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On the moral liceity of the vaccination

On the moral liceity of the vaccination against Covid*

The terms of the moral question

In this paper, I will seek to look in depth at a much-debated and most significant question: the moral liceity of anti-Covid vaccines.

In brief, the problem is this: from the standpoint of Catholic and natural morality, are vaccinations against the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 licit or illicit, given that the vaccines currently available use cell lines derived from aborted fetuses? Does the receipt of, or if I am a doctor, the injection of vaccines, render me complicit in abortion, hence committing a grave sin?

In the Catholic world, this question was the subject of a document published on 12 December 2020 by a cardinal and four bishops, in which it was declared that a Catholic can in no way participate, even indirectly and remotely, in what is the greatest crime of our time against God and against humanity: abortion.¹

* The conference was held online on 23 February 2021 on the Schola Palatina platform.

¹ The signatories of this document, dated 12 December 2020, are: Janis Cardinal Pujats, Metropolitan Archbishop Emeritus of Riga; Tomash Peta, Metropolitan Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Santa Maria in Astana; Jan Pawel Lenga, Archbishop/Bishop Emeritus of Karaganda;

The authors of this document see a clear contradiction between Catholic doctrine forbidding abortion, categorically and under any circumstances, as a grave moral evil which cries out to heaven, and the regarding of vaccines derived from the cell lines of aborted foetuses to be morally acceptable in cases of exceptional need.

Against this declaration, we have the following: On 21 December 2020, a Note from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith appeared asserting that: “*it is morally acceptable to receive Covid-19 vaccines that have used cell lines from aborted foetuses in their research and production process*” (section 2). The Note stipulates that, in the case of the current pandemic “all vaccinations 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 co-operation with the abortion* from which the cells used in production of the vaccines derive. It should be emphasised, however, that the morally licit use of these types of vaccines, in the particular conditions that make it so, does not in itself constitute a legitimisation, even indirect, of the practice of abortion, and necessarily assumes the opposition to this practice by those

Joseph E. Strickland, Bishop of Tyler (USA); Athanasius Schneider, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Santa Maria in Astana.

who make use of these vaccines” (section 3).²

The Note of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith confirms other promulgations of the Magisterium during the past fifteen years: a Note issued by the Pontifical Academy for Life on 5 June 2005, the Instruction *Dignitas personae* of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, published on 8 September 2008, and a further Note from the Pontifical Academy for Life, dated 31 July 2017.

At this point, one might well reach the conclusion that the debate is closed: *Roma locuta est* [Rome has spoken]. However, it could be objected that fifteen years is not sufficient time to attribute infallibility to the Ordinary Magisterium of the Church as expressed in these documents, or for its being closed to reform, especially since over recent decades we have seen the ecclesiastical authorities adopt ambiguous and, at times, erroneous moral positions. It suffices to recall the debate prompted by Pope Francis’s Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris laetitia* of 19 March 2016.

I believe therefore that it is right and necessary to study this matter more closely, not in the light

² This is affirmed by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in a Note signed by the Prefect, Luis Cardinal Ladaria, and the Secretary, Archbishop Giacomo Morandi, expressly approved by Pope Francis on 17 December last. Cf. https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20201221_nota-vaccini-anticovid_en.html.

of arguments concerning authority, but of arguments concerning right reason, illuminated by the faith, according to the principles of Catholic moral theology and philosophy.

Before going any further, it is necessary to define clearly what the argument is about. Primarily, it is important to note that we are not discussing vaccination in general, but only vaccines which use the cell lines of aborted fetuses, as do vaccines against Covid-19.

In terms of vaccination in general, scientific ideas and proposals may vary, but there are no fundamental moral concerns involved. We may recall in this regard a fine speech from Pius XII who, addressing Catholic doctors, affirms that a doctor worthy of his vocation uses to advantage the forces of nature, “for the purpose of procuring, through those forces, healing, health, strength and, frequently, what is still more precious, providing protection against diseases, contagion and epidemics. In their hands, the formidable power of radioactivity is tapped and used to fight evils which rebel against any other treatment; the properties of the more virulent poisons serve to prepare effective remedies; additionally, the germs of more dangerous infections are put to different uses in serotherapy and vaccination.”³

³ Pius XII, Speech to Catholic doctors on 29 September 1949, in *Speeches and Radio Messages of His Holiness Pius XII*, volume 11, p. 223 (pp. 221-225).

Furthermore, the distinction between the moral problem we have touched on and the problem of hypothetical damage to the human organism as a result of the anti-Covid vaccine, must be made clear. Appraisal of the second problem is within the competence of scientists, not of moralists, who can only express an opinion on the basis of objective and incontrovertible data provided by doctors and researchers: this has not yet happened.

It must also be made clear that, when we talk of science, we are referring to modern science, not medieval science. In the Middle Ages, philosophical and scientific theories were brought together in a single system of teaching. The separation and diversification of the human sciences and sciences of nature did not emerge until the start of the modern era, developing into the “scientific revolution” preceding the industrial revolution. The primary characteristic of modern science is its hypothetical nature and it merely puts forward valid hypotheses until proven to the contrary, and hence it is in continuous change. However, faith and morality do not change. Scientism is a claim to transform scientific truths into dogmatic truths, elevating science to a higher category of knowledge. If one wages an anti-vaccination crusade, one risks falling into the error of scientism, which is to at-

tribute absolute value to putative scientific data, whilst disregarding or relativising the elements of the question.

Finally, it must be said that morality is a branch of philosophy and theology, sciences which require in-depth study; it is not something which can be improvised. The study of the theological sciences is not reserved to priests, but it is permitted, and indeed recommended, for the laity. However, neither the laity, nor simple priests, are entitled to present the findings of their studies as the Magisterium. The Magisterium belongs to the teaching Church, consisting of the pope and the bishops. However, Canon Law recognises in the laity “persons who excel in necessary knowledge, prudence and integrity” who have the capacity to “assist the pastors of the Church as experts and advisers” (Canon 228) and “to receive from legitimate ecclesiastical authority a mandate to teach the sacred sciences” (Canon 229).

Everything on which I will expound in this paper is therefore subject to the judgement of the Church, by whose teaching I seek to abide, with a view to perceiving whether, in truth, the receipt or injection of the anti-Covid vaccine is, as some believe, an intrinsically evil act in itself.

The fundamental principles of moral theology

It is above all necessary to call to mind certain fundamental principles. The object of moral science is man, his conduct, his actions, his behaviour. Morality does not apply to all acts of man (sleep, digestion, etc), but only to acts said to be *human*, performed by man because he is free and a master of those acts. Anything beyond the domain of liberty falls outside the domain of morality.

However, morality presupposes the existence of a stable human nature, ordered by absolute and immutable laws; from these proceed moral obligations which are comprehensible to human reason.⁴ Therefore an eminent moralist, Father Viktor Cathrein defines moral philosophy as “the science of human moral acts, drawing on the highest rational principles in the light of reason”.⁵

It is also necessary to distinguish moral philosophy from moral theology. Theology covers the moral acts of man, and its primary source is Revelation, from which it draws certain principles: theological reflection elevates man to a su-

⁴ Regis Jolivet, *Treatise on philosophy*, volume V, *Morality* (1), Morcelliana, Brescia 199, pp. 21-22.

⁵ Viktor Cathrein, *Moral philosophy. Scientific exposition of the moral and judicial order*, Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, Florence 1913, p. 1.

pernatural state, whereas moral philosophy deduces principles from natural reason. As Father Ramón Garcia de Haro has explained, “moral theology is the science of faith, whereas natural and philosophical ethics can rely on the forces of reason alone”.⁶

Obviously, moral truth is one and the same: there is no truth of faith different from that of reason. Given that man is truly included in the supernatural order, the teachings of moral philosophy need to be integrated with the moral maxims of Christian Revelation.

Regarding the principles of morality and appraisal of human acts, the most reliable source is St Alphonsus Maria de Liguori (1696-1787). The activities of St Alphonsus throughout his long life were multi-faceted, but his greatest contribution relates specifically to moral theology where, as Pietro Cardinal Palazzini writes, “his authority is unique”.⁷ We could say that St Alphonsus made of morality what St Thomas of Aquinas made of theology: he put together a formidable overview of the various currents of moral reflection in his time, while purifying them of errors, and expounded on the principles of Catholic

⁶ Ramón Garcia de Haro, *The Christian life. Course of fundamental moral theology*, Edizioni Ares, Milan, 1995, p. 39.

⁷ Pietro Cardinal Palazzini, *Bibliotheca Sanctorum*, Città Nuova, Rome 1990, volume 1, pp. 860-861.

morality as systematically and precisely as did St Thomas, when expounding on the principles of dogmatic theology.

In his encyclical *Spiritus Domini*, published on 1 August 1987 for the bicentenary of the death of St Alphonsus, Pope John Paul II said the following: “The *Praxis Confessarii*, the *Homo Apostolicus* and his principal work, the *Theologia moralis*, made him [St Alphonsus] a master of Catholic moral teaching.”

The greatest moral theologians of the 20th century, including Fathers Girolamo Noldin (1838-1922), Arthur Vermeersch (1858-1936), Domenico Maria Prümmer (1866-1931), Benedikt Merkelbach (1929-1936), Josef Mausbach (1861-1931), Pietro Cardinal Palazzini (1912-2000), Father Marcelino Zalba (1908-2009), all made reference to the *Theologia moralis* of St Alphonsus.

