

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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What constitutes martyrdom?

The word martyr is taken from the Greek and means a witness. However, a martyr, as acknowledged by the Catholic Church, is a special kind of witness, and martyrdom the act of giving one's life in doing so.

The definition of martyrdom is in fact given by St. Thomas Aquinas when he asks the question of whether or not it is the Faith alone which is the cause of martyrdom, or whether the defense of other virtues also can be the cause of martyrdom (IIa-IIae, Q 124, Art. 5). There he defines martyrs as those who by

physical suffering unto death bear witness to the truth; not indeed to any truth, but to the truth that is according to piety, which was revealed to us by Christ [a truth of faith]: wherefore Christ's martyrs are His witnesses... Wherefore the cause of all martyrdom is the truth of faith.

Analyzing this definition, we can determine the three conditions that must be fulfilled for the full and true nature of martyrdom to be accomplished (see Prummer, *Manuale Theologiae Moralis*, II, §623). There are of course many other heroic acts of the virtue of fortitude, but the honor of the crown of martyrdom is only given to those souls whose lives fully realize all three conditions:

1) True physical death is required, for this is the greatest sacrifice a man can make and the most perfect testimony to the truth of the Catholic Faith. Thus St. John the Evangelist, who was boiled in hot oil and miraculously delivered, is not in the strict sense a martyr, nor the Blessed Virgin Mary at the foot of the cross, although spiritually and through her fullness of grace she is the Queen of Martyrs.

2) The death must be inflicted out of hatred of Catholic Truth. St. Thomas Aquinas (*ibid.*) points out that the death must be a profession of the truth of the Catholic Faith, either in the form of words or by actions. Clearly heretics cannot be martyrs, but a man can be a martyr for his actions, and not just for his words. St. Thomas also points out that a man can be a martyr not only for defending a dogma of Faith, but also for defending moral truths of the supernatural order that depend upon the Faith, or which are referred to God in a supernatural sense. Thus it is that St. John the Baptist is rightly considered as a martyr in the strict sense, as is St. Thomas a Becket in defending the rights of the Church and St. Thomas More in defending papal primacy over the Church in England. Likewise is St.

Maria Goretti rightly considered a martyr by dying for purity. St. Thomas Aquinas also points out that those who die for their country can also be considered as martyrs if the human good of the nation is referred to God Himself. Thus Garcia Moreno, the President of Ecuador, can rightly be considered a martyr, as also could St. Joan of Arc (although she is not usually honored as such).

3) The death must be accepted voluntarily, that is without resistance. Thus it is that St. Maurice and his Theban legion of 2,000 men became martyrs by offering no resistance. However, infants and those who are asleep cannot be considered martyrs in the true sense. To the objection of the Holy Innocents, St. Thomas replies that there is no evidence that God gave them free will, but rather that they obtained by a special grace of God, along with baptism of blood, what is normally merited by free will (*ibid.*, 124, 1, ad 1).

Consequently, there are many persons who die holy deaths but who are not strictly martyrs. This happens if the persecutor does not know that a person is Catholic or does not kill him because he is Catholic, or because he holds to some supernaturally revealed Catholic truth, but for some other reason. Thus it is that St. Maximilian Kolbe, as heroic as was his death, is not rightly considered a martyr. Nor was Edith Stein (St. Maria Benedicta), for she was put to death for her Jewish origins rather than for her Catholic faith. Another case of a man who died a holy death but who is not a martyr is St. Damian De Veuster, who died on account of the leprosy contracted at Molokai in Hawaii. For as heroic as was his life, his death was still by natural causes.

It also follows that any persons who die for natural truths, that is for truths of the natural law, are not martyrs. Any persons who would be killed for standing up against abortion or euthanasia, for example, would be performing a great act and obtaining many merits if done for supernatural reasons. But the inviolability of human life and the immorality of killing the innocent are in themselves truths of the natural law, shared by many non-Catholics. Dying for them would not make a person a martyr.

May I immunize my children with vaccines developed from cell lines that were originally derived from an aborted fetus?

