



The COVID-19 Vaccine: A theological guide

SACC - the Church and the COVID-19 Vaccine

SACC Ecumenical Theological Task Team - February 8, 2021

COVID-19 has affected us all and brought great hardship and pain. Christians and other people of faith have prayed and continue to pray for God's intervention. Scientist, including our own, have worked non-stop, to develop a vaccine and have succeeded. God is answering our prayers.

The development of the vaccine is a cause for celebration for many. But it has also created fear among some people. Others are spreading concerns on social media, that create panic and mistrust of the vaccine.

This guide will help you address the questions raised by your congregation.

DOES THE COVID-19 VACCINE HAVE “THE MARK OF THE BEAST”?

No.

The vaccine is not controlled by the devil and does not have the “mark of the beast” (Rev. 13:16) 666. There is an argument that the vaccine is not from God but the devil and part of the ‘new world order’. This is based on a misunderstanding of the book of Revelation.

Revelation was probably written during the early years of the church in the reign of Emperor Domitian when Christians were persecuted in the Roman empire. The emperors demanded Christians abandon Jesus and worship the emperors as gods. The most infamous of these emperors in the first century were Nero and Domitian. Scholars associate “the mark of the beast” with Nero. When translated into Greek, the letters of his name add up to the number 666. The number 666 was a hidden reference to Nero. The code 666 was then also used during the reign of Domitian, as his persecution was akin to that of Nero's. The emperors' demands that they be worshipped, is also tied to the worship of the beast's image (Rev. 13:15; 20:4).

Taking the vaccine does not demand Christians forsake Jesus, as happened during the roman empire. Far from causing fear and anxiety among Christians, Revelation has a positive message. It tells us to focus on Jesus who is the sole object of worship. We must embrace the vaccine as a gift from God during a period of intense suffering.



CAN 5G SPREAD COVID-19?

No.

There is no evidence that 5G technology spreads COVID-19. Viruses cannot travel on radio waves or mobile networks. Many countries in Africa do not have 5G technology but have still been devastated by COVID-19. We should embrace 5G as it will deliver faster connection and access to information and it does not spread COVID-19.

WAS COVID-19 MADE IN A LAB?

No.

There is no evidence that the virus was made in a laboratory. Pandemics caused by viruses have happened throughout history, like the SARS and MERS coronavirus outbreaks.

The COVID-19 virus was not created by companies to make a profit from the vaccine. The fact that the vaccine was developed so quickly is a cause for celebration. So, the church must call on companies and governments, to make sure the vaccine is accessible to all, not just the wealthy few.

IS THE VACCINE A FORM OF POPULATION CONTROL BY THE WEST?

No.

The vaccine is not an effort by the west to kill the people of Africa. Vaccines are not new. Our children are vaccinated at birth. Most of us would have died of illnesses such as measles and polio, as babies if we had not got vaccines. The same is true of the COVID-19 vaccine.

COVID-19 affects us all. It does not care what race or gender you are. Two million people have lost their lives to COVID-19 worldwide, rich, and poor countries alike. Every part of the world has had its share of pain. Let's continue to show global solidarity through mutual support as Christ would want us to.

WILL THE VACCINE CHANGE MY DNA?

No.

The top South African scientists assure us it will not. The mRNA vaccines will not change your DNA. All types of COVID-19 vaccines work to train your bodies to fight the virus. mRNA is one of the types of vaccines that will be used. mRNA is not the same as DNA. It cannot combine with our DNA to change it. mRNA is naturally made by our body. It gives instructions into our bodies' cells on how to fight the COVID-19 virus.



IS THE VACCINE MADE FROM ABORTED FOETUSES?

No.

No, the vaccine itself does not contain aborted foetuses. Ethical concerns have been raised on the production of the vaccine. One of which is that the vaccine has been made from cell lines of aborted foetuses.

There is a history of the use of fetal cell lines in the research and development of vaccines for diseases such as hepatitis A, rubella, chickenpox, Ebola, and the early polio vaccines. Some of the vaccines we will use are simply based on this technology.

A way that vaccines are tested for safety in the laboratory is on cell lines. A cell line is a process of growing living human tissue in a laboratory. The foetal cell lines themselves do not contain foetal tissue; they are grown in labs.

ARE VACCINES SAFE?

Yes.

All vaccines go through clinical trials to test their safety and effectiveness. Constant checks are done to see if there are any side effects and vaccines will be withdrawn if the side effects are serious. These vaccines have been produced very quickly but no steps were skipped on the way. They have already been given to millions of people of all races around the world. Our safety has been a top priority of vaccine manufacturers.