Before and after Vatican II, heterodox currents of thought emerged, and unfortunately Bernhard Häring (1912-1988), the most widely known exponent of moral heterodoxy of our time, was a Redemptorist. He belonged to the religious order founded by St Alphonsus, although the order has radically distanced itself from his principles. What is valid for the children of St Alphonsus is equally valid for those of St Ignatius: *corruptio optima pessima* [corruption of the best is the worst].

However, there was a significant reaction to these errors: *Veritatis splendor*, John Paul II's encyclical of 6 August 1993,⁸ a response from the Church's Magisterium to the crisis of theological and moral thought in the post-Council period.

Above all, the encyclical *Veritatis splendor* reminds us of the existence of moral absolutes, that is negative rules which, always and in every case, prohibit certain human acts. The encyclical reiterates that there are acts which are intrinsically evil and the rules which prohibit them are absolute.

These are the acts which, “in the Church’s moral tradition, have been termed ‘intrinsically evil’ (*intrinsece malum*): they are such *always and per se*, in other words, on account of their very object, and quite apart from the ulterior intentions of the one acting in the circumstances. Consequently, without in the least denying the influence on morality exercised by circumstances and especially by intentions, the Church teaches that ‘there exist acts which *per se* and in themselves, independently of circumstances, are always seriously wrong by reason of their object’” (VS, section 80). “If acts are intrinsically evil, a good intention or particular circum-

⁸ http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ip-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor.html.

stances can diminish their evil, but they cannot remove it. They remain ‘irremediably’ evil acts; *per se* and in themselves they are not capable of being ordered to God and to the good of the person” (VS, section 81).

The negation of moral absolutes is the common theme of ethical theories such as *consequentialism* and *proportionalism*, which John Paul II explicitly condemns in his encyclical. “The former claims to draw the criteria of the rightness of a given way of acting solely from the calculation of foreseeable consequences deriving from a given choice. The latter, by weighing the various values and goods being sought, focuses rather on the proportion acknowledged between the good and bad effects of that choice, with a view to the ‘greater good’ or ‘lesser evil’ actually possible in a particular situation” (VS, section 75).

The elements which constitute the morality of human acts

The encyclical *Veritatis splendor* reminds us that a human act is dependent on three elements: the *intention* of the acting subject, the *circumstances* – and in particular, the consequences – of his action, or the *object* itself of his act” (section 74).

The indications in *Veritatis splendor* of the elements which constitute the morality of human acts are worthy of in-depth analysis.

The elements of objective morality are, according to traditional moral theology,⁹ as follows:

- *The objective purpose*, also known as the formal object of human acts: The human act draws its morality primarily from the object, which is what the act produces directly for itself. The act will be good or bad according to its objective conformity, or non-conformity, with the natural law and the ultimate Good, which is God.
- *The circumstances*, that is the entirety of accidental elements in the act, which surrounds the act, influences it, conditions it, but does not in itself constitute it. Circumstances can increase or diminish the good or evil of an act, but they do not transform a good act to a bad act, or vice versa. For ex-

⁹ The doctrine presented here is illustrated by St Alphonsus Maria de Liguori in *Theologia moralis*, Editio nova, prepared by Father Leonardo Gaudé, Ex.Typ. Vatican, Rome, 1905-1907, and textbooks by Adolph Tanquerey, *Brevior Synopsis Theologie moralis*, Desclée, Paris-Tournai 1940; Antonio Arregui-Marcelino Zalba, *Compendio de Teologia moral*, El Mensajero del Corazón de Jesús, Bilbao 1965; Josef Mausbach, *Teologia morale*, Paoline, Alba 1959 *et al.* Cf also Father Serafino M. Lanzetta, *Appraisal of the moral act and contemporaneous deviations*, conference held at the *Università d'Estate 2020* of the *Fondazione Lepanto*, now in *Fides Catholica*, section 2 (2020), pp. 263-281.

ample, to steal is always an evil act, while almsgiving is always a good act.

- *The subjective purpose* which is the intention, good or bad, of our acts. The subjective purpose does not necessarily coincide with the objective purpose of the human act. It is, for example, possible to give alms for an evil purpose, which differs from an act which is good, to help the poor. This does not detract from the fact that the formal object of the act, i.e. almsgiving, is, of itself, good. The purpose cannot alter the object of the act but, since the morality of the act derives from the integrity of the elements thereof, it can vitiate the morality.

A concrete act will only be morally good if it is in conformity, in all its elements (object, intention and circumstances), with the rule of morality (*Bonum ex integra causa*¹⁰ [good in every aspect]). If just one of its elements is bad, the act itself becomes morally bad (*malum ex quocumque defectu* [an act is wrong when it is wrong in any aspect]), because all three elements constitute an indissoluble unit. In order to judge the morality of an act, it is necessary to start with its object. This means to ask oneself

¹⁰ St Thomas of Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-IIae, q. 18, a. 4 ad 3.

whether the act performed is, in itself, bad. The rule is that what is evil with regard to the object remains evil even when the circumstances and purposes are good. St Thomas Aquinas affirms that “acts which are in themselves evil cannot be performed for any good purpose”.¹¹

Therefore, the judgement according to which a good purpose justifies bad means is contrary to Catholic morality.

John Paul II, in his criticism of *proportionalism* and *consequentialism*, states that, “In order to offer rational criteria for a right moral decision, the theories mentioned above take to account the intention and *consequences* of human action. Certainly there is need to take into account both the intention (...) and the goods obtained and the evils avoided as a result of a particular act. Responsibility demands as much. But the consideration of these consequences, and also of intentions, is not sufficient for judging the moral quality of a concrete choice. The weighing of the goods and evils foreseeable as the consequence of an action is not an adequate method for determining whether the choice of that concrete kind of behaviour is ‘according to its species’, or ‘in itself’, morally good or bad, licit or illicit. The foreseeable consequences are part of those circumstances

¹¹ *Ibid.*, I-IIae, q.8 a. 6, ad 3.

of the act, which, while capable of lessening the gravity of an evil act, nonetheless cannot alter its moral species. Moreover, everyone recognises the difficulty, or rather the impossibility, of evaluating all the good and evil consequences and effects – defined as pre-moral – of one’s own acts: an exhaustive rational calculation is not possible. How then can one go about establishing proportions which depend on a measuring, the criteria of which remain obscure? How could an absolute obligation be justified on the basis of such debatable calculations?” (VS, section 77) The answer is: to examine the formal object of the act.

The deeper metaphysical reason, as noted by the moralist Josef Mausbach, lies in the following fact: the good, in its very concept, is that which is perfect, total, integral, and excludes any essential defect. On the other hand, evil is never completely evil, but is a defect, it is a distortion of some good.¹²

What are the intrinsically evil acts which, because of their formal object, are under no circumstances permitted? The Church defines the following: blasphemy, homicide, theft, adultery, and many others. One of these intrinsically evil acts, as affirmed by John Paul II in the encyclical *Evangelium vitae*, is procured abortion, “the de-

¹² Mausbach, *Moral theology*, I, p. 309.

liberate and direct killing, by whatever means it is carried out, of a human being in the initial phase of his or her existence, extending from conception to birth” (EV, section 58).

In *Evangelium vitae* there is a passage worded in a manner which indicates quasi-infallibility. It is section 57, in which the Pope expresses himself as follows: “Therefore, by the authority which Christ conferred upon Peter and his successors, and in communion with the bishops of the Catholic Church, I confirm that the direct and voluntary killing of an innocent human being is always gravely immoral. This doctrine, based upon that unwritten law which man, in the light of reason, finds in his own heart (cf. Rom 2:14-15), is reaffirmed by Sacred Scripture, transmitted by the Tradition of the Church and taught by the ordinary and universal Magisterium. (...) The deliberate decision to deprive an innocent human being of his life is always morally evil and can never be licit either as an end in itself or as a means to a good end” (EV, section 57).

Cooperation with evil

Having clarified the existence of intrinsically evil acts, which are never permitted, the problem arises concerning cooperation with such acts. Man

is driven by his social nature to cooperate with other men, in good or evil. Moralists explain that there are differing levels of cooperation, which should be considered carefully. In fact, I can cooperate with evil performed by another in two different ways: I can either want the evil perpetrated by another to happen, or I can collaborate with this evil without wanting to, but being constrained to do so. The first type of cooperation in the sin of another, in which consent is given to evil, is known as *formal*; the second type, which is repudiated, is known as *material*, because it has an incidental link with the evil, which may be *proximate* or *remote*.

The term *remote* does not refer to closeness or distance in time, but to the degree that one contributes directly to the act. An example of remote cooperation is that of a taxi driver who takes a thief to a house where he wishes to commit theft. An example of proximate cooperation is, for example, a situation where a person holds the ladder for the thief to ascend. If the participants in the two acts are in agreement with the thief, they are guilty of formal cooperation in the theft; if not, their cooperation will be purely material – remote for the taxi driver, and proximate for the person holding the ladder, as he is contributing directly to the act, but may have been forced to do so by the thief, under threat of death.

The rule, according to moralists, is this:¹³ *formal cooperation* with evil, which implies interior consent to the wrongful act, is always illicit. *Material cooperation* is illicit when it assists directly and immediately in a wrongful act, but can become licit in case of necessity, the more so the more remote it is.

