does not last as long as immunity from vaccination. You're right, however, that you are probably at lower risk.

Question from William 10:13 AM

To change corporate behaviour in the future can we support labeling programs such as the NO FETUS TISSUE USED ...see www.noftu.com

- Great idea. Just like environmentalists have labels indicating that products were not tested on animals, etc. (MM)

Question from Anonymous Attendee 10:15 AM

One of the biggest problems for me as a Deacon is that we do not have consistency from the Church hierarchy. For example, Bishop Athanasius Schneider and Bishop Strickland have been vocal about how the reception of the vaccination is a moral wrong. This in light of the Vatican statement from 2005. This lack of unity causes confusion of the faithful.

- I agree. While I know that they were motivated by their laudable commitment to the pro-life cause, I do not think that Schneider and Strickland should have issued that statement. It uses misleading rhetoric that makes it seem that there is a much greater connection between than vaccines and abortion than there really is. The statement is also clearly out of step with prior statements of the Pontifical Academy for Life and the CDF, indicating that vaccination in these circumstances is morally permissible. (MM)

Comment from Anonymous Attendee 10:18 AM

Regarding the common good aspect, though, I think some of us have felt extreme pressure, even risking shame if we don't take the vaccine. We fear a mandate on this. None of this feels settling.

- The US is definitely not going to mandate vaccination – the public would not stand for that. There is, I think, a reasonable moral pressure to be vaccinated precisely because vaccination isn't only or primarily a matter of private benefit, but a matter of enabling us to achieve herd immunity so life can finally begin to return to some semblance of normal and put an end to the many harms that have come with lockdowns, etc. (MM)

Question from William 10:23 AM

Abortion is legal by law of man but not of God...so is it really "LEGAL"?

Question from Tracy Tully 10:24 AM

Hello, I have two questions, the first leading to the second... (1) To what degree does an individual's situation in life impact the morality of one's decision to take the vaccine? Case in point: I am a healthy 52-year-old who hasn't seen my 78-year-old vulnerable parents in 14 months. I feel morally obligated to "get the jab" in order to see my parents—who may or may not have many years left to live. Yet I remain conflicted about this choice because of the remote cooperation with evil and the possibility of promoting a market for aborted tissue. I understand I may have a proportionate reason to take the vaccine, but I still feel uncomfortable. If I had a direct way to advocate/lobby the vaccine industry effectively, that might assuage my conscience. (2) Can you provide ways for us to lobby them effectively? For example— email templates and lists of vaccine manufacturers' contact emails would be helpful! Thank you!

Answered during webinar

Comment from Ken 10:26 AM

Then any evil can become acceptable based upon the passage of time or complexity. That seems morally "convenient."

- No, that's not true. Recognizing that one may permissibly benefit from past evils does not mean that the past evil becomes acceptable. If a loved one needs an organ transplant, and the needed organ becomes available because someone was murdered, one will benefit from the murder. But that doesn't mean the murder was acceptable or that you are glad that it happened. (MM)

Question from Dave 10:27 AM

Risk of losing vulnerable people in gaining benefits of herd immunity is not far from Margaret Sanger's "get rid of undesirables". To Dr. Moschella.

- I'm not sure what you mean by this. The greatest beneficiaries of herd immunity are precisely those who are most vulnerable, so getting vaccinated is a way of protecting the most vulnerable, not getting rid of them. In the absence of herd immunity, those who are most vulnerable are likely to eventually get the disease and die or suffer serious illness (unless they keep themselves indefinitely locked up and isolated, which may be even worse). Vaccination is probably the only way to avoid that. (MM)

Question from Francis 10:28 AM

Thank you, Dr. Trasancos. Is there a record of what the other 292 HEK specimens were before they got to specimen number 293?

-Dr. Trasancos was mistaken about the meaning of 293. It doesn't mean that the cell line was produced from the 293rd specimen. Rather, it means that the cell line was produced from the 293rd *experiment*. All of those experiments were done with the fetal tissue taken from the *same* aborted child. (MM)

Question from Francis 10:30 AM

Since the origin of HEK-293 is unknown (a.k.a illicit), why not suspend its use entirely? In moral choices, Aquinas cautions that in the presence of doubt, one should suspend action. Can't we as a human race pave another path with more moral purity and discard these morally compromised cell lines? Justifying their widespread use could be ethical concession.

