

What About Religious Exemptions for COVID Vaccines?

Recently, some Catholic parishioners have begun asking their pastors either to provide or to sign a document testifying that their refusal to be vaccinated against the Covid virus is supported by the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. Some bishops have provided templates for such a declaration; nevertheless, there is no basis in Catholic moral teaching for rejecting vaccine mandates on religious grounds.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) published the “Note on the morality of using some anti-Covid-19 vaccines” (21 December 2020), which stated:

5. At the same time, practical reason makes evident that vaccination is not, as a rule, a moral obligation and that, therefore, it must be voluntary. In any case, 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.

To read the CDF's Note in its entirety, go to:

https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20201221_nota-vaccini-anticovid_en.html

Further, while it is the responsibility of the individual to raise moral or ethical objections to vaccination based on the dictates of his or her conscience, that person's decision to refuse the COVID-19 vaccine finds its limits when applying the Principle of the Common Good. For the conscientious person, refusing to receive vaccination should lead to a decision to use other means to protect his or her life and the lives of others against COVID-19. Those persons who claim that they cannot in good conscience accept vaccination should be ready to properly assume other scientifically recommended means of avoiding infection and contagion, including the use of face-coverings, social distancing, hand sanitizing, periodic testing, and quarantine.

The Holy See has clearly stated that receiving the COVID vaccine is in accord with Catholic faith and has urged people to be vaccinated as an act of charity and out of respect for the common good in fighting the pandemic. Catholic moral teaching, while ever respectful of individual rights, always balances such rights with individual and social responsibilities, respect for human dignity and life, solidarity, the common good, and care for the most vulnerable. The failure to hold these principles in a proper balance is a misrepresentation of Catholic doctrine.

There is so much talk in our society about individual rights, but few mention the call to serve others or our responsibility to be selfless. Our culture is self-focused. Americans are repulsed at the thought of subjecting themselves to others. We view freedom from an extremely selfish perspective.

Those who are pro-choice wear t-shirts saying, "My body, my choice." Some of those who oppose vaccines or masks are using the same slogan, "My body, my choice." Anyone who says, "My body, my choice" is not in sync with the Gospel. To the pro-choice advocates, the Church says that a woman's individual rights need to be balanced by the rights of the unborn child. That same principle applies for vaccinations. Individual rights are to be respected, but they are to be balanced with responsibility to protect all people, especially the most vulnerable. Jesus did not say, "My body, my choice." Rather he said, "***This is my Body given for you***" (Lk. 22:19).