Material cooperation with evil, proximate or remote, can only be licit a) when one does not want the evil and does not cooperate in acts which are evil in themselves; b) cooperation is justified by a good and proportionate reason; c) this reason must be proportionately grave considering how great or proximate the evil one cooperates in.

Don Alfredo Morselli demonstrates the weakness of the claim that “all acts related with abortion are illicit” with the following example. “If a doctor is performing an abortion, and asks the nurse to pass him the scalpel, the nurse cannot morally do so; but if, during the abortion, the doctor says to the nurse: ‘something unexpected has happened; pass me the scalpel because the patient is dying’; in that operation, the nurse **MUST** pass him the

¹³ Cf. St Alphonso Maria de' Liguori, *Theologia moralis*, volume I, pp. 35-361; Tanquerey, *Brevior Synopsis Theologie moralis*, pp. 38-39; Arregui-Zalba, *Compendium of moral theology*, pp. 144-145; Mausbach, *Moral theology*, I, pp. 425-443; Pietro Cardinal Palazzini, entry *Cooperation in evil*, in *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, volume IV (1950), coll. 496-498; Pietro Cardinal Palazzini-Francesco Roberti, entry *Cooperation with evil*, in *Dictionary of moral theology*, Studium, Rome 1968, pp. 434-435.

scalpel.”¹⁴ This would be a case of proximate cooperation rendered licit by the circumstances. But in the case of a cleaning lady who is required to sweep the room in which the operation takes place, cooperation would be equally licit. In this case, a grave reason, such as retaining her job, is sufficient for her to cooperate indirectly and remotely in what will be happening in that room.

In short, there are distinctions in levels of responsibility which a moralist must consider in concrete cases.

There are also certain cases in which a good act produces two consequences, one good and one evil.¹⁵

Moral theologians apply in this case the *principle of double effect* and give the following explanation: it is assumed that the act can be licit if certain conditions are met: the act in question is not evil in itself, but it must be good or indifferent, according to the principle that the end can never justify the means; the good effect must be immediate to the act and not a consequence of the evil effect; the intention is good; there is a right and proportionate reason. In this case, we can say that the evil effect is not directly desired, but permitted.¹⁶

¹⁴ <https://www.dogmatv.it/proteina-spike-cellule-fetali-e-magistero>.

¹⁵ Palazzini-Roberti, *Cooperation in Evil*, in *Dictionary of Morality*, p. 585; Garcia de Haro, *The Christian Life*, pp. 286-292.

¹⁶ On the principle of the double effect cf. *inter alia*, Tommaso Scandroglio, *Unjust law and lesser evil*, Phronesis, Palermo 2018.

Vaccines deriving from foetal cells

In the light of these moral principles, we can now broach the question: if a doctor vaccinates a patient and a patient receives a vaccination, to what degree are they cooperating with the sin of abortion?

Vaccination is preventative because it makes use of the memory of the immune system, allowing the body to develop a defence system against a bacterium, virus or other microorganism. Vaccines can be either *viral* vaccines or *synthetic* vaccines, the latter being of the new generation of vaccines. Some of these vaccines use cell lines which are derived from aborted foetuses. A cell line is a culture of cells with an indefinite life and is distinguished from a cell strain which does not have an indefinite life. These cell lines serve to produce vaccines against certain viruses, because, unlike bacteria, viruses grow only within cells. However, under no circumstances are the cells from aborted foetuses injected with the vaccination.¹⁷ Foetal cells serve only to culture the virus, and are destroyed by the virus, in the same way as the infected cells are destroyed in a patient's organism.

¹⁷ <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e3ada1a6a2e8d6a131d1dcd/t/5fd3ce39e679895094dd1e49/16077164-0062/NCBCVaccineStatementFINAL.pdf>

Cell lines deriving from aborted foetuses have been used in the production of numerous viral vaccines. The first human cell line to be isolated was WI-38 (Winstar Institute 38), with diploid fibroblasts of the human lung.

An American researcher Meredith Wadman recounted in her book *The Vaccine Race*,¹⁸ that this cell line was identified by Leonard Hayflick, who was then working at the Winstar Institute of Anatomy and Biology in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. All cell lines then available derived from tumours and hence contained an altered genome. In June 1962, Hayflick accepted a female foetus from the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, fragmented the lungs, released cells from the tissues, then transferred the cells to a glass phial for cellular cultures. While travelling abroad, he distributed this phial throughout the world. This act, which Meredith Wadman sees as beneficial, was intrinsically immoral. From then onwards, other cell lines deriving from foetal tissues were developed. They have been used to produce numerous marketed medicines, and more recently certain anti-Covid vaccines.

In the preparation of anti-Covid vaccines, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), as of 22 January 2021, there were 237

¹⁸ Meredith Wadman, *The Vaccine Race: Science, Politics and the Human Costs of Defeating Disease*, Viking, 2017.

vaccine candidates in development. Some of these used cell lines derived from direct abortions: the HEK-293 line¹⁹ and the PER.C6 line.²⁰ The AstraZeneca vaccines from the University of Oxford are viral vaccines, which have used the HEK-293 cell line at all stages of their development; the Johnson and Johnson vaccine, authorised by the United States in February, in turn uses line PER.C6; the Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna vaccines are synthetic vaccines, which have used cell line HEK-293 at the testing stage. None of the cell lines used in the anti-Covid vaccines currently available, have been derived from abortions deliberately procured to produce the vaccines.

The AIFA (Italian Medicines Agency),²¹ has explained that the SARS-CoV-2 viruses infect persons using a protein, known as *Spike*, which acts as a key, allowing viruses to access the cells, in which they are then able to reproduce. All vaccines are developed to induce a response which blocks the *Spike* protein, hence preventing the infection of cells. The first two vaccines approved in Italy by the AIFA for the vaccine campaign, are the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines,

¹⁹ Cell line HEK-293 derives from the cells of a foetus aborted around 1972 and the cell lines were generated in 1973.

²⁰ Cell line PER.C6 was obtained from the cells of a foetus 18-weeks old, aborted in 1985.

²¹ <https://www.aifa.gov.it/vaccini-mrna>.

which are synthetic vaccines. They use messenger ribonucleic acid molecules (mRNA) which stimulate the immune system and produce specific antibodies. When exposed to contagion, the antibodies produced by vaccination block the *Spike* protein and prevent it from penetrating the cells. Therefore, the vaccine does not introduce the actual virus to the cells, but merely genetic information which allows the cell to replicate the *Spike* protein. If, subsequently, the vaccinated person comes into further contact with the SARS-CoV-2 virus, his immune system will recognise the virus and is ready to fight it. Human DNA is not modified by the mRNA, which does not remain in the organism, but is degraded shortly after the vaccination.²² However, to determine the sequence of the mRNA (the message which is the basis of the pseudo-viral *Spike*) – for the acquisition of cognitive data acquisition and not to manufacture the vaccine – cell culture derived from the tissues of aborted foetuses has been used.

The Oxford University's AstraZeneca, and other viral vaccines, adopt a different approach

²² Anti-Covid vaccines used in the mRNA technology “do not modify the DNA” of the person immunised. The chairman of the European Society of Human Genetics, Maurizio Genuardi, Ordinary Professor of Human Genetics at the Catholic University, Rome campus (<https://www.dottnet.it/articolo/32526258/societa-di-genetica-i-vaccini-covid-a-mrna-non-modificano-il-dna/>).

to induce the immune response in the organism when confronted with the *Spike* protein. They use cell lines also in the production of the vaccine.

The WI-38 cell line is used in vaccines against measles, mumps, rubella, chickenpox and herpes zoster. The MRC-5 line, prepared and developed in 1966, is used for hepatitis A, hepatitis B, typhus, polio, diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, smallpox, rabies and herpes zoster. If the use of cell lines deriving from aborted fetuses is in itself intrinsically illicit, this includes not merely the anti-Covid vaccine, but all viral vaccines commonly in use, in particular, in Italy, vaccines against rubella, chickenpox, poliomyelitis and hepatitis A.

Anyone who admits the existence of moral absolutes must admit that there are certain acts which cannot, for any reason in the world, be performed, because they are in themselves illicit. One such act is the murder of an innocent person and any form of formal cooperation with such an act.

If the vaccination is in itself illicit, never and under no circumstances can a vaccine deriving from foetal cells be permitted.

If, on the other hand, it has to be admitted in certain cases, or for certain vaccines, this would signify that the vaccine is not of itself morally illicit.

For example, it would be a contradiction to assert that the vaccination is illicit but if rejecting it results in the loss of a job, or in another serious loss, it would not be obligatory for a married couple with children who are bound by their duty to provide for their family, to abstain from it; or that the vaccine against Covid is not licit, but vaccines against rubella and poliomyelitis are licit.

This would mean that the use of the vaccine deriving from foetal cells is not of itself evil, but licit under certain conditions. The problem does not relate merely to the anti-Covid vaccine, but to vaccines and modern medications in general, which frequently use foetal cell lines in research and development.²³ When infected with Covid, the President of the United States, Donald Trump, was treated with medicines, such as Regeneron, which had been tested with foetal cells.²⁴ Did he commit an act that was in itself illicit? And are those who take numerous medicines, produced or tested using foetal cells, committing an illicit act?

It cannot therefore be said that, in accepting anti-Covid vaccines, Catholics are contradicting

²³ For example, Dornase (for cystic fibrosis), Enbrel (for rheumatoid arthritis, psoriasis), Darbopetin (for anaemia, chronic renal failure/dialysis).

