

Dear Epiphany,

I read in the newspaper recently that some religious guidance recommends forgoing the Johnson and Johnson COVID-19 vaccine if one were given the option of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines. The issue is over how the Johnson and Johnson vaccine was developed and made, if it were made using human stem cells.

I do not believe that the sanctity of a human soul is harmed in any way by how the Johnson and Johnson vaccine was developed and made. Yes, every life matters. Every soul is beloved by God. Indeed, life serves God's purposes in many different ways. There are many souls that together have produced the Johnson and Johnson COVID-19 vaccine; more than our minds could imagine. And so, my response to the Johnson and Johnson COVID-19 vaccine is "thank you, dear and innumerable, God-beloved souls." Thank you for having so valiantly, and providentially, contributed to other people's lives. You have given them safety so they can employ their freedom to choose and share God's love. This vaccination isn't ultimately about preserving life, it is about preserving love.

Yes, life is important, please don't get me wrong, but if life was the most important thing in God's creation, why did God make it such a foundational part of the human experience? Why do we die? Some say sin, the sin of Adam and Eve, which, one reading of the mythology of Genesis says unleashed death upon humanity. But I don't see death as punishment, I see it as process. The process against which we evaluate how we live our life, right here, right now, is in anticipation of the great equalizing reality that we all die, and we will all meet God face-to-face, to account for our lives. That may be good or that may be bad; but, it puts us all on a level playing field. If death, then, is a fundamental part of freely forming our spirit, why should it be avoided at all costs? Why should death be deemed failure? No one knows what is beyond the curtain of death, which I believe makes it a blessing against which to measure how we use the freedom of our lives to live the life that God so designed for each one of us. Running from death is the sin. Living against the reflection of death is the blessing that spreads love.

The theology I teach and preach claims freedom as the highest theological good. Here is the logic chain: God is a relational God, three in one; God may be many things and have many parts, but the one indisputable reality of God is that God is love; it is from the excess of God's love that creation was made; the specific role of humanity is as recipient of God's love; and yet, for love to be truly love, humanity was given the capacity to freely reject or freely accept it; for there is no love unless there is true freedom, and that is why freedom is the highest theological good.

God works in mysterious ways, and nothing in God's Kingdom is for naught, because God is love, God created out of love, God never puts an end to anything that God loves, and God loves you, and God loves all those souls who made the Johnson and Johnson vaccine a reality.

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