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Life News

Promoting the sanctity of life

Pandemic raises concerns about links between vaccination and abortion

Ever since the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, people around the world have been hoping for a vaccine. If one or more effective vaccines could be created, mass-produced and quickly rolled out, a huge amount of illness, disability and death would be prevented, burdensome restrictions on gathering and on travel could be lifted, and life would return more or less to normal.

As it has turned out, scientists have risen to the challenge and quickly developed and trialled dozens of vaccines. Some have already been judged to have met required standards of quality, safety and effectiveness, and are now being mass produced and rolled out to the public. More are in the pipeline.

Unfortunately, any hopes we had of vaccines bringing the pandemic to a rapid end have been dampened by the realisation that they aren't 100% effective, and the emergence of mutant forms of the virus that might make current vaccines redundant. We now know that the first crop of vaccines won't protect us completely from getting infected and transmitting the virus to others, but they will very likely reduce our chances of severe illness and reduce our infectiousness to others. It is becoming apparent that long before everyone around the world who wants vaccination can get it, the current vaccines will very likely need to be replaced with new ones.

Now that in Australia we are only weeks away from the first vaccinations, we are turning our minds to the question of whether to get one or not. A Newspoll survey at the time of writing suggests that about three quarters of all Australians will accept vaccination, but fewer think it should be mandatory. The government is encouraging vaccination not just out of self-interest, but out of concern for others around us, especially those who for medical reasons cannot

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Editorial

Welcome to a New Year, a new look *Life News* and a new Editor!

I'm a wife and mother of 2 adult sons and have held all kinds of positions in the LCA—from Sunday school teacher to parish chairperson, from editor of Lutheran Women Magazine to web manager of the LCA Worship Planning Page. When I saw that Life News was looking for a new editor, I jumped at the chance to help "promote the sanctity of human life". I'm looking forward to the challenges this new role will bring!

Covid-19 may have curtailed many activities in the past year but it has also brought a new focus to life issues. We've had time to really think about what is important to all of us. It has shown that we really do care about protecting the elderly, the disabled and other vulnerable members of our community.

It has also generated much debate about vaccines. In this edition Nick Schwarz makes the case for why a committed, pro-life Christian may

in good conscience receive the current COVID-19 vaccines. We acknowledge that the issue of COVID-19 vaccinations is a contested one within the Christian pro-life community, and that some of our readers will hold contrary views which we respect. We also note that there is no official position and policy on this issue that has been adopted by LfL or the LCA.

Feedback on our newsletter is always welcome—please contact us via the email addresses listed on page 3. And we encourage you to share it with your friends and in your congregations and parishes.

Trudi Skene



Pandemic raises concerns about links between vaccination and abortion (cont.)

be vaccinated.

For Christians and non-Christians whose respect for human life extends to life in the womb, another vaccination related consideration has emerged in addition to concerns about safety and effectiveness and the common good. Last year it came to light that a number of the COVID-19 vaccines being developed had a connection to either an abortion that occurred in 1972, or one that occurred in 1985. The AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine, which the majority of Australians will receive, is produced with the aid of an 'immortalised' foetal cell line codenamed HEK-298. Back in 1973, a scientist in the Netherlands experi-

mented on human embryonic kidney cells taken from a baby electively aborted in 1972 to create cells that could divide repeatedly without aging, and be mass produced for use in vaccine preparation, drug testing, cell research and other fields of research and development. The Pfizer and Novavax vaccines, which are also on order for Australia, were not produced with the aid of HEK-298 cells, but HEK-298 cells were used to test their effectiveness in the lab.

A few other long-lasting foetal cell lines that date back to the 1960s continue to be cultured on a large scale and used in the preparation of vaccines for other diseases, such as measles, mumps, rubella, chick-

enpox, hepatitis A, poliovirus and rabies.¹

To begin with at least, Australians will not be able to choose which vaccine they receive. The 20 million doses of the Pfizer vaccine the government has ordered are reserved for people the government has classified as the highest priority: frontline health workers, quarantine hotel and border workers and nursing home residents and staff. After that everyone will be offered the AstraZeneca vaccine, 3.8 million doses of which will be imported and 50 million manufactured here in Australia. The Novavax vaccine is also on order from overseas but not expected to arrive until the end of the first half of the year.