²⁴ <https://www.technologyreview.com/2020/10/07/1009664/trumps-antibody-treatment-was-tested-using-cells-from-an-abortion>.

their anti-abortion position, providing enemies of the Church with arguments against them. The truth is the exact opposite: for enemies of the Church, it would be easy to point to the contradiction between refusing the anti-Covid vaccine while using other vaccines or medications, for example, to treat diabetes or hypertension, which are produced with foetal cell lines. It is necessary to get to the root of the moral problem, not go around it.

The contention of historic concatenation

The objective purpose of vaccination is certainly good: it is not an act which, in itself, is created to kill, but rather to save lives. The intention, which only God can judge, is putatively good. What are the circumstances then, which could render this act illicit, in the form of cooperation with evil?

There are essentially two contentions which argue against the liceity of the anti-Covid vaccination. The first considers it illicit, because of its association with the abortion industry. The second considers it to be illicit because of the damage it induces to physical health.

According to the first contention, those who knowingly and voluntarily receive vaccines de-

rived from foetal cell lines enter into a kind of concatenation with the abortion industry. This contention asserts that the murder of unborn children, the extraction of cells from their bodies, the use of those cells, the marketing of the “products” made of the bodies of murdered children, the manufacture of medicines and vaccines and, at the final stage, the vaccination, are all part of a chain of crimes which cannot be separated one from the other, and that one cannot collaborate with this chain if one does not want to be defiled by evil. This type of concatenation or defilement with the crime of abortion is in itself immoral.

The logic of this contention is only apparent because, through a paralogism, it establishes a concatenation of cause and effect, which exists at a historic level, but does not exist at a moral level, by virtue of which every act must be judged on its direct and immediate consequences, not on its historic links, even if they are close.

For example, in Italy there is certainly a historic link between the approval of the laws on divorce (1970) and abortion (1978). The culture which lies behind these two stages of moral degradation is the same. But, at the level of moral judgement, the act of promulgation of the first law must be distinguished from the act of promulgation of the second. The formal objects of

these acts are different, their authors are different; there are differences in complicity and in the levels of responsibility. Historic concatenation does not imply metaphysical and moral causality between the two events.

Moral science requires a high level of accuracy and does not admit of generalisations. However, what is arbitrary, from a logical and metaphysical standpoint, is the application of the same responsibilities in different moral situations. At a moral level, the principle of personal responsibility applies to every act performed freely, for which a person is therefore accountable; but he is not responsible for the actions of others, except in so far as he approves or cooperates with those actions.²⁵ The murder of unborn children, the use of their cells for the production of vaccines, and finally the vaccination, are all stages interlinked in a historic concatenation, but each stage requires a distinct moral appraisal. Otherwise, the moral judgement will be absorbed in, and confused with, the historic judgement.

The Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, in the instruction *Dignitatis personae*, promulgated in 2008, rightly affirms that, in situations where cells derived from aborted foetuses are used to create cell lines to be used in

²⁵ Garcia de Haro, *The Christian Life*, p. 196.

scientific research, “there exist differing degrees of responsibility” (section 35).²⁶

A first category of persons is represented by researchers who work on human cells. In this case, a distinction must be drawn between embryos and aborted fetuses. Research on embryos is always illicit, because it involves direct killing. In research on fetuses, a distinction must be drawn between fetuses deriving from spontaneous abortions or procured abortions. Research on foetal tissues derived from spontaneous abortions, as on adult stem cells, is permitted by the Church, but it is often impossible to know whether the cell lines derive from spontaneous abortions or procured abortions.

A second category of persons is represented by those working for companies which produce and market vaccines deriving from aborted fetuses. The managers of pharmaceutical companies have a duty to produce, distribute and offer vaccines which are ethically acceptable; in not doing so, they incur a grave moral responsibility, which is distinct from the responsibilities of their employees. Therefore, as emphasised in *Dignitatis personae*, “in organisations where cell lines of illicit origin are being utilised, the responsibility of those who make the decision to use them is not the same

²⁶ http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia//congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20081208_dignitas-personae_en.html.

as that of those who have no voice in such a decision” (section 35).

Finally, there is the category of persons who must necessarily make use of vaccines for medical reasons and doctors who inject those vaccines. Their moral responsibility is of an entirely different kind. On this, as stated in the instruction, “danger to the health of children could permit parents to use a vaccine which was developed using cell lines of illicit origin, while keeping in mind that everyone has the duty to make known their disagreement and to ask that their healthcare system make other types of vaccines available” (section 35).

The Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith reiterates this in 2020, in these words: “when ethically irreproachable Covid-19 vaccines are not available (e.g., in countries where vaccines without ethical problems are not made available to physicians and patients, or where their distribution is more difficult due to special storage and transport conditions, or when various types of vaccines are distributed in the same country but health authorities do not allow citizens to choose the vaccine with which to be inoculated) *it is morally acceptable to receive Covid-19 vaccines that have used cell lines from aborted fetuses in their research and production process*” (section 2).

“The fundamental reason for considering the use of these vaccines morally licit is that the kind

of cooperation in evil (*passive material cooperation*) in the procured abortion from which the cell lines originate is, on the part of those making use of the resulting vaccines, remote. (...) It should be emphasised, however, that the morally licit use of these types of vaccine, in the particular conditions that make it so, does not in itself constitute a legitimation, even indirect, of the practice of abortion, and necessarily assumes the opposition to this practice by those who make use of these vaccines” (section 3).

“In fact, the licit use of such vaccines does not and should not in any way imply that there is a moral endorsement of the use of cell lines proceeding from aborted fetuses”²⁷ (section 4).

There is no yielding to or compromise with abortion in this position.

Direct participation in evil?

The strongest pontifical document against abortion published to date is the encyclical

²⁷ Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction *Dignitas personae*, section 35: “When the illicit action is endorsed by the laws which regulate health care and scientific research, it is necessary to distance oneself from the evil aspects of that system in order not to give the impression of a certain toleration or tacit acceptance of actions which are gravely unjust. Any appearance of acceptance would in fact contribute to the growing indifference to, if not the approval of, such actions in certain medical and political circles.”

Evangelium vitae by Pope John Paul II on 25 March 1995. In sections 73 and 74 of this encyclical, John Paul II broaches the problem of cooperation with evil, with particular reference to abortion and euthanasia. The Pope affirms that “in the case of an intrinsically unjust law, such as a law permitting abortion or euthanasia, it is therefore never licit to obey it, or to ‘take part in a propaganda campaign in favour of such a law, or vote for it’”.

The Pope refers to a situation in which there is a parliamentary vote over a more restrictive abortion law, and where the problem of conscience arises, and he affirms that: “when it is not possible to overturn or completely abrogate a pro-abortion law, an elected official, whose absolute personal opposition to procured abortion was well-known, could licitly support proposals aimed at limiting the harm done by such a law and at lessening its negative consequences at the level of general opinion and public morality. This does not in fact represent an illicit cooperation with an unjust law but rather a legitimate and proper attempt to limit its evil aspects” (section 73).

This passage has given rise to a number of different interpretations, but it is clarified in a later passage in which the Pope states the following: “in order to shed light on this difficult

question, it is necessary to recall the general principles concerning cooperation in evil actions. Christians, like all people of goodwill, are called upon under grave obligation of conscience not to cooperate formally in practices which, even if permitted by civil legislation, are contrary to God's law. Indeed, from a moral standpoint, it is never licit to cooperate formally in evil. Such cooperation occurs when an action, either by its very nature or by the form it takes in a concrete situation, can be defined as a direct participation in an act against innocent human life or sharing in the immoral intention of the person committing it. This cooperation can never be justified either by invoking respect for the freedom of others or by appealing to the fact that civil law permits it or requires it. Each individual in fact has moral responsibility for the acts which he personally performs: no one can be exempted from this responsibility, and on the basis of it everyone will be judged by God himself (cf. Rom 2:6; 14:12)" (section 74).

The Pope refers, above, to "direct participation in an act against innocent human life or sharing in the immoral intention of the person committing it". In such cases, according to *Evangelium vitae*, one can speak of culpable cooperation in evil. This means, for example,

that for a Catholic member of Parliament, it is possible to limit the damage of an unjust law already in force, either by voting through amendments for removal of a permissive provision or adding a restrictive provision.

However, if illicit provisions remain, he can, under no circumstances and by no means, incur responsibility for the wording, in itself entirely unjust, for example, in the case of a law which permits abortive practices, even if only in cases which are thought to be extreme.

An evil can be tolerated, without taking action against it; one can even regulate an evil, by reducing the freedom and scope of the evil act; but one cannot permit or regulate an evil by authorising it, because this would signify its approval and render the person in question complicit.²⁸ No circumstances and no good intention can ever transform an intrinsically bad act into a good or indifferent human act.²⁹

But does this apply to a person who vaccinates, or who is vaccinated? Are we confronted with a “direct participation in an act against innocent human life or sharing in the immoral intention of the person committing it”? A patient

²⁸ Cf. Claudio Vitelli, *Catholics faced with an unjust law*, in *Lepanto*, section 162 (December 2002), pp. 6-18.

²⁹ St Thomas of Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 89; John Paul II, encyclical *Veritatis splendor*, § 81.

who wants to be vaccinated does not want to abort an unborn child or trade his organs; he has not participated in the killing of a foetus, committed in the past; and as for the concatenation of historical events, the relationship between abortion and the use of the vaccine is very remote, having taken place in the distant past.