It is clear that if a Catholic has a choice in the matter, he is bound to choose a vaccine that is not derived from a fetal cell line, for he does not want any kind of participation in the crime of a voluntary abortion, even one done nearly 50 years ago. However, this question has become a very difficult one from the fact that several vaccines are not available in any other form but that derived from an aborted fetus, in particular rubella (contained in the MMR), chicken pox and hepatitis A. Is one morally obliged to forgo such a vaccination, otherwise necessary for health? Also, if one is bound by civil law to receive or give such a

vaccination, must one refuse under pain of sin?

This question was very well resolved by the Pontifical Academy for Life in a document approved by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, dated June 9, 2005. (It can be viewed at www.cogforlife.org/vaticanresponse.htm). This document makes the necessary distinctions. The first is between formal and material cooperation. It is never permitted, for any reason, to cooperate formally in another's immoral action, in this case the abortion. Examples of formal cooperation include the staff who willingly help with the abortion or the original researchers who requested the aborted fetal tissue for their research. However, those who simply use the products of the cell line do not cooperate formally in the abortion.

Material cooperation exists when a person shares in some way in an evil action, for example by taking advantage of its consequences, but without sharing its evil intent. Examples of material cooperation include the staff who prepare the operating theater or the nurse who prepares the patient, neither of them knowing the exact nature of the procedure to be performed. Material cooperation can be immoral if done without sufficient reason, or moral if done for a good and proportionately grave reason, in proportion to the gravity of the evil and the proximity of cooperation in it.

The principles of double effect must be applied, namely provided that the good effect (in this case the use of the vaccine) does not come directly from the bad effect (the murder of the innocent), but is simply a by-product of this immoral act. Moreover, the material cooperation can be immediate, as in the nurse who takes care of the patient before or after the procedure, or it can be mediate because not directly involved in the abortion. Moreover this mediate material cooperation can also be very remote, and far removed from the abortion itself, as in the case of those who use vaccines that were developed from a fetal cell line some 50 years old. In cases of remote material cooperation, it is not such a grave reason that is required for there to be a proportionate reason for the material cooperation. This is not to deny the very grave evil of abortion, but simply because the material cooperation, is extremely far removed from the abortion done so many years ago. The absence of any other vaccine and the need of the vaccine for one's health would suffice. The reason for this given by the above-mentioned document is that in this case, given the remoteness of the material cooperation, "the duty to avoid passive material cooperation is not obligatory if there is grave inconvenience." Danger to health or problems with civil law constitute such a grave inconvenience.

This being said, the development of vaccines from fetal cell lines is gravely immoral, and we have the duty to actively oppose it as much as we can, in order to avoid any formal cooperation. This is how the above mentioned document describes this grave obligation:

Therefore, doctors and fathers of families have a duty to take recourse to alternative vaccines (if they exist), putting pressure on the political authorities and health systems so that other vaccines without moral problems become available... They should oppose by all means... the vaccines which do not yet have morally acceptable alternatives, creating pressure so that alternative vaccines are prepared, which are not connected with the abortion of a human fetus....

Nevertheless, it would be excessive and wrong to deny that the material cooperation in the use of such vaccines is very remote, so that where there is no alternative to such vaccines, and where the health of children or of the community at large requires it, it is not only permissible to use such vaccines for which there is no alternative, but sometimes even obligatory. This would be the case of a woman planning to marry who had never been vaccinated against rubella and who did not have any natural immunity. It would be a moral obligation to receive the vaccine, even derived from fetal cell line, in order to protect her own unborn children from the possibility of serious deformities due to infection with the rubella virus. Her duty to protect her unborn children is the grave reason that permits and, where there is no alternative even makes obligatory, the very remote mediate material cooperation involved.

In the case of routine vaccine of children with MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) there is certainly no obligation to have the vaccine, since it is not strictly necessary. It would certainly be best to request the measles and mumps portions separately from the rubella, thus making a statement of moral principle, and this should be done whenever possible. However, if the MMR combination is the only one offered, and if one has good reason to give this vaccine (as is generally the case), then a parent is not to be troubled in conscience by allowing it to be administered to his children.

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