

THE MORAL ISSUE ON VACCINATION: ANOTHER ATTEMPT AT JUSTIFICATION BY THE SSPX

In an article entitled *Practical Considerations on Vaccination Against Covid-19* dated September 24, 2021, the US website of the Society of St Pius X offers further advice on the dilemma presented by the Covid-19 virus and the pressure to undertake vaccination with vaccines compromised in their provenance by reliance on cells taken from an aborted child. The moral theologians who drafted the piece treat the issue as one of prudence—*recta ratio agibilium*—rather one of moral principle and thereby mislead their readers. Prudence has to do with the selection of which, among possible actions, right reason directs us to choose. It assumes that none of the actions available involves a breach of the moral law. The article inverts the order of priorities by relegating the moral question to the end.

The following is what the article has to say on the moral question. To assist the reader in understanding our answers we have added identifying letters to the paragraphs.

What is Proposed

- A. [I]s it permissible to take advantage of a past abortion by being vaccinated with a product made from such cells? In other words, is the one who benefits from a past sin committing a sin himself? The answer is given by St. Thomas Aquinas: “It is one thing to consent or concur with someone in wickedness, another thing to use the wickedness of someone for good; for he consents or concurs with another in wickedness to whom it is pleasing that that other person engage in wickedness, and perhaps induces him to it, and this is always a sin; but he uses another’s wickedness who turns this evil that someone does to some good, and in this way God uses the sins of men by eliciting from them some good; hence it is lawful too for a man to use the sin of another for good.” (*De Malo*, q. XIII, a. 4, ad 17. See also *Summa Theologica*, II-II, 78, 4).
- B. Here it is question not of an evil which one commits oneself, but of a sin committed by another: and this is why it is first necessary to reprove the past sin and not to consent to its malice.
- C. This reprobation is internal, but it may also be necessary to manifest it externally, especially when it comes to avoiding the scandal that could arise from this use: either scandal towards neighbor, or risk of more or less relativizing the initial sin, out of habit or out of self-interest.
- D. We must then make it clear that we do not consent to the sin from which we profit: this is why we will be careful to act only for a “proportionate” reason.
- E. This means that the more serious and scandalous the past sin, the more important must be the reason to benefit from it; likewise, the closer this sin is to its good effect, that is, the more influence it has on this effect, the more one must demand a serious cause.
- F. In the present case, it should be remembered that, while abortion is a particularly heinous crime – which certainly involves the risk of scandal – it does, however, allow the manufacture of vaccines only indirectly and very remotely. The existence of a reasonable motive for consenting to be vaccinated is therefore possible: for example, the inevitable loss of one’s professional activity or social responsibilities, the need to visit an elderly person to support him and not to leave him alone...

- G. Thus, when there is a valid reason proportionate to the possible dangers, it is not immoral to be vaccinated with a product which has been prepared or tested with the above-mentioned fetal cells.

The Answer

A. Let us examine the two classes of conduct St Thomas identifies. One who relies on the virtuous promise of another to tell the truth is not tainted by the evil means that person uses to do so—*his swearing by false gods*. One who borrows from another is not tainted by the evil involved in the mode by which that other does so—*his exaction of usury*. In each case the subject performs a good act, or one which is morally neutral—relying on another’s word; borrowing money, or goods—in spite of the sin of the other. He uses the good provided by the other; the other’s wickedness is accidental, *extrinsic to his own act*. The sin of the other is no more than a condition, a cause *per accidens* of the good he does, and cannot alter the moral quality of his own act.

It is otherwise with one who suffers injection with a vaccine tainted in its provenance with moral evil. The evil in which he shares is a cause *per se* of the good he intends, intrinsic to his own act and affecting its moral character. He concurs in the wickedness of provider and injector. Being injected is not like eating or drinking, acts which, since they are natural, are *eo ipso* good. *Prima facie* injection is a *violent* act, against the order of nature and evil, unless it can be redeemed to the level of the *artificial*, and the good, by reason of the end for which it is done for, as St Thomas teaches, moral acts take their species according to what is intended. (*Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 64, a. 7) Thus vaccination takes its moral quality from the character of the substance to be injected. If the vaccine is morally compromised, so is the vaccination.

It will be objected that all the person wants by being injected is the benefit, or hoped-for benefit, to his health of protection against the virus; that is, all he desires is some good. Of course! If that was not the case he would have no reason for consenting. But one may not cooperate in evil that good may come of it. (*Romans* 3: 8) That principle is absolute. As to whether the good intentions of the one being injected may excuse this breach of the moral law, see below.