Answered during webinar

Question from Francis 10:30 AM

There is concern that the mRNA has the possibility of interacting with/affecting the human DNA. Is this not a concern? These immortal cell lines (as they are called) may not result to direct need for more cell lines, but isn't their very use a signal to others that there are benefits from experimenting on fetus?

- There is no scientific basis for this concern. RNA does not create or change DNA. (MM)

Question from William 10:31 AM

Can we agree to use fetal tissue obtained from abortions that were not ELECTIVE??

- We can use fetal tissue from spontaneous abortions (i.e., miscarriages) or non-viable pre-term births, if proper consent is obtained. (MM)

Question from Francis 10:31 AM

Would you agree that the commonality of the fruits of evil does not reduce the evils and thus should not prevent us from fighting to eliminate the evil no matter how ubiquitous it is?

- Agreed. Of course, we should fight to eliminate evil. But the evil at issue here is *abortion*, not the use of cell lines originally derived from the tissue of aborted fetuses. (MM)

Question from Mariette Baxendale 10:31 AM

Will the Q and A and the chat or the transcript also be posted? Thank you so much. This was excellent.

Question from Mary McGurran 10:31 AM

What is the Church doing to educate Catholics? I am involved in the Pro-life movement, so I try to search for information, but a very, very large majority of Catholics aren't even aware that this is an issue and do not even know that the bishops made a statement. Many probably heard that the Pope strongly recommends all Catholics to receive the vaccine. If Catholics are unaware and take the vaccine and do not voice their objections, do the Church leaders hold a moral responsibility for that?

Answered during webinar

Question from Ken 10:38 AM

How should the extremely low infection rates & low mortality rates (excluding vulnerable populations) factor into one's decision to vaccinate? I would think it is a major consideration.

- See answers to prior questions. It's not primarily about protecting oneself, but precisely about protecting those who are more vulnerable. And that can only be done by achieving herd immunity (unless we ask those who are vulnerable to remain in self-quarantine for years or even perhaps the rest of their lives...) (MM)

Question from Mary Anne Serra 10:38 AM

I am a Parish Nurse so my pastor and parishioners look to me for the best information. I also know that the insurance companies and the pharmaceuticals always look at the bottom line and they have very little concern for this issue. How do we affect change in those industries as well as the legislators?

- Let legislators know that you are concerned about the use of aborted fetal tissue for research, and about how widespread this is. Let me know that there are ethical alternatives and ask them to de-fund the use of aborted fetal tissue and provide funds to incentive the use of ethical alternatives (i.e., tissue from miscarriages or non-viable pre-term births). (MM)

Question from Margaret W 10:40 AM

Dr. Moschella mentioned evangelization. Isn't my witness to life by not taking the vaccine the kind of evangelization Catholics are called to and the best form of resistance to evil? Why do we spend so much time easing consciences rather than informing them to be heroic?

- The vaccines are so many steps removed from abortion (and do not incentive future abortion) that people are likely to see a refusal not as heroic witness, but rather as unreasonable unwillingness to contribute to the effort to achieve herd immunity – an effort which is likely to save many lives and also bring the many harms of lockdowns to an end. There are ways to give heroic witness that do not involve risking the lives and livelihoods of others by hampering efforts to achieve herd immunity, and that are much more directly related abortion. For instance, refuse to invest your money in companies that contribute to Planned Parenthood or are otherwise involved in abortion or embryo-destructive research. Volunteer at or donate to a crisis pregnancy center. Pray in front of an abortion clinic. Write to legislators in support of pro-life legislation. These are all *much* more direct and effective ways to give witness, and (by contrast with refusing vaccination) they don't involve putting others at risk. (MM)

Question from Dr. Mary Anne Urlakis 10:46 AM

There are significant questions regarding the potential of pathogenic priming and future immunologic adverse reactions from the mRNA biologicals- from credible sources, as well as questions about the efficacy and data that was excluded from the published efficacy testing. Among those I'm referencing here are the concerns of Dr. Peter Doshi, the Assoc Ed of the prestigious BMJ. If, in fact, there are long-term side effects from the mRNA vaccines, the common good would be harmed, public distrust in the process and vaccines would be further harmed. How do these concerns weight into the moral calculations are we go forward? Considering that there are other ethical vaccines in process- following the prescribed route of animal testing, and strict phase I and

phase II trials, would it not be more prudent to wait for these vaccines rather than to accept new and experimental technology that is also tainted with abortion?