Some Christians consider vaccines with links to historic abortions (like all three COVID-19 vaccines on order for Australia) as 'ethically compromised'. But that stance doesn't necessarily stop them from accepting such vaccines. Their policy is first to appeal to the government to find and approve vaccines that are not so compromised. If the government doesn't respond to their appeal, then they accept the vaccine on the grounds that it will protect themselves and others with whom they come into contact. In other words, they view the acceptance of the compromised vaccine as a mark of Christian love for self and neighbour.

Other reasons for accepting these vaccines include:

- In accepting a vaccine today, I am in no way responsible for an elective abortion that took place decades ago.
- Accepting this vaccine for myself or my child doesn't imply that I am justifying unethical behaviour or that I am unconcerned about it.
- Vaccines are an example of how God can use humans to transform evil acts into something good.
- The abortions and associated tissue sampling many years ago that gave rise to these cell lines are now very remote from us today. The cells currently being used in labs are many generations removed from the original foetal cells. We can use them in good conscience for good purposes like creating vaccines.
- These cell lines are well proven, relatively cheap and in widespread

¹WI-38 and MRC-5 cell strains (used in the preparation of MMR, chickenpox, hepatitis A and polio vaccines) are not immortal. After these cells have divided and reproduced themselves about 50 times, they will start to show signs of aging and no longer be usable. However, they were cultured in large amounts and frozen so that they are expected to be in use for some decades yet.

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use. There is no demand for new ones. Getting a vaccine prepared with the aid of one of these cell lines therefore doesn't 'increase abortion'.

- These cell lines are used in so many areas of medicine and science that it is impossible to escape their reach. Sin taints the whole world. Absolute moral purity is unachievable.
- It is odd to refuse vaccination on 'pro-life' grounds when refusal dramatically increases the chances of disease, disability and death. It seems more like rigid legalism, making an idol of conscience, or more like prideful moral grandstanding than love of neighbour.

Christians who are persuaded by these arguments, and who accept expert advice about vaccine safety and effectiveness, can still call for high ethical standards in biomedical research. Getting a vaccine with links to a 40-50 year old cell line doesn't undermine our mission to promote respect for human life, or our right to challenge the view that human embryos and fetuses are a resource to be exploited.

Nick Schwarz

Further information

Australian Government Department of Health information about COVID-19 vaccines: <https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines>

Charlotte Lozier Institute updates on COVID-19 vaccine candidates and abortion-derived cell lines: <https://lozierinstitute.org/update-covid-19-vaccine-candidates-and-abortion-derived-cell-lines/>

The Gospel Coalition: The FAQs: Are fetal cells being used in COVID-19 vaccines and treatments? <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-faqs-fetal-cells-covid-19-vaccines-treatments/>

Thinking about whether or not you should receive a Covid-19 vaccine?

(Debbie Duncan, Malcolm Duncan and Chris Shaw)
<https://www.kt.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Thinking-about-whether-you-should-receive-a-Covid-19-vaccine.pdf>

UK Evangelical Alliance webinar "Making ethical decisions that respect human life"
<https://www.eauk.org/resources/what-we-offer/videos-and-podcasts/making-ethical-decisions-webinar>.

I always will love you

I wrote the song "I always will love you" in 1999. As with all the bits of poetry I have written I did not set out to write it. It just came to me. The melody appeared with the words.

Most of my ministry has involved relating to young people. I have been a school pastor for the past thirty-four years, initially in a secondary school and currently in a primary school. I wrote this song after

many years of ministry in a secondary school. Secondary students seem to be at a point in their lives where they are looking for meaning, self-understanding, and significant relationships with others. They are often ambitious and afraid at the same time. They are hesitantly confident about grand designs for the future, and incredibly aware of and sensitive to their immediate shortcomings and mistakes.



