



Speaking the truth in love

Eph 4:15

20 August 2020

The Hon. Scott Morrison MP
Prime Minister
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister

We are writing to you following yesterday's announcement that the Australian Government has signed an agreement for the production of the AstraZeneca/Oxford University COVID-19 vaccine should its clinical trials be successful.

Along with many Australians we are praying that a vaccine might be developed that will help bring an end to the pandemic. We were therefore disappointed to learn that of the 167 candidate vaccines for COVID-19 identified by the World Health Organisation, 29 of which are already in clinical evaluation, the Commonwealth has chosen to throw its lot in with one that makes use of a cell-line (HEK293) cultured from an electively aborted human foetus. It has been reported that if the vaccine is adopted for use in Australia it will be 'mandatory' or 'as near to mandatory as possible'; at the very least it can be expected that there will be enormous social and political pressure upon people to use it.

Some will have no ethical problem with using tissue from electively aborted fetuses for medical purposes. Others may regard the use of a cell-line derived from an abortion performed back in the 1970s as now sufficiently removed from the abortion itself to be excusable. But others again will draw a straight line from the ending of a human life in abortion through the cultivation of the cell-line to the use for manufacturing this vaccine; even if the cells have been propagated for years in a laboratory far removed from the abortion, that line of connection remains. They will be concerned not to benefit in any way from the death of the little girl whose cells were taken and cultivated, nor to be trivialising that death, and not to be encouraging the foetal tissue industry.

While we accept that the proposed vaccine may be sufficiently remote from the abortion that occasioned the derivation of the cell-line, we flag to you that any COVID-19 vaccine cultured on a foetal cell-line will raise serious issues of conscience for a proportion of our population. Those troubled by this may either acquiesce to the social and political pressure to use the vaccine, or conscientiously object to the use by themselves and their dependents; if the latter, they will suffer various disadvantages (e.g. denial of access to childcare, aged care or

employment) and their abstention may undermine the goal of 'herd immunity'. Many will feel deeply conflicted whichever way they go. You may be aware that for some people the Rubella vaccine already presents such a moral dilemma.

Given that many other vaccine trials are being conducted that do not involve the use of morally compromised human cell lines, we write to seek your assurance: (1) that the use of the AstraZenica/Oxford University COVID-19 vaccine will in no sense be mandatory; (2) that no-one will be pressured to prescribe, dispense or consent to the use upon themselves or their dependents of the vaccine against their conscientious religious or moral beliefs or disadvantaged for failing to do so; and (3) that the government will ensure that an ethically uncontroversial alternative vaccine be made available in Australia if it is achieved.

We attach for your information briefings from the highly respected Anscombe Bioethics Centre in Oxford University and the Charlotte Lozier Institute in the United States.

Please be assured that our churches are not opposed to vaccination: as we have said, we are praying that one may be found. But we also pray that it be one that is not ethically tainted. Throughout the present pandemic we have, along with many other religious leaders, done our utmost to encourage our communities to comply with COVID safety directives. This has come at very considerable hardship for our churches as a whole and for many individual churchgoers. We are as eager as anyone in the community to see life return to normal. But we do not want this to be achieved at the price of many good people's consciences.

Yours sincerely in Christ



The Most Rev Dr Glenn N Davies
Archbishop of Sydney and
Metropolitan of New South Wales



Most Rev. Anthony Fisher OP
Catholic Archbishop of Sydney



His Eminence Archbishop Makarios
Primate of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia

Encl.: Helen Watt, 'COVID-19 vaccines and the use of foetal cells,' Anscombe Bioethics Institute COVID-19 Briefing Paper 2 (27 April 2020) <http://www.bioethics.org.uk/images/user/covidbriefing2.pdf>
James Sherley, 'An ethics assessment of COVID-19 vaccine programs,' Charlotte Lozier Institute On Point 46 (May 2020) <https://lozierinstitute.org/an-ethics-assessment-of-covid-19-vaccine-programs/>