

Fr. Perozich comments —

This modern day article uses the technique of St. Thomas Aquinas in his Summa Theologica.

The style of presenting the “Objections” and then refuting them in the “On the Contrary” and “reply to objection” may require a little patience for us modern readers who say “just give me the bottom line”.

The “Objections” are the arguments of various people regarding a topic.

Later the “On the Contrary” are the refutations of the arguments.

Whether there is a moral obligation to be vaccinated

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Objection 1. It seems there is a moral obligation, for one is obligated to care for one's own body and to care likewise for the body of the neighbor, who by divine command is to be loved as oneself. Now, vaccination may render one's own body less likely to succumb to a viral infection and less likely to pass on such an infection to the potential harm of the neighbor. Therefore one ought to be vaccinated. As Vitoria says (*On the Law of War*, Q. 2, art. 2), "any person who has the power to prevent his neighbor's danger or loss is obliged to do so."

Objection 2. The civil authorities are ordained by God for the well being of human society, and the civil authorities think vaccination will serve the common good. As Augustine says (*Civ.* 19.16), the city of God "has no scruples in conforming to the laws of the earthly city which regulate things designed for the support of mortal life." Moreover, in times of war, says Vitoria, citizens may presume that the authorities are acting in good faith and that they "may lawfully go to war trusting the judgment of their superiors" (op. cit.). But we are at war with a coronavirus and should presume that calls for vaccination are made in good faith. Therefore it behoves us to be vaccinated out of respect for civil authority and for God who ordains that authority to our good.

Objection 3. Further, Church authorities are urging vaccination, even where State authorities are not requiring vaccination. The Roman pontiff is reported as saying, “I believe that, ethically, everyone has to get the vaccine.” Many other prelates say likewise. Now, since the Magisterium must be respected in matters of faith and morals, and this is a matter of morals connected to love of neighbor, the Christian ought to be vaccinated.

Objection 4. This obligation extends even to those who are minimally at risk. For, as the European Court of Human Rights has opined re: the routine vaccination of children (*Vavříčka and Others v. the Czech Republic*, April 2021), “it cannot be regarded as disproportionate for a State to require those for whom vaccination represents a remote risk to health to accept this universally practised protective measure, as a matter of legal duty and in the name of social solidarity, for the sake of the small number” of the vulnerable who cannot themselves benefit from vaccination: which is a morally as well as a legally sound principle.

Objection 5. The obligation is not overridden, as some contend, by a countervailing concern with the derivation or testing of the vaccines. As some have said (Statement from Pro-Life Catholic Scholars on the Moral Acceptability of Receiving COVID-19 Vaccines, 5 Mar. 2021), “one may choose any of these vaccines to protect oneself or one’s community from transmission of the virus without (1) endorsing the abortion that preceded the development of

the cell line (performed for reasons separate and independent such development), (2) incentivizing future abortions, or (3) disrespecting the memory or mortal remains of the baby whose cadaveric tissue was used and modified to create the cell line.” Consequently, the previous considerations retain their force.

Objection 6. Finally, even those who do not regard vaccination as morally obligatory generally regard it nonetheless as prudent, because it contributes to a general sense of security that will allow individuals and society to escape a highly damaging cycle of restrictions imposed under public emergency statutes; and as compassionate, for it responds to the need of the vulnerable. But this is a matter of justice as well as prudence and compassion, because, as already said, anyone “who has the power to prevent his neighbor’s danger or loss is obliged to do so.” Hence it pertains to moral duty.

On the contrary, the scripture says (Sir. 32:19–22):

Do nothing without deliberation;
and when you have acted, do not regret it.
Do not go on a path full of hazards,
and do not stumble over stony ground.
Do not be overconfident on a smooth way,
and give good heed to your paths.

And St. Augustine says (*Civ.* 19.16), that while “it is fitting to preserve cooperation between the two cities in mortal

affairs” as far as possible, yet “it is not kindness to cooperate in the loss of a greater good, nor blameless to acquiesce and to permit a slide into greater evil.”

I answer that care of the body, whether one’s own or the neighbor’s, which Augustine calls medicine (*Mor. Ecc.* 52), is always a matter of prudential judgment; and that specific actions directed to the good of the body, even basic actions such as eating, are in principle only, and not in particular application, matters of moral obligation. As the apostle says, “all things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable” (1 Cor. 6:12). Just as one may choose to eat or to fast, to give or withhold, without necessarily incurring sin, so one may choose to be vaccinated or not to be vaccinated without necessarily incurring sin. And just as one may do harm by way of untimely or disproportionate appeals to the good of eating or sleeping, and so forth, one may do harm by way of the untimely or disproportionate use of medications. Therefore such decisions require deliberation and good counsel and sound judgment, rather than appeals to duty.

