# WHITE PAPER

## FORSCOM COMMAND CHAPLAIN

Ethical Considerations Regarding the COVID-19 Vaccines

Approved by: CH (COL) Rajmund Kopec FORSCOM Command Chaplain FORSCOM Headquarters 4700 Knox St. Fort Bragg, NC 28310

#### 1. References:

- a. AR 600-20, Army Command Policy, 24 July 2020.
- b. Department of Defense Instruction, 1300.17, Accommodation of Religious Practices Within the Military Services, 1 September 2020.
- Religious Accommodation Training, United States Army Chaplain Center and School; https://usachcstraining.army.mil/world-religions.
- Purpose: The purpose of this White Paper is to provide United States Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) Chaplain Sections (CS) and Unit Ministry Teams (UMT) Information to aid them in discussing the ethical permissibility of receiving a COVID-19 vaccination.

#### 3. Background:

- a. As the COVID-19 vaccination is now mandatory, some Soldiers are seeking exemption from the vaccination based on deeply held religious beliefs. A primary concern for many Soldiers is the moral permissibility of receiving vaccines developed, tested, or produced from abortion-derived stem cells.
- b. According to the Charlotte Lozier Institute, stem cells from the HEK293 and PER.C6 lines were used in the development and production of the AstraZeneca and the Johnson and Johnson vaccines. Also according to the Lozier Institute, the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines did not use HEK293 or PER.C6 stem cell lines in the development and production of their respective vaccines. However, they did use the HEK293 line in the testing of the vaccines.
- c. The origin of stem cell line HEK293 is from the Netherlands during the 1970's. It is historically uncertain whether this line was produced through an elective abortion, or a spontaneous miscarriage.<sup>4</sup> This line was used in the production, development and testing of the AstraZeneca vaccine.<sup>5</sup> Stem cells from HEK293 were used only in the testing of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> https://s27589.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/09.17.20-Fetal-Cell-Line-Fact-Sheet.pdf

<sup>2</sup> https://lozierinstitute.org/cli-statement-on-johnson-vaccine-abortion-derived-cell-lines-used-in-production-process/

<sup>3</sup> https://www.usccb.org/resources/moral-considerations-covid-19-vaccines\_1.pdf

https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2020/05/63752/; https://www.fda.gov/ohrms/dockets/ac/01/transcripts/3750t1\_01.pdf; https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-fags-fetal-ceils-covid-19-vaccines-freatments/

https://s27589.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/09.17.20-Fetal-Cell-Line-Fact-Sheet.pdf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> https://lozierinstitute.org/cli-statement-on-johnson-vaccine-abortion-derived-cell-lines-used-in-production-process/; https://www.usccb.org/resources/moral-considerations-covid-19-vaccines\_1.pdf

d. The origin of stem cell line PER.C6 is from an elective abortion of an 18-week fetus in 1985.7 The Johnson and Johnson vaccine was produced, developed and tested using this line.

# 4. Ethical Statements from Roman Catholic Leaders:

- a. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has stated that "...it can be morally acceptable to receive a [COVID-19] vaccine that uses abortion-derived stem cells if there are no other available vaccines comparable in safety and efficacy with no connection to abortion."8 Additionally, the USCCB have stated in the case of Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, which were tested on stem cell line HEK293, "...while neither vaccine is completely free from any connection to morally compromised cell lines, in this case the connection is very remote from the initial evil of abortion."9 The USCCB has declared the AstraZeneca vaccine to be "morally compromised", and recommends avoiding it if other vaccines are available. 10 Furthermore, the USCCB has stated, "...if one has the ability to choose a vaccine, Pfizer or Moderna's vaccines should be chosen over Johnson and Johnson."11
- b. Furthermore, Pope Francis has declared that receiving a COVID-19 is an "...act of love." He adds, "Vaccination is a simple but profound way of promoting the common good and caring for each other, especially the most vulnerable."12

### 5. Ethical Statements from Evangelical Protestant Leaders:

- a. Jim Denison, PhD, Resident Scholar for Ethics with Baylor Scott and White Health, and noted Evangelical Ethicist, has stated that receiving a vaccine from abortion-derived stem cells does not endorse abortion any more than receiving an organ from a murder victim endorses murder. 13
- b. Based on the use of HEK293 for nearly 50 years, the uncertainty of its origins, and the lack of increased abortions for the purpose of developing new stem cell lines, Southern Baptist Theologian, Albert Mohler stated, "There is no activity related to abortion in the present that is in any way associated with the use of these vaccines."14 Ethicist Christopher O. Tollefsen states, "Because researchers may ethically use the HEK cell lines to develop vaccines, people can of course ethically use a vaccine should it be developed from the HEK cell lines."15