Moral cooperation with the past?

The moral question that arises is this: can there be cooperation with an evil that happened in the past?

In the nineties, Dr Susan Mackinnon, a pioneer in surgery in the peripheral nervous system at Washington University in St Louis, was unable to locate a nerve of her patient in a difficult operation. However, she knew of a book which could assist her: the *Atlas of Human Anatomy (Topographische Anatomie des Menschen)* by Eduard Pernkopf, considered to be the best example of anatomical drawings in the world, used by many surgeons dealing with the nervous system. Dr Mackinnon found the nerve in a few minutes, specifically due to illustrations in this volume, and saved her patient from amputation.

However, the author of the work, Professor

Eduard Pernkopf (1888-1955),³⁰ Chairman of the Faculty of Medicine in Vienna, was an ardent follower of Hitler and the drawings in the book derived from the bodies of hundreds of people murdered by the Nazis. His book was the centre of a heated ethical debate: there were those who affirmed that it was defiled by its past and wanted it to be removed from all bookshops, and others regarded its use as morally licit.

Dr Mackinnon turned to experts, such as Rabbi Joseph Polak,³¹ who had studied the holocaust and Dr Sabine Hildebrandt who had studied the Third Reich at length.³² These scholars, together with others, put together the Vienna Protocol: a series of recommendations on use of the book by Pernkopf, which were approved in 2017 by a group of experts from the Yad Vashem, the museum of the Holocaust in Jerusalem. The Protocol permits Professor Pernkopf's

³⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eduard_Pernkopfhttps://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eduard_Pernkopf. Cf also Nicholas Wade, Doctors Question Use of Nazi's *Medical Atlas*, in the *New York Times*, 26 November 1996; Keiligh Baker, *Eduard Pernkopf, The Nazi book of anatomy still used by surgeons*, in *BBC News*, 19 August 2019.

³¹ Joseph Polak, *After the Holocaust, the Bells Still Ring*, with a preface by Elie Wiesel, Urim Applications, Jerusalem 2015.

³² Sabine Hildebrandt, *How the Pernkopf Controversy Facilitated a Historical and Ethical Analysis of the Anatomical Sciences in Austria and Germany: A Recommendation for the Continued Use of the Pernkopf Atlas*, in *Clinical Anatomy*, 19 (2006), pp. 91-100 (2006). Cf also Giulio Meotti, *That medicine in Germany under Nazism: they were not monsters, only normal criminals*, in *Il Foglio*, 15 June 2019.

book to be used on condition that its origin was known and condemned.

This ethical decision, although not originating from a Catholic source, specifically due to its cause, makes us reflect on the difficulty of attributing moral responsibilities to a person who benefits from an evil committed by others in the past – but who clearly does not take part in the evil, rather on the contrary, explicitly condemns it.

In the Catholic world, this question has been the subject of an article by the moralist Cathleen Kaveny, entitled *Appropriation of Evil: Cooperation's Mirror Image*, published in 2000 in the journal *Theological Studies*,³³ and more recently of a speech by Professor Stefano Kampowski, reproduced in *Corrispondenza Romana*.³⁴ Cathleen Kaveny is an American scholar of theology and law; Stephan Kampowski is Professor of Philosophical Anthropology at the Pontifical Institute John Paul II for Studies on Marriage and the Family.³⁵

³³ Cf. Cathleen Kaveny, *Appropriation of Evil: Cooperation's Mirror Image*, in *Theological Studies*, 61 (2000), pp. 280-313; Ronald M. Green, *Benefiting from 'Evil': An Incipient Moral Problem in Human Stem Cell Research*, in *Bioethics*, 6 (2002), pp. 544-556; Alexander R. Pruss, *Cooperating with Past Evil and Use of Cell Lines Derived from Aborted Foetuses*, in *The Linacre Quarterly*, 71 (2004), pp. 335-350; Kevin L. Flannery, *Cooperation with Evil: Thomistic Tools of Analysis*, Catholic University Press, Washington DC 2019.

³⁴ <https://www.corrispondenzaromana.it/notizie-dalla-rete/cooperazione-appropriazione-e-vaccini-preparati-con-laiuto-di-ricerche-sulle-cellule-staminali-fetali>.

³⁵ Stephan Kampowski was one of the foremost critics of the moral ar-

The two authors apply the Pernkopf case to the debate over vaccines, arguing that the use of material deriving from procured abortions in scientific research could be seen as appropriation of evil rather than cooperation with evil, given that the act in question does not facilitate, but takes advantage of the act of another.

The case of appropriation of evil involves a responsibility even more limited than that of remote material cooperation with evil, because it does not pertain to an act performed in the present, but is associated with an act completed in the past.

Can we, in this case, speak of cooperation with evil? According to the two authors, apparently not, in particular, because there is no concomitance of the two acts. In the classic example of a person who holds a ladder for a thief, as an accomplice or a victim of threat, his cooperation in the theft – formal or material, proximate or remote as it may be – is concomitant with the act. But can there be cooperation with the evil performed in the past?

Given that the past cannot be changed today, Kampowski asserts that it is impossible for

guments put forward by Cardinal Kasper, in the essay, co-authored with Juan José Pérez-Soba, *The Gospel of the Family in the Synod debate in addition to the proposal of Cardinal Kasper*, with a preface by Cardinal George Pell, Cantagalli, Siena 2014.

anyone to provide material assistance to Nazi criminals of the 1930s and 1940s. There can, however, be cooperation with past evil – not by endorsing or approving of the fruit of the crime, but the intention with which it was performed. In this case, we will find ourselves faced with formal cooperation, rather than material cooperation. Material cooperation with an evil act committed in the past is metaphysically impossible, however, formal cooperation remains a metaphysical possibility, even if it relates to past acts. This consists of approval of such acts. According to Professor Kampowski, researchers who have used foetal stem cells to produce a stem cell line may not cooperate formally with the abortion, but benefit from immoral acts performed by another, without previously giving encouragement to or necessarily approving the act in question. “Not every time when we are benefiting from someone else’s evil action, does our benefiting signal formal cooperation with that evil.”

Let us now try to give an example under Law no. 194 on abortion in Italy. The judicial approval of that Law in 1978 was a gravely immoral act. Those responsible for Law no. 194, at a formal and material level, were those who approved it in Parliament and promulgated it as a law of the state. This formal cooperation is

today endorsed by all those who, in their intentions, words and acts, approve of that law, irrespective of the acts which make use of that law. Also, anyone who has recourse to abortion falls into a sin which is new and distinct, although their action is directly linked to Law 194.

In the case of the anti-Covid-19 vaccines, the vaccinator and the vaccinated do not cooperate in any way with an act of abortion performed in the past by those who illicitly derived cells from aborted foetuses. They appropriate the products of that iniquitous act, but drawing benefit from the evil action of another is not necessarily a formal cooperation with evil, just as there was no cooperation with the evil in the use of Pernkopf's book by Dr Mackinnon in order to save her patient.

Professor Kampowski accurately writes in the cited article: "It is simply not evident how someone getting vaccinated today with a vaccine of illicit origin assists or provides the material conditions for the abortions performed in the 1970s and 1980s, or, to put it more generally, how there can be material cooperation with evil acts performed in the past? In order to be able to rape the maiden, the master needs a ladder carried and held by his servant. The servant might not share his master's intentions, but still provides necessary conditions for him to

carry these out. To perform an abortion, an abortion doctor needs the scalpel provided by the nurse, and in a much more remote way, he also needs food, provided by the cook. The abortion doctor who, in 1972, aborted the foetus whose kidney cells were then used to produce the HEK-293 cell line does not need my getting vaccinated to provide any facilitating conditions for his or her action, which neither makes his action easier or harder. The past cannot be changed. No one today can assist in the performance of someone else's past action any more than he or she can prevent it."

Some of the best known Catholic bioethicists agree with Kampowski, stating that "it seems impossible for an individual to cooperate with an action that is now completed and exists in the past. Clearly, use of a vaccine in the present does not cause the one who is immunised to share in the immoral intention or action of those who carried out the abortion in the past. Neither does such use provide some circumstance essential to the commission of that past act. Thus use of these vaccines would seem permissible".³⁶

³⁶ Edward J. Furton, in *Ethics & Medics*, section 3 (1999) pp. 3-4, <https://www.immunize.org/talking-about-vaccines/furton.pdf>.

The utilitarian contention: damage to health

The second contention put forward to justify the non-licity of the vaccination against Covid is frequently confused with the previous contention, although it differs because it is not based on theological and philosophical criteria, but resorts to “medical” or “prudential” motives.

In brief, the argument is as follows: immunisation is not at all certain and the side effects of the vaccination are not known. The risks are high considering the totally random benefit. There are those who put this argument forward in the context of the criticism of vaccinations in general, stating that they are damaging to the organism and can more usefully be replaced by a strengthening of the immune system.³⁷ There are those who add that what is about to be distributed is a vaccine containing RNA [ribonucleic acid], hence capable of interacting with the DNA of the recipient, whose genetic information could be modified with deleterious consequences for the organism as a whole. Finally, there are those who assert that someone who is vaccinated becomes a healthy carrier of the virus (rather than being immunised against it) and therefore, apart from placing their own

³⁷ For example, Pamela Acker in *Vaccination: a Catholic perspective*, Kolbe Centre for the Study of Creation, Jackson Va. 2020.

health at serious risk, they may also constitute a potential danger for others, who may be infected. The conclusion of these arguments on the grounds of damage to health, is that considering the high risks and low benefits, it is entirely immoral to resort to vaccination.

