

Fr. Perozich comments —

People ask me if they should get the vaccine against the Wuhan virus.

I am not their physician, rather a priest who have some training in moral theology and a concern for the welfare of people.

A person must make that choice after informing the conscience beyond bishops' urging that everyone be vaccinated. Bishops are not scientists, rather relying on the information given to them by government officials.

Dressing up the public health in religious language as “an act of charity” also pushes an individual to act without consulting his conscience.

The article below offers some guidance for conscience formation.

National Catholic Bioethics Center provides guide on religious exemption to COVID-19 vaccines

The NCBC published a 'Vaccine Exemption Resource for Individuals' on July 21 as a guide to those Catholics whose 'informed conscience' has come to the 'sure judgement' that the experimental COVID-19 vaccines are either morally, medically, or legally impermissible.

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PHILADELPHIA, Pennsylvania ([LifeSiteNews](#)) – The National Catholic Bioethics Center (NCBC) has produced a template for those seeking a religious exemption from vaccine requirements, explaining “the principled religious basis on which a Catholic may determine that he or she ought to refuse certain vaccines.”

The NCBC published a “[Vaccine Exemption Resource for Individuals](#)” on July 21 as a guide to those Catholics whose “informed conscience” has come to the “sure judgement” that the experimental COVID-19 vaccines are either morally, medically, or legally impermissible.

The NCBC based its determination that freedom of conscience must be respected on documentation and instruction from within the Catholic Church, including works from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Pontifical Academy for Life, and the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC).

The NCBC laid out four key principles by which individual faithful may determine their responsibility to take or refuse medical interventions:

- Vaccination is not morally obligatory in principle and so must be voluntary.
- There is a general moral duty to refuse the use of medical products, including certain vaccines, that are produced using human cells lines derived from direct abortions. It is permissible to use such vaccines only under certain case-specific conditions, based on a judgment of conscience.
- A person’s informed judgments about the proportionality of medical interventions are to be respected unless they contradict authoritative Catholic moral teachings.

- A person is morally required to obey his or her sure conscience, even if it errs.

In line with the principles set out, the NCBC affirmed that “there is no authoritative Church teaching universally obliging Catholics to receive any vaccine,” thus determining that no binding civil mandate can justly exist.

To aid Catholics who object to medical interventions based on these principles, the NCBC produced a [template letter](#) July 7, formulated from the same vaccine exemption criteria laid out in the July 21 letter, for those who might need to satisfy employer vaccination requirements, for example.

The foremost objection to COVID vaccine uptake lies in the moral repugnance of the [connection to abortion](#) found in the currently available and experimental COVID jabs. But beside this, the NCBC noted that “a Catholic might refuse a vaccine based on the Church’s teachings concerning therapeutic proportionality.”

A judgement of therapeutic proportionality “must be made by the person who is the potential recipient of the intervention in the concrete circumstances,” the guidance reads, meaning that public health officials cannot determine that a vaccine ubiquitously serves the common good, for instance, on the behalf of individual consciences.

In fact, the NCBC clarified that the “sure judgement” of one’s own conscience regarding the moral liceity of taking any medical intervention “must be obeyed,” rather than instructions from church or secular officials which contradict that judgement.

This is borne out in CCC n.1777, the guidance emphasized: “In all he says and does, man is obliged to follow faithfully what he knows to be just and right. It is by the judgment of his conscience that man perceives and recognizes the prescriptions of the divine law.”

“Therefore,” the NCBC concludes, “if a Catholic comes to an informed and sure judgment in conscience that he or she should

not receive a vaccine, then the Catholic Church requires that the person follow this certain judgment of conscience and refuse the vaccine.”

NCBC doubles down on commitment to conscience freedom

While the NCBC made clear that the guidelines enunciated above do not address the medical, moral, or legal objections to vaccinating against COVID-19 in themselves, the Center has [previously announced](#) its opposition to mandating the currently available coronavirus shots.

The NCBC emphatically stated that it “does not endorse mandated COVID-19 immunization with any of the three vaccines that have received Emergency Use Authorization as of July 1, 2021, from the US Food & Drug Administration (FDA).”

On Tuesday, the NCBC doubled down on its commitment to conscience freedom, drawing again upon the teaching from the Church on obedience to one’s conscience and the common good. An August 17 [press release](#) from the bioethics group explained the basis of its call for the freedom of conscience relating to medical intervention on “the full range of the teachings of the Church, including its social teachings, which provide guidance on appropriate respect for persons while building up the common good.”

While acknowledging that “the Church encourages people to receive vaccination for COVID-19, even though the currently available vaccines in the U.S. have a remote connection to abortion through the use of certain cell lines,” the NCBC maintained that the production and authorization of a “vaccine that did not rely on abortion-derived cell lines for manufacture and/or testing would remove a major obstacle to COVID-19 vaccination for many.”

Continuing, the Center insisted that “[it] is extremely important to embrace both respect for the common good and

conscience as the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) did in December 2020,” which itself states that “vaccination is not, as a rule, a moral obligation” and “therefore, it must be voluntary.”

Owing to the complexity of moral and medical factors pertinent to the conscientious determination to take or refuse the COVID jabs, the NCBC committed to “continue to help people to draw upon the deepest resources of the Catholic faith to address the many challenges posed by COVID-19 with integrity and charity.”

A number of Catholic dioceses and universities in the U.S. are **mandating** coronavirus vaccines, or **instructing** their priests **not to assist Catholics** with religious exemptions. However, religious exemptions filed with most secular employers and institutions in the U.S. do not require the signature or involvement of a pastor.