Further, by reason of the rational soul’s possession of its own body (for as Augustine says in the same place, a man “is a rational soul with a body in its service”), and by reason of the principle of subsidiarity, this judgment always lies with families and individuals and never with civil or ecclesiastical authorities, which may recommend and reward such a course of action, but may not, without violation of natural rights, enforce it through penal actions.

Moreover, medicine must always, as an act of charity, be directed to discipline – the good of the body to the good of the soul (*Mor. Ecc.* 56). But the vaccinations in question, in the majority of the population, are directed to the good neither of the body nor of the soul. They are not ordinarily directed to the good of the body, whether one's own or another's, because very few are in serious danger from the virus and thus in need of a vaccine; and because these Emergency Use Authorization vaccines have not been tested sufficiently to demonstrate that they will not harm the body or interfere with natural immune processes, individually or collectively. They are not directed to the good of the soul because they teach people to accommodate rather than repudiate unjustified fear, and so to slide into greater evil; to become ever more reliant on technocratic intervention in their own lives and in the ordering of their societies; and, in the face of widespread suspension of natural and constitutional rights, enforced by such intervention, to submit to advancing tyranny.

Consequently, there not only can be no moral obligation to be vaccinated; where cooperation in such evils appears as a serious threat, there is rather, for some, a moral obligation to refuse vaccination.

Reply to Objection 1. The first objection fails in multiple ways. The obligations stated are not absolute but relative, and remain subject to prudence. Moreover, the expected benefits are not certain but only possible, and not necessarily attainable only in this fashion. Moreover, it is

unethical to vaccinate those who are not at risk, especially children, for the sake of others (mainly the very elderly) who are at risk, especially when using an experimental vaccine with uncertain long-term effects.

Reply to Objection 2. Augustine also says in the same place (*Civ.* 19.16) that “since the earthly city produced its own savants who ... reached the conclusion that there are many gods” to be placated, one for the body and another for the mind, etc., each “with its own sphere of interest and function” (thus more recently Rousseau, e.g., in *Du Contrat Social*), whereas “the heavenly city knew that there was only one God to serve, and decreed, in faithful devotion, that he should be the sole object of religious service..., on this count dissension was inevitable.” And thus it is here. As St. Paul says, “The body is for the Lord and the Lord is for the body” (1 Cor. 6:13). But civil authorities in many jurisdictions have cultivated an irrational fear of a coronavirus in place of rational fear of the living God, and have refused to concede that the body is for the Lord, denying for long periods the right to meet to receive and honour the Lord. This Augustine would rebuke, for the city of God can be indifferent to laws for temporal peace if and only if “they do not impede the religion which teaches the worship of the one supreme and true God” (*Civ.* 19.19).

Moreover, these same authorities have acted unjustly towards the poor, by depriving them of their livelihoods, and towards those in need of support for body or soul, by depriving them of access to one another and of recourse to

communities of support, even familial communities. Further, they have ceded their own democratic authority to unelected officials whom they have appointed over matters beyond the latter's competence. They have trusted in, and allied themselves with, fully indemnified pharmaceutical companies who stand to profit from the policies of these unelected officials. They have altered the definition of a pandemic to exclude consideration of the severity of its effect, focusing only on the ease of its transmission, such that pandemics are now to be frequent and unnaturally prolonged, and the people more dependent than ever on governments wielding emergency powers and pharmaceutical companies offering experimental vaccines. They have repeatedly overridden constitutional rights and freedoms in the name of a "public emergency" that never before would have qualified as such. They have failed to provide the people with sound information and with meaningful choices in response to that information. Therefore they have lost the right to be trusted by the people and to be respected in their wielding of extraordinary powers.

As Vitoria says, in the place mentioned, there may be arguments and proofs of injustice "so powerful that even citizens and subjects of the lower class may not use ignorance as an excuse" for compliance with public authorities. Similarly, Leo XIII says (*Lib. praest.*10): "If then, by anyone in authority, something be sanctioned out of conformity with the principles of right reason, and consequently hurtful to the commonwealth, such an enactment can have no binding force of law, as being no

rule of justice, but certain to lead men away from that good which is the very end of civil society.” This applies, a fortiori, to directives limiting or perverting the worship of the one true God.

Reply to Objection 3. The same Roman pontiff, Pope Francis, has called vaccination “an ethical option” and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has made clear that it is only an option and not an obligation. As stated above, vaccination is always a matter of prudential judgment. Nothing said by magisterial authorities on the subject of vaccination against the coronavirus is said in such a way as to bind the consciences of the faithful, but is proffered, and can be proffered, only by way of fatherly advice. Moreover, our ecclesial fathers are not united on the subject. Worse, many of them have compromised their own fatherly standing by doing nothing to defend the right and responsibility of the Church to offer public worship of the Lord God and to gather in his name to hear his Word, receive the sacraments, and encourage one another, which was and is their first duty. They have ignored, and advised their flocks to ignore, the apostle’s injunction (Heb. 10:25; 12:12ff.) to “forsake not the assembling of ourselves together,” preferring rather to counsel individual safety and “peace with all men” over pursuit of that holiness “without which no one will see the Lord.”

