

Mercy and Beyond: Pope Francis' Marian "Program of Life"

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Jesus said, "Follow me."¹ A commentary on the account of the conversion of St. Matthew, the tax collector, inspired the motto of Pope Francis: *Miserando atque eligendo*. These words are taken from a passage from the Venerable Bede, the historian:

Jesus therefore sees the tax collector, and since he sees by having mercy and by choosing, he says to him, "follow me," suggesting mercy is rooted in clarity or spiritual sight. Recalling the original Latin of Bede's commentary, Francis says that he likes to translate *miserando* with a gerund that doesn't exist: "*mercifying*." So *mercifying* and *choosing* describes the vision of Jesus, who gives the gift of mercy and chooses, and takes unto himself.²

Pope Francis recalls a similar moment in his own life when he experienced the tenderness of God's mercy following a confession he made at the age of 17. Being touched by the mercy of God, he answered the call to religious life and made this motto a "program of life."³ This is the same program encouraged by his predecessors, a program that calls for the rediscovery of mercy: God's perfect, compassionate, generous, kind and forgiving love, whether one feels worthy of it or not. This rediscovery was launched by the private revelations of St. Faustina Kowalska; made accessible by Pope Saint John Paul II, who at the beginning of his papacy said, "I consider this message of Divine Mercy my special task"⁴; reconfirmed by Pope Benedict XVI; and celebrated by Pope Francis.

In this paper, I intend to show how Francis' vision of mercy stands in continuity with his predecessors as I highlight three key features of his "program of life." The first feature is an approach that I have considered naming "therapeutic juris-

¹ See the conversion accounts of St. Matthew: Mt. 9:9-13; Mk. 2:13-17; Lk. 5:27-32.

² Homily 21 (CCL 122, 149-151). Quoted in Pope Francis, *The Name of God Is Mercy: A Conversation with Andrea Tornielli* (New York: Random House, 2016), 12.

³ Pope Francis, "*Misericordiae Vultus*: Bull of Indiction for Holy Year of Mercy," *Origins*, Vol. 44, n. 46, 745-754, paragraph 13.

⁴ Pope John Paul II, Address at the Shrine of Merciful Love, November 22, 1981. www.thedivinemercy.org/message/johnpaul/quotes.php. Accessed January 19, 2018.

prudence”—an expression coined by two American law professors, David Wexler and Bruce Winnick, in the 1980s.⁵ Therapeutic jurisprudence is “the study of the law’s healing potential.”⁶ The second key feature is an approach that rediscovers or affirms the Marian dimension of what it means to be Church, an extension or fruit of using therapeutic jurisprudence as a model for encountering mercy in today’s world. Finally, I offer a response to Francis’ recommendation in his exhortation “On Love in the Family,” *Amoris Laetitia*, that human formation “should be interdisciplinary.”⁷ This interdisciplinary approach to human formation complements and supports, rather than supplants, our tradition’s understanding of human nature and human behaviour, making us more merciful in our approach to pastoral care—or as John Paul II desired, making us “experts in humanity.”⁸

These three features stand out for me as key to implementing Francis’ program of life, a program that begins with an understanding of salvation as the fruit of mercy. This implies the possibility of experiencing divine restoration after an encounter with mercy or justice informed by mercy. This understanding seeks to reconcile the tension between mercy and justice.⁹ Hence the expression “therapeutic jurisprudence.” This approach sees justice inspired by mercy as the best approach to individual and communal restoration.

The Oxford and Merriam-Webster dictionaries define “therapeutic” as the healing of disease, and jurisprudence as skill in law or administration of the law. This new multidisciplinary field of study offers a holistic approach to handling legal

⁵ See David B. Wexler and Bruce J. Winnick, “Therapeutic Jurisprudence,” in *Principles of Addiction Medicine*, 4th ed. Available at SSRN: ssrn.com/abstract=1101507. Accessed January 23, 2018.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* (On Love in the Family), 2016, n. 203. www.vatican.va. Accessed January 23, 2018.