<sup>7</sup> https://www.gmp-creativebiolabs.com/per-c6-cell-lines\_74.htm

https://www.usccb.org/resources/moral-considerations-covid-19-vaccines\_1.pdf

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> https://www.usccb.org/news/2021/us-bishop-chairmen-doctrine-and-pro-life-address-use-johnson-johnson-covid-19-vaccine

<sup>12</sup> https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2021/08/18/1028740057/in-a-message-to-americans-popefrancis-says-getting-vaccinated-is-an-act-of-love

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> https://www.baptiststandard.com/opInion/denison-forum/commentary-is-the-covid-19-vaccine-ethical/

<sup>14</sup> https://www.denisonforum.org/resources/why-covid-19-vaccines-are-pro-life-abortion-conspiracy-theories-and-thesanctity-of-life/

<sup>15</sup> https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-faqs-fetal-cells-covid-19-vaccines-treatments/

 Russel Moore, President of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention has stated, "We should oppose authorizing or funding research rooted in the taking of innocent human life, that does not mean, though, that people must shun medical treatments that can save lives because they were discovered through means of which we would not necessarily approve."18

### 6. Ethical Statements from Jewish Leaders:

- a. The Orthodox Union and the Rabbinical Council of America have ruled that there is a requirement to be vaccinated from COVID-19.17
- The Rabbinical Assembly voted unanimously that the COVID-19 Vaccines are ethically permissible.18

#### 7. Ethical Statements from Buddhist Leaders:

- a. The Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism, has received a COVID-19 vaccination and stated, "This is very, very helpful, very good." 19
- b. Dr. Ken Matsuda, the President of the Buddhist Churches of America has encouraged Buddhist practitioners to receive a COVID-19 vaccination.<sup>20</sup>

## 8. Summary:

- a. Numerous religious and ethical leaders, from diverse backgrounds, have asserted that receiving a COVID-19 vaccine is ethically permissible.
- b. Receiving a potentially morally compromised vaccine does not condone the practice of abortion any more than receiving an organ from a murder victim condones murder.21
- c. No additional abortions have taken place in order to develop COVID-19 vaccines, 22
  - Receiving a vaccine is considered to be an act of 'loving your neighbor'.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>16</sup> https://www.npr.org/2021/03/03/973486060/church-leaders-say-johnson-johnson-vaccine-should-be-avoided-if-

possible

17 https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/202101/Vaccination%20and%20Ethical%20Questions%20Posed%20by%20COVID-19%20Vaccines%20-%20Final.pdf

<sup>18</sup> https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-56310274

<sup>20</sup> https://www.buddhistchurchesofamerica.org/post/covid-19-vaccine-is-here-and-variants-are-here-too

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> https://www.baptiststandard.com/opinion/denison-forum/commentary-ls-the-covid-19-vaccine-ethical

<sup>22</sup> https://www.denisonforum.org/resources/why-covid-19-vaccines-are-pro-life-abortion-conspiracy-theories-and-the-

sanctity-of-life/
23 https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2021/08/18/1028740057/in-a-message-to-americans-pope-

- e. The historical origins of HEK 293 is uncertain.<sup>24</sup> The HEK293 line has divided and reproduced for 50 years. Hence, the current stem cells are very far removed from its uncertain origin.25
- 9. CS/UMT members must be pastorally sensitive in discussing the ethical permissibility of receiving a COVID-19 vaccination. It is imperative that CS/UMT members do not attempt to influence a Soldier's decision on the subject. Rather, the information provided is a tool to aid Soldiers who are wrestling with the ethics of receiving the vaccine.
- 10. Point of Contact. The POC for this white paper is CH (LTC) Rich West at 910-570-7819, or by email at richard.w.west10.mil@mail.mil.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2020/05/63752/;

https://www.fda.gov/ohrms/dockets/ac/01/transcripts/3750t1\_01.pdf; https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/thefaqs-fetal-cetils-covid-19-vaccines-treatments/

25 https://www.heritage.org/public-health/commentary/the-covid-vaccine-and-the-pro-life-movement