Here, however, the discussion shifts from the moral level to the scientific level. What we are seeking to establish is whether receiving the vaccine, irrespective of its efficacy, is a licit or intrinsically evil act because of being “defiled” by abortion.

This question must be answered by moral theology, not science. And moral theology asserts that the vaccination against Covid is not in itself illicit. Those who assert the contrary often belong to the category of those who deny the existence of the pandemic, despite the fact that, in one year, over 113 million people have been diagnosed throughout the world, and 2.5 million of those have died.³⁸

It is true that the vaccine is at the experimental stage and its consequences have not yet been fully tested, due to the health emergency. However, the calculation of risks and benefits falls

³⁸ Cf. *AdnKronos*, 26 February 2021. https://www.adnkronos.com/covid-nel-mondo-oltre-2-milioni-di-morti_2AQxn37KREkHQiChS4foWO#~:text=Sono%oltre%20113%20milioni%20i,624%20decessi%20a%20livello%20globale.

above all on medical science. Currently, claims that the risks outweigh the benefits are refuted by untold numbers of doctors throughout the world, who acknowledge all the problematic aspects of the vaccines, but assert that, from a health point of view, not vaccinating would be far worse than vaccination.

In Italy, in addition to the Ministry of Health and regional medical structures, there are also the Higher Health Institute (ISS), the principal research centre which provides technical and scientific advice in matters of public health, and the AIFA. At European level, there is the EMA (European Medicines Agency), but above all, in Europe and throughout the world, there are hundreds of thousands of immunologists, virologists, infectious disease specialists and epidemiologists who recommend the vaccination. Only a small minority disagrees with them. This minority is, generally speaking, made up of doctors with little authority, seeking media exposure and unable to provide documented evidence for their claims.

Research into collateral damage caused by some vaccines is part of scientific progress. However, this research loses credibility when it claims to present its findings in the context of a macro-conspiracy causing damage to humanity and using this in an ethical battle. For the time

being, while at a personal level each individual is free to choose whether to receive the official medicine or so-called alternative medicines, one cannot impose moral choices based on questionable scientific data.

Furthermore, from a moral viewpoint, reliance purely on the risk/benefit calculation, according to the proportionality criterion, leads to a utilitarian balance, characteristic of proportionalism. The error here is to rely, not on the objective good of the desired purpose, but on calculation of the anticipated results. John Paul II, however, teaches that “the weighing of the goods and evils foreseeable as a consequence of an action is not an adequate method for determining whether the choice of that concrete kind of behaviour is ‘according to its species’, or ‘in itself’, morally good or bad, licit or illicit” (VS, section 77; cf. also sections 65, 74).

The right to refuse the vaccine, relying on utilitarian calculations, is not in fact absolute, but should take into account the common good. A healthcare provider, for example, or a professor, who has direct contact with many other people, also has a moral duty to consider the health of those people, and not merely their own. But also, those who write in blogs, circulating utilitarian arguments without sufficient evidence, are carrying heavy moral responsibilities.

In the face of these stringent arguments, there are those who side-step the problem, for example, by introducing the question of a duty to return stolen goods. According to this contention, the cells of an aborted baby are not the legitimate property of the institutions or researchers who make use of them and the appropriation and evil use of the foetal tissue is a great breach of justice.

Here, however, we are discussing the murder of innocents, not possession of the mortal remains of a victim, a problem which is entirely peripheral. Furthermore, the duty not to derive benefit from stolen property is not absolute. Stolen goods, even if acquired in good faith, must be returned to the legitimate owner, but this principle is clearly not intended to be applied beyond a certain practical limit. The owner of a plot of land who finds a treasure buried by a thief two hundred years ago is not obliged to trace the descendants of the original owners and return the treasure.³⁹

Professor Danilo Castellano also analysed this aspect, emphasising that there can be situations in which the use of a cadaver does not constitute a moral crime.⁴⁰ A typical case was

³⁹ <http://casuistrycentral.blogspot.com/2021/02/tainted-vaccines-reply-to-copenhagan.html>.

⁴⁰ Danilo Castellano, *Anti-Covid 19 vaccinations: a complex bioethical*

that of the air accident in 1972 in the Andes, in which the survivors, who were stuck for 71 days, were obliged to feed on the bodies of their travel companions.

Moreover, the Church permits the use of cadavers for autopsies and transplants, when they do not involve the death of the donor, and also research into foetal tissues deriving from spontaneous abortions. What must be condemned is the illicit use of the cadaver, but a lawful use is, in specific cases, admissible.

Obligation of the vaccine and the common good

There remains the delicate issue of the possible compulsory imposition of vaccines. On 21 December 2020, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith declared the following: “It is evident, in the light of practical reason, that the vaccination is not, as a rule, a moral obligation and must therefore be voluntary.”

However, these words were later added: “In all cases, from an ethical standpoint, *the morality of the vaccination depends not only on the duty to protect one’s own health, but also pursuit of the common good.* If there is no other

and biojuridical problem, in <https://www.filodiritto.com/le-vaccinazioni-anti-covid-19-un-complesso-problema-bioetico-e-biogiuridico>.

means of halting, or merely preventing, the epidemic, it is good to permit recommendation of vaccination, in particular to protect those who are weakest and more exposed. Those who at any rate, for reasons of conscience, refuse vaccines produced with cell lines derived from aborted foetuses, must strive to avoid, through prophylactic methods and appropriate behaviour, becoming vehicles for transmission of the infective agent. In particular they should avoid any risk to the health of those who cannot be vaccinated for clinical or other reasons, and the most vulnerable persons” (section 5).

At this point, it must be clearly stated that the argument that it would, in principle, be illicit to impose an obligation of vaccination against Covid or other diseases, is a liberal argument, which does not correspond to Catholic doctrine because it neglects a pillar of classic moral philosophy – namely, the concept of “the common good”, founded on the Christian natural law, which has its foundation in God, the Supreme Good.

The difference between liberalism and Catholicism is that Catholic social doctrine places the common good above the individual good.⁴¹ Man

⁴¹ In the extensive literature on the common good, cf. Father Antonio Messineo, *The Common Good*, in the *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, vol. 2, Vatican City 1949, coll. 1217-1226.

is, by nature, a social being and society is not an agglomerate of individuals, but one organism, to which the principle set out by St Thomas of Aquinas applies: “*Bonum commune est melius quam bonum unius.*”⁴² If those governing consider that the common good of the population requires mass vaccination, they have a right to impose it, according to the principle that the common good takes precedence over the good of individuals, of course providing that they do not legislate against the Christian natural order.

Compulsory vaccination is not, as some believe, the result of a modern totalitarian state. In Europe, the obligation of vaccination arose in the early 19th century, when Edward Jenner (1749-1823) discovered the smallpox vaccine.⁴³ The King of Naples, Ferdinand IV of Bourbon, was among the first to apply the new theory in Italy in March 1801, with a mass vaccination programme in the populations of Palermo and Naples. On 20 June 1822, in the Papal States, the Cardinal Secretary of State, Ercole Consalvi, issued a decree which instituted a Central Vaccination Committee for inoculation throughout that territory.⁴⁴

⁴² St Thomas of Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 47, a.10.

⁴³ In Italy, the obligation to vaccinate all newborn babies against smallpox was suspended in 1977 and abolished in 1981. In the interim, vaccinations against diphtheria (1939), poliomyelitis (1966), tetanus (1968) and hepatitis B (1991) were made obligatory.

⁴⁴ *Literary ephemerides in Rome*, Volume VIII, 1822, pp. 102-112. Leo

The political and institutional regimes have changed, but compulsory vaccination has been in force without interruption in Italy from 1888.⁴⁵ In the space of 150 years, there was a Liberal State, a Fascist State and a Democratic Republic, but the obligatory vaccination did not change.

Article 32 of the Italian constitution says that “no one can be obliged to undergo a specific medical treatment, unless in accordance with a legal provision”, but permits the legislator to impose a vaccination obligation in the event of a medical emergency, because health is protected, not only as a fundamental right of the individual, but in the interest of the community.

In a judgement pronounced on 18 January 2018, the Constitutional Court broached the question of the constitutional legitimacy of compulsory vaccination, raised by the Veneto Region.⁴⁶ According to the ruling pronounced by Judge Marta Cartabia, the need for the prevention of infectious diseases can impose uniform measures on the entire national territory, for the purpose of achieving herd immunity “which requires vaccination coverage in a given com-

XII made obligatory vaccination optional, but certainly did not consider it to be immoral. Cf. http://www.brunacci.it/upl/Editto_1822.pdf.

⁴⁵ <https://www.radiospada.org/2021/01/ritorno-al-reale-un-parere-giuridico-sulla-questione-vaccini>.

⁴⁶ https://www.cortecostituzionale.it/actionSchedaPronuncia.do?param_ecli=ECLI:IT:COST:2018:5.

munity, to eliminate the disease and protect those who, due to specific medical conditions, cannot undergo preventive treatment”. This falls “into the discretion – and political responsibility – of Government bodies to assess the urgency of intervention, in the light of new data and epidemiological phenomena emerging in the interim, also based on the precautionary principle which should be applied to a highly delicate situation regarding the health of each citizen, such as that of prevention”.

