

Chapter 14

Health Protection and Policies in the Pontificate of Francis

Paolo Palumbo

Università Giustino Fortunato, Italy

Antonella Losanno

University of Salerno, Italy

ABSTRACT

The chapter, through a study of the Encyclicals, Apostolic Exhortations, speeches, and messages of Pope Francis, as well as some documents of the Roman Curia, highlights how the issue of health protection and policies in support of this human right are central to Francis' teaching. The protection must not be a mere statement of principle but the concrete realization of the right to health in a broad way, involving not only the physical well-being of the human person but also requires the protection of the environment of which every man is an integral part.

INTRODUCTION

The *tweet* launched by Pope Francis on 25 October 2018 on the occasion of the Global Conference on Primary Health Care is emblematic and encapsulates the meaning of his entire Magisterium on the issue of health, which the Pope defines as not a consumer good, but a universal right. Francis also highlighted the risk that “*The business model in healthcare, if adopted indiscriminately, instead of optimizing available resources, risks producing human waste*”. Thus, in his programmatic apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii gaudium*, he had vigorously urged rulers and financial power to ensure that there is health care for all citizens. In other words, “*quando la persona malata non viene messa al centro e considerata nella sua dignità, si ingenerano atteggiamenti che possono portare addirittura a speculare sulle disgrazie altrui. E questo è molto grave!*” (*When the sick person is not placed at the centre and his or her dignity is not considered, attitudes are generated that can even lead to speculation on the misfortunes of others. And this is very serious*) (10 February 2017), the Pope had said. In this lies the basic motive inspiring the Magisterium of Francis, which finds its most recent reference in the Angelus, recited at the Gemelli

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-8868-0.ch014

Hospital, last 11 July, in which he launched a strong appeal for the accessibility of a good health service, accessible to all, reminding individuals and States of the importance of effective, free and universal health care: “*In these days of hospitalization, I experienced once again how important is good healthcare that is accessible to all, as there is in Italy and in other countries. Free healthcare, that assures good service, accessible to everyone. This precious benefit must not be lost. It needs to be kept! And for this everyone needs to be committed, because it helps everyone and requires everyone’s contribution. In the Church too it happens that at times some healthcare institution, due to poor management, does not do well economically, and the first thought that comes to mind is to sell it. But vocation in the Church, is not to have money; it is to offer service, and service is always freely given. Do not forget this: saving free institutions*”. Of course, even on this issue, while highlighting in the course of this contribution the peculiarities that the Magisterium of Francis offers, it is not difficult to bring out a clear continuity of thought and direction with the Magisterium of the previous Popes, where the theme of health is often linked to that of disease and suffering.

St John Paul II with his Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris* on the Christian meaning of human suffering, of 11 February 1984, and with the establishment of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Health Care Workers, we have the first systematic treatment of the theme of human suffering and health, understood in an integral perspective (Taliercio, 2005). In fact, after having described the world of human suffering (chap. II) with its different faces - physical, psychic and moral suffering - and their interdependence, the Pope enters into the fundamental theme: the question of meaning which the mystery of suffering poses (chap. III) in order to suggest how this precious experience of life can be corroborated and made fruitful, in the conviction that there is no direct connection between sin and suffering as a punishment for guilt, as a certain erroneous theology would have us believe. The fundamental answer to such a great mystery is not an idea, a thought of an intellectual nature, but a Person and his experience: Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the One who conquered suffering with Love (chap. IV), taking upon himself the pain of the world and experiencing Himself the drama of suffering to the point of experiencing God’s abandonment, in order to redeem man (Moriconi, 2011; Zanotti, 2020). And the man who suffers is a sharer in the sufferings of Christ (chap. V) and can make even his suffering fruitful if he becomes capable of looking at Christ crucified and accepting the “Gospel of suffering” with love and courage in the mysterious, but always loving, design of divine Providence (chap. VI). Like Christ the Good Samaritan, the Church is at the side of people who suffer (Chapter VII).

Also fundamental is the institution of World Day of the Sick by John Paul II on 13 May 1992, for 11 February each year, the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes. The aims of the World Day of the Sick are: to make the people of God, Catholic health care instructions and civil society aware of the need to ensure the best possible care for the sick; to help the sick to appreciate suffering on a human and supernatural level; to involve dioceses, Christian communities and religious families in the health care ministry; to encourage the increasingly valuable commitment of voluntary work; to recall the importance of the spiritual and moral formation of health care workers; to make people understand better the importance of religious assistance alongside the sick (Arice, 2016).

In his magisterial interventions Benedict XVI too has often reflected on the theme of evil, pain, and suffering, emphasising the difficulties but always with a look of great hope for all, and above all recalling the question of meaning posed by the theme of suffering and the decisive and definitive ‘answer’ found in Christ and his Paschal Mystery. This is what he has done in his encyclicals, particularly in the first two. In the Encyclical *Deus Caritas est* of 25 December 2005, in a rich and comprehensive treatment of charity as an essential dimension of being a Christian, he proposes useful reflections in particular

14 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:
www.igi-global.com/chapter/health-protection-and-policies-in-the-pontificate-of-francis/302494

Related Content

The Challenges Behind the Development of an E-Mentoring Model for Online Distance Education: A Pilot Experience

Lina Morgado, Ana Paula Afonso, Nathalie Ferretand Marta Gomes (2022). *Handbook of Research on Global Education and the Impact of Institutional Policies on Educational Technologies* (pp. 363-376).
www.irma-international.org/chapter/the-challenges-behind-the-development-of-an-e-mentoring-model-for-online-distance-education/291765

The Role of Critical Literacy in Troubling Cultural Myths: Applying Critical Discourse Analysis to the Myth of Christopher Columbus

Lyndsey Aubin Benharrisand Katharine Covino Poutasse (2024). *Challenging Bias and Promoting Transformative Education in Public Schooling Through Critical Literacy* (pp. 142-160).
www.irma-international.org/chapter/the-role-of-critical-literacy-in-troubling-cultural-myths/346870

The Evolving Landscape of Consumer Rights

(2026). *The Impact of Organizations on National Interests, Local Autonomy, and Individual Freedoms* (pp. 315-332).
www.irma-international.org/chapter/the-evolving-landscape-of-consumer-rights/394993

Sex Differences and Coping Strategies of Children of Incarcerated Parents: A Systematic Review

Gelan Hesham Abdou Ahmed (2025). *Policies, Initiatives, and Innovations for Global Health* (pp. 187-206).
www.irma-international.org/chapter/sex-differences-and-coping-strategies-of-children-of-incarcerated-parents/361928

Public Policy Propelling the Development of UK Third Sector Social Enterprises

(2018). *Influence of Public Policy on Small Social Enterprises: Emerging Research and Opportunities* (pp. 25-51).
www.irma-international.org/chapter/public-policy-propelling-the-development-of-uk-third-sector-social-enterprises/187610