Catholics also have **recourse** to **general Christian exemptions** that are compatible with Catholic doctrine but not based on the magisterium of the Catholic Church.

National Catholic Bioethics Center

July 21, 2021

Vaccine Exemption Resource for Individuals

This resource explains how the Catholic Church’s teachings may lead individual Catholics to decline certain vaccines. It is intended for Catholics who have made a sure judgment in conscience to refuse a vaccine. It is not a decision-making guide and does not address all legal, medical, and moral considerations. The NCBC has provided such guidance here. It is not a determination that an exemption will be granted.

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that a person may be required to refuse a medical intervention, including a vaccination,

if his or her informed conscience comes to this sure judgment. While the Catholic Church does not prohibit the use of any vaccine, and generally encourages the use of safe and effective vaccines as a way of safeguarding personal and public health, the following authoritative Church teachings demonstrate the principled religious basis on which a Catholic may determine that he or she ought to refuse certain vaccines:

- Vaccination is not morally obligatory in principle and so must be voluntary.¹
- There is a general moral duty to refuse the use of medical products, including certain vaccines, that are produced using human cells lines derived from direct abortions. It is permissible to use such vaccines only under certain case-specific conditions, based on a judgment of conscience.²
- A person's informed judgments about the proportionality of medical interventions are to be respected unless they contradict authoritative Catholic moral teachings.³
- A person is morally required to obey his or her sure conscience, even if it errs.⁴

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A Catholic may judge it wrong to receive certain vaccines for a variety of reasons consistent with these teachings, and there is no authoritative Church teaching universally obliging Catholics to receive any vaccine. An individual Catholic may invoke Church teaching to refuse a vaccine developed or produced using abortion- derived cell lines. More generally, a Catholic might refuse a vaccine based on the Church's teachings concerning therapeutic proportionality. Therapeutic proportionality is an assessment of whether the benefits of a medical intervention outweigh the undesirable side-effects and burdens in light of the integral good of the person, including spiritual, psychological, and

bodily goods.⁵ It can also extend to the good of others and the common good, which likewise entail spiritual and moral dimensions and are not reducible to public health. The judgment of therapeutic proportionality must be made by the person who is the potential recipient of the intervention in the concrete circumstances,⁶ not by public health authorities or by other individuals who might judge differently in their own situations.

At the core of the Church's teaching are the first and last points listed above: vaccination is not a universal obligation and a person must obey the judgment of his or her own informed and certain conscience. In fact, the Catechism of the Catholic Church instructs that following one's conscience is following Christ Himself:

In all he says and does, man is obliged to follow faithfully what he knows to be just and right. It is by the judgment of his conscience that man perceives and recognizes the prescriptions of the divine law: "Conscience is a law of the mind; yet [Christians] would not grant that it is nothing more; . . . [Conscience] is a messenger of him, who, both in nature and in grace, speaks to us behind a veil, and teaches and rules us by his representatives. Conscience is the aboriginal Vicar of Christ."⁷

Therefore, if a Catholic comes to an informed and sure judgment in conscience that he or she should not receive a vaccine, then the Catholic Church requires that the person follow this certain judgment of conscience and refuse the vaccine. The Catechism is clear: "Man has the right to act in conscience and in freedom so as personally to make moral decisions. He must not be forced to act contrary to his conscience. Nor must he be prevented from acting according to his conscience, especially in religious matters."⁸ NOTES

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1 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), "Note on the Morality of Using Some Anti-COVID-19 Vaccines," December 17, 2020, n. 5: "At the

same time, practical reason makes evident that vaccination is not, as a rule, a moral obligation and that, therefore, it must be voluntary.”

2 See Pontifical Academy for Life, “Moral Reflections on Vaccines Prepared from Cells Derived from Aborted Human Foetuses,” June 9, 2005; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction Dignitas personae*, 2008, nn. 34-35; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Note on the Morality of Using Some Anti-COVID- 19 Vaccines,” nn. 1-3. When there is a sufficiently serious reason to use the product and there is no reasonable alternative available, the Catholic Church teaches that it may be permissible to use the immorally sourced product under protest. In any case, whether the product is used or not, the Catholic Church teaches that all must make their disagreement known and request the development of equal or better products using biological material that does not come from abortions.

3 See United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services*, 6th ed. (Washington, DC: USCCB Publishing, 2018), n. 28. Hereafter “ERDs.”

4 “A human being must always obey the certain judgment of his conscience. If he were deliberately to act against it, he would condemn himself. Yet it can happen that moral conscience remains in ignorance and makes erroneous judgments about acts to be performed or already committed.” *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), www.vatican.va, n. 1790. Hereafter “CCC.”

5 See ERDs, nn. 32-33; nn. 56-57; Part Three, Introduction, para. 2; Part Five, Introduction, para. 3.

6 See ERDs, nn. 56-57. Both of these directives state that the proportionality of medical interventions is established “in the patient’s judgment.”

7 CCC, n. 1777, citing John Henry Cardinal Newman, “Letter to the Duke of Norfolk,” V, in *Certain Difficulties felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching II* (London: Longmans Green, 1885), 248.

8 CCC, n. 1782, citing Second Vatican Council, *Dignitatis humanae*, December 7, 1965, n. 3.

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[https://www.ncbcenter.org/ncbc-news/
vaccinestatementupdated](https://www.ncbcenter.org/ncbc-news/vaccinestatementupdated)