The National Bioethics Committee expressed a reasonable opinion in a declaration of 27 November 2020, to the effect that “every effort must be made to achieve or maintain optimal vaccination coverage, without ruling out the imposition of a vaccine obligation in the event of an emergency, in particular for professional groups most exposed to the infection and transmission of the disease”. “Voluntary compliance by the population should be preferred and encouraged” as desirable for society.⁴⁷

Hence, a national Government in Italy or other countries, could consider recourse to compulsory vaccination for all, or specific categories of citizens (the elderly, social and health workers, military forces, police, ambulance workers,

⁴⁷ <http://bioetica/governo/it/it/document/parere-e-risposte/i-vaccini-covid-19-aspetti-etici-per-la-ricerca-il-coste-e-la-distribuzione>.

teachers, and others), through a parliamentary legislation. Would this be a “medical dictatorship”? Is it a dictatorship to close borders to protect national health? Would it be illicit to request, where there are epidemics, a medical certificate from non-EU immigrants wishing to cross our borders? Would it not be in the common good to require this?

When the cholera epidemic surged through Europe in 1830, there was no vaccine against cholera until the end of the 19th century. Pope Gregory XVI (1831-1846) could not stop the spread of cholera in the Papal States, but set up a severe medical dictatorship involving medical barricades controlled by the military and rigorously preventing anyone from crossing the borders. There was a quarantine of at least fourteen days, “medical passports” for free movement, the suspension of all religious festivals, feasts and gatherings of every kind. Violations of these measures could lead as far as to life imprisonment and the death penalty. An “Extraordinary Commission of Public Safety” was instituted in Rome, presided over by Giuseppe Cardinal Sala and assisted by a Standing Medical Council.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Cf. Marcello Teodonio, Francesco Negro, *Cholera, homeopathy and other stories*, Rome 1837, Fratelli Palombi, Rome 1988; Francesco Leoni, *Cholera epidemics in the final decade of the Pontifical States*, Apes, Rome 1993.

Two hundred years later, on 8 February 2021, the Chairman of the Pontifical Committee for the Vatican City State pronounced a second Decree to the effect that “an employee who refuses without proven health reasons” to undergo preventive medical examinations and vaccination could suffer “consequences to a varying degree which could lead to the termination of employment”.⁴⁹

On 18 February an explanatory note was issued by the Governorship, which reiterated that adherence to the vaccination campaign was voluntary, but “it must be taken into account that refusal by the interested party could create a risk for him or herself, for others or for the work environment. For this reason, in the interests of protection of the community, provision could be made for anyone who refuses vaccination without medical reasons, to take measures which, firstly, minimise the risk in question and, secondly, make it possible to seek alternative solutions which would make it possible for the interested party to work”.⁵⁰

This prudential position does not appear unreasonable. Whilst a debate is legitimate, it cannot be argued that the decree of the Vatican, in the

⁴⁹ <https://www.vaticanstate.va/phocadownload/leggi-decreti/normativa-generale/N.%20CCCXCVIII.pdf>.

⁵⁰ <https://www.vaticannews.va/it/vaticano/news/2021-02/nota-vaccini-governatorato-vaticano-coronavirus-norme-lavoro.html>.

case of a health emergency, is of itself illicit. If the authorities of the Vatican City State consider that because of the epidemic, there is a risk to the health of its citizens, they have the right to require compulsory vaccination. And if vaccination is not a moral obligation, it is equally certain that compulsory vaccination is not an immoral act.

It can happen that, facing a Government authority which imposes a compulsory vaccination, there are those who consider it more prudent not to be vaccinated, based on information at their disposal. Measures taken by the authority and decisions taken by the citizen are not in themselves immoral. The authority has the right to impose compulsory vaccination, if it considers it to be just in view of the common good; the citizen has a right to seek to avoid this vaccination if he considers the position of the authority to be unfounded. But this avoidance of the vaccination is in no way a moral obligation.

If the imposition of the vaccination is prospectively disproportionate, but is not in itself immoral, the citizen is entitled to obtain a risk/benefit calculation which, in this case, does not represent an application of proportionalism to moral law, but to one's own interests, and one can make his or her own choices on the basis of these calculations.

If, on the contrary, the imposition of the vac-

ination was in itself immoral, citizens would not only have a right, but a moral duty, to risk not only dismissal, but even death, to avoid submitting to it. But it will be necessary to demonstrate that the vaccination is immoral in the light of incontrovertible moral principles, rather than debatable medical or scientific hypotheses, such as damage to health. Mass vaccination may not necessarily succeed in defeating the Covid, but this has nothing to do with the ethical issue we are confronting. We must return to the heart of the problem we wish to tackle, which is not the obligation to receive the anti-Covid vaccination, but its moral liceity.

To each, according to his or her responsibilities

The consequences of the pandemic are before the eyes of us all: economic crisis, mental instability, increasing feelings of intolerance, frustration, anger. In this uncertain and confused environment, the medical and political authorities are seeking mass vaccination.

If we consider that we have good reasons to avoid this obligation, we have a right to do so, but we must not confuse the reasons for medical precaution with reasons deriving from an objective moral law which has universal value. Indi-

vidual precautions must harmonise with the common good, if we do not wish to fall into selfish individualism, disregarding the health interests of those close to us.

It is also curious that many wish to establish non-existent links between causes and effects at a moral level and fail to perceive the potential logical consequences. Today, an anti-Covid facemask we purchase is probably made in China and China also produces most of clothing worn in the West. However, these masks and clothes are the work of slaves in the Chinese Communist regime: a criminal regime not yet eradicated like the National-Socialist regime, but very much alive and aggressive against the West. In this case, should we not also speak of cooperation with the fruits of a monstrous criminal regime? There could be many other examples extending to every area of our lives.

As rightly observed by Dr Joseph Shaw, “Refusing to do intrinsically evil actions will occasionally require heroism, but it is always possible. Avoiding all cooperation with evil, even remote material cooperation is simply impossible. I cannot vote, pay taxes, use the internet, open a bank account, or patronise a large shop, without remote material cooperation with evil: abortion, usury, unjust wars, pornography, slave labour, and so on. We must protest, of

course, but even our protests can lose their force if we are protesting about everything.”⁵¹

It is not heroism, but sentimentalism which emerges when it is said: “Of course, it is certainly true that vaccination is licit. However, I want nothing to do with abortion, and therefore I refuse the vaccine.” On the surface, the case seems similar to the situation of an expectant mother who refuses to undergo lawful removal of a tumour for fear that this may, even indirectly, cause the death of a child in her womb. In reality, the opposite is true. St Gianna Beretta Molla gave her life to save the life of another human being. A doctor who refuses to vaccinate or be vaccinated could arguably be accused of not saving the life of a neighbour, and in fact endangering that life, and hence assuming grave responsibility.

When there is uncertainty, reference is made to the law in force, and moralists assume grave responsibilities if they suggest measures more rigid than those in the law, which in this case is the rules of the Congregation the Doctrine of the Faith, reiterated in the space of fifteen years.

These rules do not oblige us to be vaccinated, but also no moral law exists which can impose on us a moral duty not to be vaccinated. We can-

⁵¹ <https://casuistrycentral.blogspot.com/2021/02/tainted-vaccines-reply-to-copenhagan.html>.

not make our opinion a rule of conduct vis-à-vis our neighbour. The alternative to the dictatorship of relativism is not the moral relativism of those who set up their conscience, emancipated from any reference to the authority, as a supreme rule of action. The rule for both social and spiritual life is subordination, not self-determination.

What should be done therefore? Action follows reflection, and does not precede it. If the anti-Covid vaccination were in itself immoral, it would certainly be proper to set up a campaign against mass vaccination, whatever the consequences. If, however, as we have sought to demonstrate, vaccination does not in itself pose a moral problem, action must adhere to prudential and strategic rules, designed to achieve the best result and using licit means. From this standpoint, it is clear that to create or encourage a new pro-life movement with the aim of mobilising public opinion against anti-Covid vaccines, would have two disastrous consequences: firstly, it would, irremediably and without justification, divide the pro-life movement, which has grown considerably over the last twenty years; secondly, rather than gathering a stronger consensus in public opinion, it would discredit and isolate the movement.

It is evident that strategic rules cannot take precedence over the rules of the moral order, but

it is equally evident that one cannot base an effective strategy on weak and moral reasons lacking in substance. It is therefore necessary to avoid splitting the pro-life movement, and to renounce anti-vaccine crusades which are unjustified and counter-productive, and instead to renew with greater intensity and determination the public campaign against abortion. If we want to get the pharmaceutical companies to use adult stem cells rather than foetal cells for their research, we must fight to eliminate or diminish abortions, not vaccinations. Immoral experiments on aborted fetuses must stop, but it will not stop as a result of denouncing vaccines, which risks undermining our credibility: they will cease because of our “no” to abortion, a categorical “no”, without exceptions and compromise, to the “structures of sin”⁵² of our time.

Those who wish to seriously fight against abortion should focus on the roots of the anti-natalist culture of death, which generates experiments on human fetuses, and not become

⁵² “Finally, we cannot underestimate the network of complicity which is now extending to international institutions, foundations and associations, which systematically fight for legalisation to allow abortion throughout the world. Abortion therefore goes beyond the responsibility of individuals and the damage caused, assuming a strongly social dimension; grave injury is inflicted on society and its culture by those who should be its builders and defenders. (...) We are confronted with what can be defined as a ‘structure of sin’ against human life not yet born” (*Evangelium vitae*, section 59).

isolated in a fruitless battle against vaccines placing responsibility on those who have none.

