

Catholic Health Care Ministry Is Anchored in a Global View

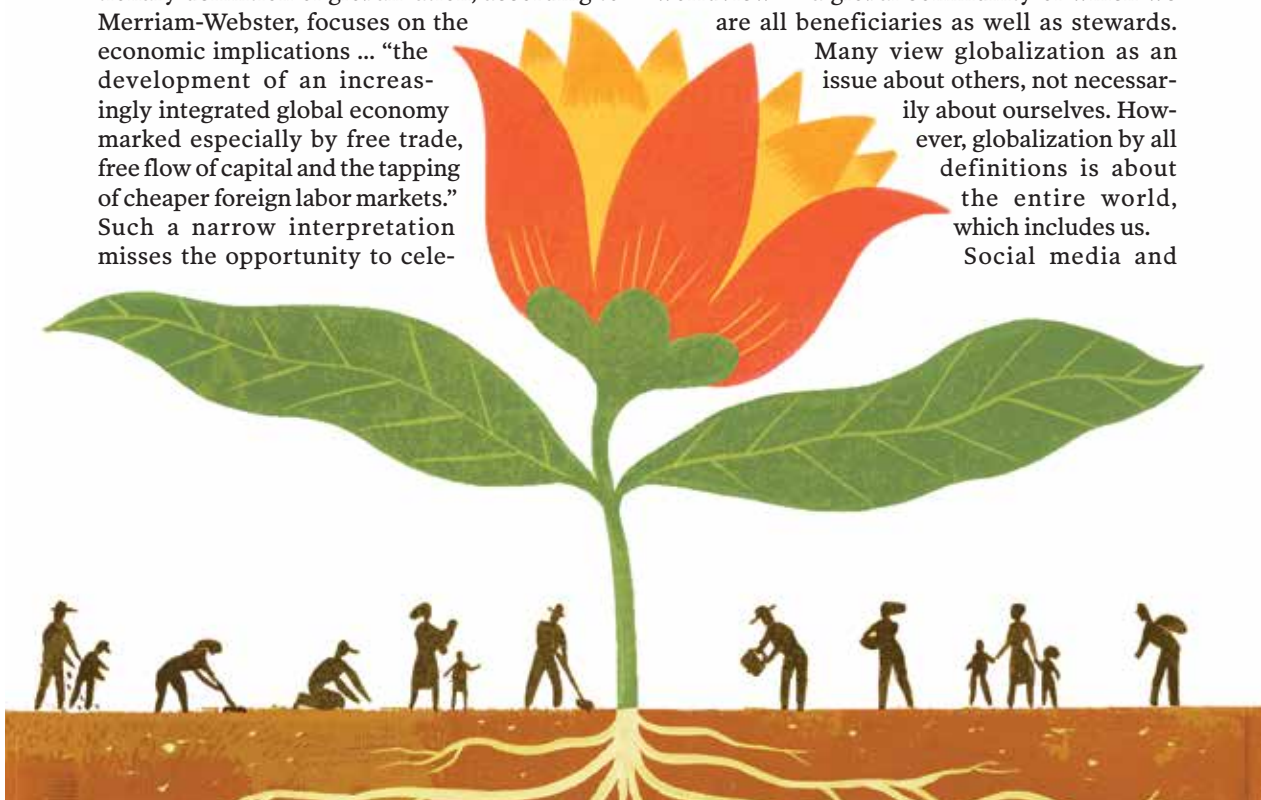
By BRUCE COMPTON and DIANE JONES

Merits and misgivings related to globalization catapulted onto our mobile devices and into our conversations in June 2016 when Britain elected to leave the European Union in the historic “Brexit” vote. From this side of the pond, we watched the immediate political and financial fallout. “Britain just killed globalization as we know it,” was a *Washington Post* blogger’s headline. Yet for Catholic health care, globalization has deeper roots. It is a call, an invitation, an opportunity, which must be attended with the virtue of temperance.

This issue of *Health Progress* explores how globalization impacts health and health care in the United States and around the world. The dictionary definition of globalization, according to Merriam-Webster, focuses on the economic implications ... “the development of an increasingly integrated global economy marked especially by free trade, free flow of capital and the tapping of cheaper foreign labor markets.” Such a narrow interpretation misses the opportunity to cele-

brate globalization as a uniting of the human community, across oceans, mountains and national borders. Globalization calls us to an inclusive worldview — a global community of which we are all beneficiaries as well as stewards.