B. This statement is wrong: *it is* a question of evil one commits oneself, an act of cooperation, of concurring in another’s wickedness. The sin with which one is cooperating is not the *past* sin of abortion—it is impossible to cooperate with a past sin. It is the sin of profiting *in the present* from the use of cells in the present stolen from the murdered infant. Reproving the past sin while accepting what results from that sin in the vaccine is an exercise in logical and moral self-contradiction, of *saying* one thing and *doing* the opposite.

C. One who takes a tainted vaccine is involved in scandal in respect of abortion generally. There is only one way to avoid giving that scandal: refrain from using a tainted vaccine.

D. & E. The excuse of a ‘proportionate’ reason is fallacious. It is not licit to do evil that good may come of it. The principle suffers NO QUALIFICATION, no matter how ‘serious’ or

'proportionate' the individual may think his reason. That moral error of a proportionate reason was condemned explicitly by Pope John Paul II in *Veritatis Splendor* (August 6th 1993):

79. One must... reject the thesis, characteristic of... proportionalist theor[y], which holds that it is impossible to qualify as morally evil according to its species... the deliberate choice of certain kinds of behaviour or specific acts, apart from a consideration of the intention for which the choice is made or the totality of the foreseeable consequences of that act for all persons concerned.

The primary and decisive element for moral judgement is the object of the human act which establishes whether it is capable of being ordered to good and to the ultimate end which is God...

...

80. Reason attests that there are objects of the human act which by their very nature are incapable of being ordered to God because they radically contradict the good of the person made in his image. These are the acts which, in the Church's moral tradition, have been termed intrinsically evil (*intrinsice malum*): they are such *always and per se*, in other words, on account of their very object, and quite apart from the intentions of the one acting and the circumstances...

Pope Paul VI had taught the same in (*Humanae Vitae* June 25th, 1968, n.14).

Though it is true that sometimes it is lawful to tolerate a lesser moral evil in order to avoid a greater evil or in order to promote a greater good, it is never lawful, even for the gravest reasons, to do evil that good may come of it...

Implicit in the reasoning in these two paragraphs (D. & E.) is another problem. Its authors treat 'sin' as if it was a univocal term, signifying the same character in every breach of the moral law. But the term 'sin' is an analogous term, as are its cognates 'wickedness' and 'moral wrong'. That is, it signifies in the subjects of which it is said (its 'inferiors') a character which is somewhat same and somewhat un-same *but more un-same than same*. St Thomas attests to this in Question II, article 10 (Response) of his *De Malo* where he identifies four categories of sin in a descending order of grievousness.

F. & G. These paragraphs continue the confusion of the *past* evil of the abortion that gave rise to the cells, and the *present* evil of the use of effects of the stolen cells. The authors also adopt materialist rather than metaphysical terminology (i.e., the Church's terminology): using 'direct' and 'indirect' rather than 'immediate' and 'mediate'; 'close' and 'remote' (referring to place or time) rather than 'proximate' and 'remote' (referring to the vaccine's reality). The endeavour to excuse such behaviour for a 'proportionate' reason is addressed above.

Use of the infant's cells is reprehensible because the vaccine relies on them *immediately* and *proximately* because their use goes to determining the vaccine's quiddity or essence (*what it is*).

Concluding Remarks

The moral theologians of the *Society of St Pius X* display an insouciance about causality and its modes which leads to facile conclusions. Their indulgence in the moral theological error of proportionalism ensures that their opinions cannot be reconciled with the Church's constant teaching.

In December 2020, five Kazakhstani bishops led by Cardinal Pujats put the issues in telling perspective when they condemned the atheistic zeitgeist driving the push for vaccination in a statement which exposes the shallowness of the moral advice emanating from the Society of St Pius X:

Our society has created a substitute religion: health has been made the highest good, a substitute god to whom sacrifices must be offered—in this case, through a vaccine based on the death of another human life.¹

Finally, we should add a *monitum* for the reader. In presenting the moral reasons that militate against the use of tainted vaccines we are not trespassing on the realm of a person's private conscience. God alone is the judge of any man. In *the internal forum*, it is the individual under the guidance of his priest confessor who must resolve the application of the principles to the particular case, in the course of which there will be taken into account the current widespread confusion in understanding of the moral principles.

Our reasoning concerns only the objective situation, *the external forum*.

Michael Baker

October 11th, 2021 — *Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost*

Twenty Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

¹ See <https://www.crisismagazine.com/2020/covid-vaccines-the-ends-cannot-justify-the-means>