Many in the pro-life movement are undecided whether they should accept or reject the COVID-19 vaccine. But before we decide to make it, as a movement, a kind of pro-life litmus test, we must put the larger issue of abortion in context. Truth be told, the COVID-19 vaccines are but one sad little link in a much bigger chain fettered to the great evil of our age: the killing of innocent children in the womb.

Those who say that the COVID-19 vaccines presently available are morally illicit point to the fact that the cell line used in their testing or production was derived from a baby aborted around 1960.

It is important to note that the vaccines currently available vary in their connection to abortion and thus their cooperation with that evil. The AstraZeneca vaccine used cell lines derived from abortion at all stages of the vaccine process (development, production and testing) and therefore has a strong connection to abortion. However, Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna vaccines were not developed or produced from cell lines derived from abortion but did make use of such cell lines (HEK-293) during the testing stages.

Both the Pontifical Academy of Life and the lay-run John Paul II Academy for Human Life and Family believe that this constitutes remote cooperation with evil, and should not be used as a basis for denying anyone the vaccine, especially the elderly who are at high risk from the China Virus.

But if an individual decides that receiving such a vaccine constitutes immoral cooperation with evil, then we – and society at large – should also reflect on all of our other choices in life that also constitute immoral cooperation with that same evil. The fact of the matter is that our society is so intertwined with the abortion culture and industry that it is almost impossible to not be “cooperating” with that evil in one way or another.

The fact is that the same 60-year-old cell lines used to develop the COVID-19 vaccine have
not only been used in the making of other vaccines, but also in developing cancer treatments, insulin, and numerous commonly prescribed medicines and drugs, such as statins and blood pressure medications. The bottom line is that if the use of the currently available COVID vaccines is illicit because of their association with these cell lines, then the same use of these cells in the production of almost all of today’s medications makes their use equally illicit and we must therefore refuse them. Tens of millions of individuals would lose access to life-saving medications if we went down this path.

Those who claim that the use of COVID-19 vaccines can never be justified, to be consistent, must apply the same standard to all medicines that are associated with abortion. This would put the lives of countless people at immediate risk, and create an even bigger moral dilemma concerning human dignity than we are currently facing with the vaccine alone.

In a broader sense, we are all guilty of cooperation with the evil of abortion by nature of our society’s economic and cultural connection to it. For this reason, it is intellectually dishonest and inconsistent to deny vulnerable people who need immunization from COVID-19 access to the vaccines that are currently available, especially when there are no moral alternatives present. Perhaps one might suggest the use of hydroxychloroquine or ivermectin as effective therapeutics in the treatment of COVID-19, but it turns out that these drugs, too, are also tested using those same cell lines.

The average American has a much more proximate cooperation in the evil of abortion when they pay their taxes or buy anything made in China, where the government forces women to have abortions. And, now, under the Biden administration, we will be complicit in abortion when we simply pay our taxes. Remote cooperation, not just with abortion, but with all evil is inevitable unless we completely isolate ourselves from modern society by taking up a hermit-like existence.

This is not to say that individuals should not be free to abstain from a vaccine that has a connection to abortion, as long as by refusing it they do not cause harm to themselves or their community. And if there is no “clean vaccine” option – a vaccine that is not associated with abortion – then you should choose the vaccine that has the most remote cooperation with this evil. We should demand ethical practices in biomedical research – which means not using cell lines from aborted babies – and we should employ every lawful means to achieve this end. Educating oneself using trustworthy sources of information so that you will know how to proceed.

All this is to say that the COVID-19 vaccines are only a small part of a much larger problem:
the abortion-industrial-complex itself and the immoral practices of both bio-medical researchers and the pharmacological industry.

We urge everyone in the pro-life movement to confront the larger issues raised above. If we are to have an effective response to the unethical practices in the bio-medical and pharmacological industries we must be unified in our demands for clean vaccines and clean medicines. We must be courageous in our pursuit to seek the truth and defend life, but realistic about the challenges as well. Above all, we must pray for clarity as we seek to expunge the sin of abortion from every corner of our lives and from society as a whole.

NOTE: Katarina Carranco is the Director of PRI’s newly established Rome Office.