I like to bombard them with passages from the Bible which proclaim God's emphatic exclamation marks (!) about each of us, even when our own lives often seem better symbolized by question marks (?). I also like to reassure people that God's plans came first, and he created us in order to fit into them – not the other way around. We don't have to scratch around trying to figure out a way to find God, or please God, or satisfy God – he loved each of us so much first that he then created us so that we could live as his children forever. "You are because God has loved you into being!" – I have never had a teenager object to being told that!

The song draws on Paul's words in Ephesians 1:3-12 celebrating our relationship with God, through Jesus, according to the Creator's choice and plans – God's love – "even before the world was made" (1:4). I wanted the song to proclaim the certain Gospel of God's love to people sometimes struggling with uncertainty, so it seemed appropriate to write it in the first person: God singing to us. I have not been surprised that my students always favour the closing lines: No matter what you've done, or life has done to you, I haven't changed my love, I always will love you. Perhaps those words are the emphatic answer to the hymnic prayer I loved singing in my own growing up: *O Thou who*

changest not, abide with me.

Mark Greenthaner

Pastor Mark Greenthaner is the School Pastor at Good Shepherd Lutheran Primary School in Croydon, Victoria. His beautiful song can be found at #534 All Together for Good (the purple book).

*Before the earth knew birth,
or stars began to shine,
already you I knew forever would be mine.
Before the mountains greened
or oceans found their blue,
the one I longed to love,
the one I loved was you.*

*My child you'd be, and free
to take me by the hand.
All that was there we'd share,
that's how my world was planned.
The finest jewels I made,
with sunlight on the dew,
could never match the riches
of my love for you.*

*You were my friend, and then
you turned and walked away.
But I would die to try
and bring you back to stay.
In all my secret plans I knew what I would do:
my Son would give his life
to show I still loved you.*

*So when you fall, and call,
afraid that I won't hear,
know through my Son we're one –
I always will be near.
No matter what you've done,
or life has done to you,
I haven't changed my love,
I always will love you.*

Snippets

COVID-19 pandemic

Worldwide, especially in the northern hemisphere, the second year of coronavirus infection looks like being tougher than the first. The world total death toll is now over 2.2 million, with over 105 million people infected from the beginning, and the global outbreak shows no signs of abating. In Europe and North America the winter has been cold, driving people indoors, and yet the holidays promoted more social mixing. The USA continues to be the most severely affected nation, with over 27.2 million cases and 467 thousand deaths for its 332 million population, followed by India, Brazil and Russia. In fifth place is the UK, with over 3.9 million cases and over 110 thousand deaths for its 68 million people. We remain richly blessed to live in Australia, being in 109th place in the world listing, with 28,842 cases and 909 deaths for our 25.6 million population. New Zealand places 168th, with 2,315 cases and 25 deaths for its 5.0 million. Papua New Guinea reports 891 cases and 9 deaths for its 9.0 million people, taking 185th place.

Worldometer keep abortion statistics also, and record that over 42.6 million babies died from abortions in 2020. By contrast, 13 million people died from disease, 8.7 million from cancer, 5 million from smoking and 1.7 million from HIV/AIDS. The figures appear to be accurate, and if so, abortion is 19 times more deadly than the C-virus.

www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/

SA Termination of Pregnancy Bill

This radical bill to make abortion merely another “health procedure” would allow

sex-selection abortion, and abortion right up to the time of birth if two doctors deem it appropriate (the two can be from the same abortion clinic). The bill passed the upper house 12-9 on 3 December, and is due for debate in the lower house from 16 February. The bill is similar to that in Victoria, where late-term abortions have been done for “psychosocial” reasons 65 times a year. There are no valid medical reasons for abortion after 23 weeks gestation, the time when babies become viable outside the womb. Early delivery by Caesarean section is possible where required by illness. Financial help, accommodation, adoption or fostering options are available where mothers need help.