Answered during webinar

- **I reviewed the piece by Dr. Doshi, who brings up some important points. None of these points seem to undermine the claims that the vaccines are relatively safe (all vaccines involve some level of risk) and do provide at least some protection against illness, especially severe illness. (MM)**

Question from Anonymous Attendee 10:52 AM

In Dr. Moschella's presentation you use the argument that many actions include some evil or injustice and somehow excuses for the use of these aborted fetal cell lines. This is moral relativism. It is important to qualify that certain actions are more or less evil. For instance, how can you equate the injustice of slavery with the intrinsic evil of abortion? The gravity of the issue is such that we have an obligation to remove all evils from our life and from society, however, the evil of abortion must be rejected in all its forms including benefiting from it. So are you not using moral relativism arguments to excuse evil?

Answered during webinar

Question from Anonymous Attendee 10:52 AM

Second question, the common good is often an ambiguous term and in order to participate in the "common good" we have to have a working definition of what it means. Aquinas indicates that by the common good is meant: All members of society working together, in virtue, for the good of all. The common good of society cannot be reduced to one aspect, for instance, that of health. Furthermore, Aquinas means that in order for our actions to be for the common good, individuals must be living virtuous lives (doing good and avoid evil) and through this they are doing the "common good". What is your definition of the "common good"? and how do you view the individual's responsibility toward this common good in light of Aquinas' principles?

- **Agreed – the term common good is complex. I tend to use a definition along the lines of the one in Gaudium et Spes from Vatican II: the common good is set of conditions that facilitates the ability of all members of society (as individuals and as groups) to pursue human flourishing. There are many dimensions to human flourishing: bodily life and health are among the dimensions of human flourishing, but other elements include healthy social relationships, meaningful work, knowledge, appreciation of beauty, personal integrity/virtue, religion, etc. Vaccination is important not only because it protects health (both for the those vaccinated and for others with whom one may come in contact), but also because achievement of herd immunity, which is necessary to put an end to the lockdowns and restrictions that seriously hamper our ability to pursue the many other dimensions of human flourishing. (MM)**

Question from Anonymous Attendee

Is there actual, proven advantage to using aborted fetal tissue? or is it just to perpetuate spread of evil/ upholding the abortion industry? I recall that when we first learned about stem cell work, we heard that adult stem cells were producing good results, but fetal stem cells were not (and even caused weird anomalies.

- Scientists do not use aborted fetal tissue in order to perpetuate abortion. (Nor does its use directly increase the number of abortions – women seek abortion because they are not ready/willing to have a child, not because they want to contribute fetal tissue to research.) Fetal tissue has certain properties that most adult tissue does not have, precisely because the child is at such an early stage of development.
- Note that fetal tissue is not the same thing as embryonic stem cells. It's true that embryonic stem cell research did not yield good results leading to clinical trials precisely because the cells were too difficult to control, whereas research with adult stem cells has led to many clinical trials and effective therapies. We also now have ethical alternatives to embryonic stem cells that are more effective – namely, induced pluripotent stem cells. (However, we would not have developed the technology to produce induced pluripotent stem cells without conducting immoral experiments on human embryos.) (MM)

Question from Tim Collins

Why has God's Holy Word not been part of this conversation?!? Didn't the Lord Jesus say in the Sermon of the Mount "Thou shall not kill"? Josie Collins

- Yes, he did. We all agree that abortion is a grave evil and that we need to work to stop it. But no abortions were done in order to make the vaccines, and taking the vaccines will not increase the number of abortions. (MM)
- Jesus also told us to love others as he loved us, and part of loving others is doing our part to bring this pandemic to an end by stopping its spread, and vaccination is the only real way to achieve that goal (apart from allowing the vast majority of the population to be infected, with the resulting loss of life especially for the most vulnerable). (MM)

Thank you for joining us for this webinar!

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