HOW IS HUMANITY A CO-CREATOR WITH GOD?

We have been praying for God to end the pandemic and for life to return to normal. God moved and inspired our scientists to develop effective vaccines. That way, our scientists are co-creators with God. Christians should view the vaccines as part of the answer to our prayers. The swift effort that has gone into developing effective vaccines is a miracle. Christians should see the Spirit of God at work in all areas of life. The vaccine is not the saviour, but God is. There is, no legitimate Christian reason for refusing to take the vaccine.

Let us continue praying for God to give our experts, whom God has called, all that is needed to save lives and bring healing. As Apostle Paul writes (1 Corinthians 3:9).

“For we are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building”; that the words of Prophet Jeremiah might come true for our time: “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope”. (Jeremiah 29:11)



Care in a time of CORONA

HOW CAN I PREACH THE SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE?

We have lost too many lives and livelihoods because of COVID-19. Every life is important, and livelihoods help sustain life with dignity. Let us preach for the sanctity of human life.

The saving of life requires the commitment of us all to help create an environment for living in the compassion of God in Jesus. Christ felt compassion for the people, "Because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36). The same Christ instructs us, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." (Luke 6:36). This compassion of Christ encourages us to be champions of life-saving vaccines against COVID-19.

HOW IS THE VACCINE A SHOW OF LOVE?

Jesus said: *"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another."* (John 13:34-35).

Being vaccinated is an act of love for your neighbour. When you get vaccinated you are helping slow the spread of the virus and do not cause your loved ones suffering. It is our moral responsibility for the common good. Protecting the health of the community is more important than our individual beliefs. The guiding principle should be the Jesus cause "that they may have life". We must all say in a united voice, "I will take the vaccine not only for what I hope will be the good of my health but for others to ensure population-wide immunity.

WHY IS THE VACCINE A JUSTICE ISSUE?

The churches' responsibility must be to advocate for every South African who wants a vaccine to get it, especially the poor. We will raise our prophetic voice and ensure that the distribution of the vaccine is not corrupt, as happened with the procurement of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). We must fight that all who are found to have committed acts of corruption are dealt with accordingly.

We must call for a spirit of global solidarity for access to these vaccines and the sharing of knowledge. Many rich nations of the world are keeping large volumes of vaccines, and not sharing them with poorer countries. We must speak out. This is an injustice that the world should not tolerate.



Care in a time of CORONA

HOW CAN I ADDRESS FALSE INFORMATION?

Wrong information about the vaccine is dangerous. Having the right information is the best way to make the right choices and live without fear. Knowledge and wisdom are key biblical ideals, as Proverbs 15:14 instructs: “The discerning heart seeks knowledge, but the mouth of a fool feeds on folly.”

We need to empower ourselves by getting information on vaccines and COVID-19 from experts and encourage our congregants to do the same. We must trust that South African scientists are as good as any in the world. We must not be misguided by every fake scientific post on the internet.

Go to SACC’s dedicated COVID-19 website – <https://www.churchinaction.org.za>

to get advice and guidance. Let us be the voice of reason. Let us give hope.

WHAT ABOUT FREEDOM OF CHOICE?

We believe in freedom of choice, as Christians. We should empower our congregations with information to make the best decision. But we cannot force the vaccine on them. Their membership of and standing in the Church, should not be affected by the decision that they take on the vaccine.

HOW CAN THE CHURCH CO-OPERATE WITH THE GOVERNMENT?

The Church should cooperate with the Government in its attempts to vaccinate our people and save lives. We should give the health authorities all the support that they need. We should open our Church buildings to be vaccination centres.

WHAT CAN I DO AS A CHURCH LEADER?

Church leaders have an important role to play in communication about the vaccine and getting people to be vaccinated. Church leaders officially supporting the vaccine, is very important. When Church leaders get vaccinated in public, they help restore trust in vaccines among their congregants and the broader society.

Church leaders should encourage their congregants and their loved ones to take the vaccine and address wrong and fake information. We can tip the balance between trust and distrust, confidence, and fear.

CONCLUSION

The development of the COVID-19 vaccine is a major achievement in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic. The vaccine is our best hope to save lives. It will help protect people who get infected with the virus from becoming very sick. We can then save lives and livelihoods. Being vaccinated is an act of love for our neighbour.



www.churchinaction.org.za