It should be added that it is an illusion to think of defeating the coronavirus with human powers alone, such as mass vaccination. Epidemics, like all collective disasters, are willed or permitted by God to punish humanity for its sins. Sins, private or public, are transgressions of the divine and natural law. Only respect for this law can remove the evils looming over the world.

These considerations refer us to a broader framework of philosophy and theology of history which lies beyond the moral question we have endeavoured to examine. However, it is necessary to remember that knowing and observing the law is not possible without the help of grace, through which God works in us and causes the good we do. Divine grace illuminates for us the Truth, which can only be found if we love and desire to know it. And it is only the truth which we have sought in these pages.

The teaching of the Gospel

St Paul is a guide for us.⁵³ The Roman em-

⁵³ This example has been opportunely cited by Fr Arnaud Sélégnny of the Society of St Pius X. cf. <https://sspax.org/en/news-events/news/it-morally-permissible-use-covid-19-vaccine-62290>.

perors imposed, under pain of death, that sacrifices should be made to idols, but their faith imposed on Christians that they should not scatter even one grain of incense on pagan altars, because this would have been an apostasy. The martyrs of the early centuries, like all martyrs in the Church, chose death rather than the apostasy of their faith. No compromise was possible.

However, a moral question which divided the Christians of Corinth was put to St Paul, who exhorted his disciples to be prepared for martyrdom: is it permitted to eat meat sacrificed to the false gods of pagans? The meat offered to idols in a sacrifice was only partially burnt; the rest was distributed to priests or sold on public markets. This was a very important question for the Christians of Corinth, because all the butcheries in Corinth used meat immolated to idols.

So the question was: does a Christian who eats this meat commit an apostasy? Does he not perhaps cooperate with evil by entering into concatenation of causes with idolatry?

The response of St Paul is reassuring and prudent at the same time. "But as for the meats that are sacrificed to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no God but one." (1 Cor 8:4)

Therefore, eating meat sacrificed to idols is

morally lawful and does not involve any sin. This was the doctrine of the Church and a Christian instructed in his faith should have known this. However, according to St Paul, not all Christians in Corinth were capable of understanding this. So he adds: “But there is not knowledge in every one. For some until this present, with conscience of the idol: eat as a thing sacrificed to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.” (*Ibid* 8:7)

What is defiled is not the meat, but the weak conscience of some Christians, who used to eat immolated meat in a religious act as pagans. They believed that, if they continued to eat the meat like any other food after having been converted, they were committing an act of idolatry. This was a typical case of an *erroneous conscience*. Their erroneous conscience led them either to be scandalised at seeing other Christians eating this meat or, believing that they were committing an evil, to eat it out of human respect and therefore sin, while not committing any act that in itself was illicit.⁵⁴

Thus, St Paul reproaches those who did not consider this weakness of conscience and ate meat, immolated to idols, scandalising their

⁵⁴ An illuminating comment has been made by Don Dolindo Ruotolo in *New Testament. Letters of St Paul the apostle*, Casa Mariana, Naples 2008, pp. 639-642.

brothers and driving them to commit an evil act. “But take heed lest perhaps this your liberty become a stumbling block to the weak. For if a man see him that hath knowledge sit at meat in the idol’s temple, shall not his conscience, being weak, be emboldened to eat those things which are sacrificed to idols? And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ hath died? (1 Cor 8:9-11)

This approach of St Paul is, in my opinion, applicable to those who today affirm that never and under no circumstances would it be licit to have a vaccination. Let us imagine that someone remains convinced of this argument. However, given that his conscience is weak, he agrees to the vaccination, due to fear, for example of losing their job. In this case he is, although performing a licit act, committing a sin, because he is convinced, according to an erroneous conscience, that he is committing a sin. The responsibility for this sin falls upon the person who has given incorrect teaching.

We must recall that conscience is the immediate subjective rule of morality.⁵⁵ Conscience does not create the law, but discovers and

⁵⁵ More precisely: “moral conscience is the judgement of the practical intellect which, founded on the light of the first moral principles, evaluates the morality of our acts in their concrete singularity” (Garcia de Haro, *The Christian Life*, p. 387).

applies it in the concrete case: when it rightly evaluates the action, the conscience is true, but when, out of ignorance or ill will, it distances itself from the truth, it is erroneous or false. If someone performs a materially evil act, ignoring the evil thereof, but is convinced that it is good, he is not committing a fault. But a materially good act, such as receiving vaccination, can constitute a fault when performed against the judgement of an erroneous conscience, which considers it to be evil.⁵⁶

However, a person who spreads a contention that conflicts with the Ordinary Magisterium of the Church, and is morally more rigid, must consider the risk of assuming responsibility for the sin of his brothers for what St Paul calls the “weakness of conscience”. On this St Thomas says: “Any affirmation on what is a mortal sin, if there is no express awareness of its veracity, is dangerous (...).”⁵⁷

St Alphonsus, in his turn, in his great work on morality, wrote these admirable words: “Since it is certain, or considered to be certain... that things should not be imposed on men under pain of grave fault, unless there is an evident reason for it (...) considering the present fragility of the human condition, it is not always true that it is safer to lead

⁵⁶ Jolivet, *Morality*, pp. 208-209; Mausbach, *Moral Theology*, I, pp. 209-210.

⁵⁷ St Thomas of Aquinas, *Quodlibet*, IX a. 15.

souls to the narrowest path, as we see that the Church has condemned both laxity and rigorism.”⁵⁸

However, in terms of a conclusive moral judgement, this point does not concern us, even if it is very significant. What is of interest to us is the teaching of St Paul: meat sacrificed to idols is the result of a sin, but is not itself a sin and can be eaten by Christians.

Similarly, we could say that the human remains used for vaccines today are the result of sin, but in grave circumstances, Catholics can make use of them, for example, in order to protect their lives and the lives of those dear to them. The “evil”, as taught by St Paul, lies in the actions and intentions of men, not in the things as such, which in themselves are all good.

Our Lord taught in the Gospels: “Hear ye me all, and understand. There is nothing from without a man that entering into him, can defile him. But the things which come from a man, those are they that defile a man.” When he left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked Him to explain that parable, and Jesus answered: “Do you not understand, that whatsoever enter-

⁵⁸ St Alphonso Maria de’ Liguori, *Theologia moralis*, cit. p. 53, which adds: “As accurately advised by St Antonino, discussing when an act should be condemned as mortal sin or not: if one cannot rely on the explicit authority of Holy Scripture, or on a Canon, or on a decision of the Church, or on an evident reason, the act can only be categorised with great difficulty.”

eth into the mouth, goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the privy? But the things which proceed out of the mouth, come forth from the heart, and those things defile a man. For from the heart come forth evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false testimonies, blasphemies. These are the things that defile a man. But to eat with unwashed hands doth not defile a man.” And when the disciples told him that the Pharisees had been scandalised, he answered: “Let them alone: they are blind, and leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into the pit.” (Mark 7:1-23; Matt 15:10-20)

The cells of a murdered baby are in themselves good, just as a baby conceived in rape is not defiled by the sin of the father. There is only one sin which defiles, and that is original sin. For actual sins, free consent of intelligence and will are required.

The Church’s teaching permits the use of cell lines derived from the tissues of stillborn foetuses and, under certain conditions, those deriving from procured abortions.⁵⁹ As long as we loudly disapprove of the murder of unborn chil-

⁵⁹ A balanced exposition of the doctrine of the Church on the use of vaccines derived from aborted foetuses is offered in *Moral Guidance on COVID-19 Vaccines* by the Bishop of Spokane, Thomas Daly: <https://dioceseofspokane.org/guidance-on-covid-19-vaccines>.

dren, we are not committing a sin, when taking a vaccine derived from the cells of aborted children; we accept the fact that the one who has unjustly lost his life, now restores life, not only to us, but also to those who kill, unjustly market parts of those bodies, and yet are now obliged to seek protection through them.

We must be loud and clear: it is not licit to kill the innocent. However, anyone who accepts the vaccine is not linked in concatenation with the executioner, but possibly shares moral solidarity with the victim. He who is vaccinated suffers an injustice perpetrated by others, but does not participate in it.

This is the teaching of the Gospel. This is the teaching of St Thomas of Aquinas, St Alphonsus Maria de Liguori and the entire moral tradition of the Church.

The Church has condemned anyone who states that “it is not licit to follow the probable opinion, or the more probable among the probable”.⁶⁰ If the contention of the moral liceity of the vaccination was only a probable opinion, it would be licit to follow it. But this contention is not an opinion, it is a rule laid down by the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, in accordance with the principles of traditional moral

⁶⁰ Decree of the Holy Office on 24 August 1690 against the errors of Jansenists, in Denzinger-H., no. 2303.

philosophy and theology.

The Church is not a liquid society, it is an institution which pronounces juridical and moral rules, which should be adhered to, unless they are in contradiction with the perennial Magisterium of the Church, the teaching of the popes or the doctrine of the Gospel.

This is the case in the teaching on the liceity of the vaccination against the coronavirus – a sad chapter in contemporary history, a burden we must carry with immense faith in divine Wisdom and Goodness, which never allows us to be confronted with insoluble moral situations.

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