Further, they have allowed professions of respect for the second great commandment to override the obligations of the first great commandment, misconstruing “neighbor love” as cooperation in irrational

fears rather than proclaiming the dominical “Fear not!” in the midst of this global storm. Taking their eyes off Jesus, they have been buffeted by the winds and begun to sink into the waves. They have now seized on the vaccines as a way to recommence their cancelled assemblies, without any forethought to the new situation of the Church, or indeed of the neighbor, under the frequent and prolonged “pandemic” regimes to which they have lent their own blessing. Such have acted as cowardly and thoughtless fathers, whose persons must be respected for the sake of their office but whose advice is no more to be trusted than that of the civil authorities to whom they have wrongly ceded their own proper ecclesial authority. For they have rendered to Caesar what is God’s.

Reply to Objection 4. The principle is not morally sound or even coherent. It is true, as Kierkegaard says, that in Christianity each one is worth more than a thousand rather than each, as Bentham would have it, counting for one and only for one. But whereas the few may voluntarily expose themselves to great risks for the sake of the many, and the many may voluntarily undergo risks for the sake of the few, the many cannot be obliged or compelled to expose themselves unnecessarily to risks, however remote, in order to protect the few. That logic contradicts both the utilitarianism from which it arises and the Christian morality of which it is a deceptive simulacrum. It leads to injustice, both within and beyond the sphere of medicine, through an arbitrary privileging of the few that disenfranchises the many. (This same logic is

operative in abortion, e.g., where the hosts of the unborn are sacrificed to the plans of the wealthy or the dissipations of the lustful.) It is disproportionate through and through, without rising to the free and generous disproportion of Christian love.

Reply to Objection 5. The scholars in question claim that they are not using proportionalist reasoning, but rather asserting that “the attenuated and remote connection to abortions performed decades ago, and the absence of any incentive for future abortions,” effectively insulate users of the vaccines from moral culpability as they enjoy the fruits of “this welcome advance of science.” The same logic, however, might be used to justify enjoying the benefits of other evil acts that advance science; nor are the criteria clear for determining when material cooperation in evil is sufficiently remote as to incur no guilt. So the debate about this must continue. In any case, these scholars do not attempt to establish a moral obligation to be vaccinated and their statement explicitly allows for the possibility of conscientious dissent, as do magisterial documents.

Reply to Objection 6. This objection has already been answered. “Justice is the virtue of giving each his own” (*Civ.* 19.20), and justice in the present matter means permitting each to exercise prudence and compassion according to his own judgment, for man “is in the hand of his own counsel” (*Sir.* 15.14), though he should indeed “do nothing without deliberation” nor be hasty either in

entering on the rough road or in entrusting himself to the smooth one. Moreover, he should be compassionate, for “there is no harm in this word, ‘compassionate’, where there is no passion in the case” (*Mor. Ecc.* 53). At present, however, there is not only much passion in the case but much panic, which clouds the judgment of many.

Supplementum. The reason for that is this: Most are living the present life uninformed by hope in the life to come. Without that hope, which the churches ought to have been proclaiming but have not, their life “offers nothing but a pretense of happiness, which is great unhappiness.” Hence they “cannot dispose of the real goods of the mind; for the so-called wisdom that is intent on this life’s business, managing it prudently, coping with it resolutely, exercising temperate restraint, making just distributions, all without directing it to that end where God is all in all, where eternity is certain and peace entire, that is not real wisdom at all” (*Civ.* 19.20, trans. O’Donovan).

In the present crisis even this partial and inadequate wisdom has forsaken us, because we have beforehand forsaken that real wisdom which orders the body to the soul and the soul to God, the wisdom which knows that “only the soul that serves God can rightly command the body” or deliberate calmly about the affairs of the body. We have sold the birthright of our freedoms for a mess of pottage with barely a moment’s hesitation. And now? Now we will entrust ourselves to an experimental vaccination program and begin carrying local or global vaccination

passports in a permanent war against all threats to Health & Safety, and against all liberties that threaten our new Health & Safety regimes. We will order our souls to our bodies, and neither to God, in a global association that offers “a perverted imitation of God” through its proud aspiration to command all things and to imprint them with the marks of its own control. For “even the wicked make war for the peace of those who belong to them (*Civ.* 19.12).

And what will the churches do? Will they also turn away those who cannot or will not demonstrate that they have been vaccinated? If they do turn them away, they will only confirm that they have transferred their allegiance to the city of man and that their religion is secretly the religion of man. But if they do not turn them away, they will find themselves right where they have all along refused to be: in open violation of civil authorities. The smooth road, on which they so hastily embarked, will suddenly become very rough indeed.