Global Health Disparities from a Catholic Social Teaching Perspective

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In *Evangelium Vitae*, Pope John Paul II refers to Catholics as “the people of life and for life,”[1] as he concludes his teachings on issues of human sacredness. Within those concerns he accounts for the Catholic responsibility to assist the vulnerable which includes the sick and the poor of the world.[2] Perhaps the greatest concern for global health is the reconciliation of health inequalities which is an aspect of what John Paul II was referring to in his writing. Along with the Catholic responsibility to assist the sick and poor is the basic human right for all people to health at the highest possible level.[3] Global health disparity is defined by the dispersal of disease and lifespans and the ranges between the poor and wealthy are significant.[4] This challenge equates to 20 million deaths per year and that hasn’t shown much of a change in the last 20 years.[5] When discussing this global challenge along with the directives for Catholic social responsibility which is seeking to realize a common good, this paper will explore the ethical justification for a global right to health from a Catholic perspective. The health care situations of both developed and developing countries will be outlined to establish a starting point for this ethical dilemma. The factors that are contributing to the disparities will be discussed based on the findings of the Commission on the Social Determinants of Health. Catholic theological concepts will be covered through the encyclicals related to Catholic Social Teachings. Health as a human right will be examined through the constitution of the World Health Organization and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. The issue of health inequalities and the Catholic position will be viewed from principles of The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights. The progress that has been made in improving the gap in health disparities will conclude the discussion which will include health governance and humanitarian assistance.


[5] Enku Kebede-Francis, Global Health Disparities. Closing the gap through good governance. (Sudbury, Massachusetts: Jones and Bartlett Leaning, 2011), 84