Many view globalization as an issue about others, not necessarily about ourselves. However, globalization by all definitions is about the entire world, which includes us. Social media and



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mass communications now provide us with instantaneous news and information from around the world. The profound impact on governments, economies, businesses and people demonstrates that our world is so virtually and humanly connected that geographic proximity no longer defines community. Facebook “friends” often are described as a village of acquaintances across

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communities and continents. The social network claimed an average of 1.13 billion daily active users in June 2016, and more than 85 percent of them are outside the United States and Canada. If Facebook were a country, it would be the most populous country in the world.

WE HAVE TEACHING, TRADITION

During his 2015 visit to the United States, Pope Francis spoke to the merits of globalization when addressing immigration. Cultural homogenization, he warned, is not healthy, but working together is good for the world.

“If a globalization tries to make everybody even, as if it were a sphere, that globalization destroys the richness and the specificities of each person and each people,” Francis said.

When people are unified in a way that allows them to maintain their identities, he said, they are strengthened: “It is excellent, because people may grow. It gives dignity to every man and woman. It gives rights.”

After the Brexit vote, the Holy Father reiterated his thoughts on deterring cultural homogenization while also continuing to uplift the potential unity created through globalization. During a press conference on his plane, Pope Francis said, “For me, unity is always better than conflict ... fraternity is better than animosity and distance ... and bridges are better than walls.”

Pope Francis’ comments flow from Catholic

social teaching that calls us to uphold the common good and the dignity of each person — the good for each person is intimately related to the good for the whole community.

In the encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, Pope John Paul II called on all people and societies to practice the social virtue of solidarity, which responds morally to the growing interdependence among all individuals and nations that is the hallmark of globalization.

“Solidarity is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people near and far,” he said. “On the contrary it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.”

In a 2003 address to the members of the Pontifical Academy for Life, Pope John Paul II spoke of health care, specifically, and “the very serious and unacceptable gap that separates the developing world from the developed in terms of the capacity to develop biomedical research for the benefit of health care assistance and to assist peoples afflicted by chronic poverty and dire epidemics.” To accept the status quo of “peoples without the

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resources of science and culture,” he said, “means to condemn them to poverty, financial exploitation and the lack of health care structures, and also to commit an injustice and fuel a long term threat for the globalized world.”

OUR ROOTS, OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSIDERATIONS

As a global health ministry, U.S.-based Catholic health care is playing a role in globalization. It’s in our DNA. The very existence of Catholic health care in the United States is a result of globaliza-

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tion, when more than a century ago, members of female and male religious communities left their families and homes from across Europe to make new lives in America in order to serve Catholic immigrants and others they found in need.

In their example we see how globalization can make us not only neighbors in the truest sense, as witnessed in the parable of the Good Samaritan, but also partners. They came to this country to live, to build communities of faith where those on the margins could access health care and education. They did not come, then leave; they stayed, they built, they served.

But today brings different means. Globalization, along with the 24-hour news cycle, provides an unprecedented ability to see needs as they arise and to recognize potential human and natural resources. Disasters and wars, financial crises and violence — we are now interconnected virtually and virally. But the ability to serve must be tempered.

We cannot exploit communities for their human and material resources. Nor can we

exploit their lack of access in order to fulfill our need to “reconnect” with our calling in the healing ministry. As globalization continues, the way we provide charity globally likely also will need to change. Just because we can make easier connections through technology doesn’t make us good partners in creating sustainable access to needed care and services.

In 2015, CHA developed “Guiding Principles for Conducting International Health Activities,” a resource for Catholic health ministry leaders and others who participate in international projects. The six principles and their accompanying questions bring to life the richness of Catholic social teaching and tradition as we consider our current and future roles in international health.

Pope Francis has a vision of globalization that affirms the dignity of all people: “If a globalization tries to unite everyone ... respecting each individual, each person, each richness, each specificity, respecting each people, that globalization is good and it enables us to keep growing and take us to peace.”

As a global health ministry, Catholic health care has a unique opportunity to join Pope Francis and the international community in the movement’s leadership.

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