On 6 February about 4000 pro-life supporters braved the rain to join the Walk For Life from Adelaide Oval to Parliament House. Parliamentarians such as Nicola Centofanti, Clare Scriven and Alex Antic spoke to oppose the bill. SA readers are encouraged to phone or write to their lower house MP to express their concern. We have a good chance of passing an amendment to limit abortion to before 23 weeks.

www.acl.org.au , www.loveadelaide.org.au

Gender Confusion

More on the issue of gender dysphoria mentioned in the last Life News. “The shocking evidence that convinced a (UK) High Court judge to effectively ban a NHS gender clinic from giving puberty-blocking drugs to children was revealed on 10 January .. the Tavistock Centre in London began prescribing puberty blockers to under-16s in 2011. There has been growing concern ever

Snippets (cont.)

since about the irreversible, life-changing dangers. Last month the clinic suspended referrals for hormone therapy after judges ruled it was 'very doubtful' youngsters could give informed consent". Born-female trans-male Keira Bell (23) said to the Court – "I started to realise the vision I had as a teenager of becoming a male was strictly a fantasy. My biological make-up was still female no matter how much testosterone was in my system – I started to just see a woman with a beard – I felt like a fraud, more lost, more isolated and confused."

www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9130157/The-physicians-testimony-led-High-Court-judge-ban-puberty-blocker-drugs.html

"On 4 February the Victorian government's Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill passed 27-9 in the upper house. Not one of the reasoned amendments were passed, which leaves parents with children who are exploring their gender identity, doctors, psychiatrists or psychologists who provide medical care for these children, among others, at risk of complaints if they do not affirm and support gender transition. The concerns of the Victorian AMA, the RANZCP and the Law Institute of Victoria as well as of faith leaders were ignored. The Andrews government failed to listen to any voice of concern." The new law also affects those who wish to help people wanting to change their sexual orientation, such as pastors and counsellors. Celibate gay Christians talking to other gays who then claim to feel harmed could be sentenced to up to ten years in jail. Where is the boundary between having a Christian view explained and someone feeling 'berated' ?

www.eternitynews.com.au/australia/conversion-bill-passes-debate-will-continue/

Belgian euthanasia is broken, says detailed academic study

Michael Cook writes - "Every once in a while, a bioethics article appears which is a powerful indictment of injustice. Euthanasia in Belgium: Shortcomings of the Law and its Application and of the Monitoring of Practice, just published in the Journal of Medicine and Philosophy, comes into this category. Since 2002 euthanasia laws in Belgium and the Netherlands have been models for legal reform elsewhere. Canada has followed them. Portugal is about to. Spain is moving in the same direction. In Belgium euthanasia accounts for an estimated 2.4 per cent of all deaths, and much more in Flanders, the Dutch-speaking section of the country. Yet the authors of the JMP article basically argue that Belgian euthanasia is broken ethically, administratively and legally. Its scope is ever-widening and the safeguards are failing. The commission in charge of overseeing doctors' compliance with the law is ineffective or even complicit in a pro-euthanasia agenda. To document its stunning claims, it draws not on newspaper scandals but on thoroughly researched academic data over the last 20 years and the reports of the control commission itself."

<https://mercatornet.com/belgian-euthanasia-is-broken-says-academic-study/69924/>

Closing quote from Professor Ray Lowenthal AO:

It is impossible to create a system that permits suicide for some but that with 'robust' safeguards can guarantee the protection of the vulnerable.

Dr Rob Pollnitz

LfL Foetal model

One of the projects the LfL committee set for 2020 was to purchase and set up a display for a foetal model set. It is intended to be a simple-to-use kit for independent groups to borrow and show the development of humans while they are still hidden from view in a mother's uterus. It has information cards to aid learning, and uses grocery items of various sizes to show approximate

weights of a developing baby. The committee is also considering commissioning a simple children's book to accompany the display. But for now we are gathering any children's books that support the display. So far we have two copies of *Horton Hears A Who!* (Do you have any other suggestions or favourites?)

Longer term we would like to have numerous kits ready to make available to schools, Sunday schools, churches, and to accompany LfL speakers in the community. At the moment it is in Adelaide, SA, but hopefully we can have them in other states in the future. Please **contact us via email** if you would like to have this come to your parish or community and give it a test run.

Meg Pearce



Thank you for your support!

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www.lutheransforlife.lca.org.au/public-resources/life-news/

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