News
Vatican
Pope Francis is pictured through an ornament on the Christmas tree as he leads the Angelus

Pope Francis is pictured through an ornament on the Christmas tree as he leads the Angelus from the window of his studio overlooking St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Dec. 20. (CNS/Vatican Media)



by Joshua J. McElwee

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The Vatican's doctrinal office issued a note Dec. 21 saying it is "morally acceptable" for Catholics to take vaccines against the coronavirus, in what appears an unprecedented effort to convince believers to inoculate themselves to help end the global pandemic.

Addressing concerns that some of the new vaccines were developed using cell lines connected to tissue obtained from two abortions decades ago, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith said the "grave danger" of spreading the coronavirus outweighs those concerns.

"When ethically irreproachable COVID-19 vaccines are not available … it is morally acceptable to receive COVID-19 vaccines that have used cell lines from aborted fetuses in their research and production process," said the doctrinal office.

"All vaccinations recognized 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 cooperation with the abortion from which the cells used in production of the vaccines derive," it continued.

The doctrinal office says its note was approved by Pope Francis on Dec. 17.

Some Catholics have expressed concerns that several of the new coronavirus vaccines, including those from Pfizer/BioNTech, Moderna and AstraZeneca, might have used cells connected to the aborted fetuses, either in their development or testing phases.

The Vatican's doctrinal office says it is not giving a "moral endorsement" to the cell lines that were used in producing the vaccines, but says the connection to the aborted material is "remote."

Although the Vatican note does not recommend that vaccination against the coronavirus be made mandatory, it says "the morality of vaccination depends not only on the duty to protect one's own health, but also on the duty to pursue the common good."

"In the absence of other means to stop or even prevent the epidemic, the common good may recommend vaccination, especially to protect the weakest and most exposed," says the note.

If some people choose not to take the vaccine for reasons of conscience, the Vatican says those persons "must do their utmost to avoid … becoming vehicles for the transmission of the infectious agent."

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The chairmen of the U.S. bishops' doctrine and pro-life committees had previously addressed the morality of the coronavirus vaccines in a Dec. 14 note that was less fulsome in its endorsement of the inoculations.

While the American prelates recommended Catholics use the Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna vaccines, they said the product from AstraZeneca "should be avoided" if alternatives were available.

The Vatican's doctrinal congregation is traditionally considered the highest authority on the Catholic Church's doctrine, beside the pope or an ecumenical council.

Throughout the pandemic, Francis has exhorted Catholics to follow the instructions of health authorities in order to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

During his weekly Angelus address in St. Peter's Square Dec. 20, the pontiff told people not to "lament" about things they have been unable to do because of the pandemic precautions and to instead think of doing something for those in need.

The Vatican's note also calls it a "moral imperative" for governments and pharmaceutical companies to offer the coronavirus vaccines "to the poorest countries in a manner that is not costly for them."

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