⁸ Pope John Paul II, Address on the 25th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, October 11, 1987. www.vatican.va. Accessed January 23, 2018.

⁹ On November 24, 2008 Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco, Archbishop of Genoa and President of the Council of the Bishops’ Conferences of Europe, gave a lecture in Genoa, Italy on the relationship between justice and mercy. He spoke of the tension between them when he said, “The question of the relationship between justice and mercy is an ancient one that has marked the development of Western civilization from the outset. Every time that the mind has attempted to put order between tendentially adverse opposites, such as personal freedom and social order, sin and punishment, recovery and redemption the relationship between justice and mercy has arisen regularly.” Drawing upon the wisdom of Pope Saint John Paul II and St. Thomas Aquinas he concludes, “If it wishes to take its full course mercy must first produce justice. For this reason, mercy neither opposes nor creates alibis for justice but rather contains justice as its principal expression and essential moment. Mercy, therefore, inspires and commands justice, giving it life and light so that it is better able to surpass its own rigid and formal definitions.” See Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco, “Giving Freely Without Boundaries,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, January 14, 2009, 13.

cases, taking into account the behavioural sciences and the desire to heal victims and perpetrators of crime. In other words, it is an approach that sees mercy and justice leading to healing and restoration of all those hurt by crime. It is justice informed by mercy.

This means that following and accepting a moral code or the law, freely and with love, coupled with understanding the logic of the code, leads to spiritual health or salvation. It happens, however, that some people will miss the mark due to pride, fear, ignorance or some other vulnerability. Like the prodigal son (Lk. 15:11-32), they may not trust God's plan for their lives and instead choose another path due to ignorance, pride or impatience. Some of these choices create wounds in need of healing, leading to the need for a therapeutic approach to recovery and restoration. The healing of wounds is at the heart of Francis' papacy and teaching on mercy. It is precisely our vulnerability that makes us human, in need of mercy.

In his Bull of Indiction declaring the Jubilee Year of Mercy, Pope Francis writes, "We need constantly to contemplate this mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity and peace. Our salvation depends on it."¹⁰ He spoke of this truth in *Evangelii Gaudium* when he affirmed, "The salvation which God offers us is the work of his mercy."¹¹ This means our divine health (*salus*)—the possibility of divine restoration and deliverance—depends on mercy. Why? It is because the opposite of mercy is emotional, spiritual and sometimes physical exile. If our spiritual health, our salvation, depends on mercy, the opposite, emotional exile, leads to spiritual illness. It appears that Francis sees sin more as illness than as failure. If the fruit of mercy consists of joy, serenity and peace, the fruit of exile is despair, shame, self-loathing and isolation. Mercy is the end of exile.

In order to become merciful agents, we must take the time to study and understand the vulnerable in our community. This understanding evokes empathy and leads to action. Vulnerability is derived from the Latin verb *vulnerare*, meaning "to wound." Knowledge of our own vulnerabilities keeps us humble and merciful, attending to the vulnerabilities of others who may have been wounded in profound ways. Without this self-knowledge and a basic understanding of the human condition and the many assaults on the dignity of the person, one may be tempted to judge the hearts of others, not knowing the various factors that may have prevented these people from knowing authentic freedom. It may be by the grace of God that we were not wounded in utero by drugs or environmental toxins, not aban-

¹⁰ Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 2.

¹¹ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World), 2013, n. 112. www.vatican.va. Accessed January 23, 2018.

doned at birth, not traumatized by war, natural disaster or neglect, not born into a family with addictive tendencies.

In 1980, John Paul II, in his encyclical on mercy, *Dives in Misericordia* (God, who is Rich in Mercy" [Eph. 2:4]), addressed these difficulties when he wrote, "at this difficult, critical phase of the history of the Church and world"¹² there is nothing that people need more than divine mercy. He went on to say, "the Church lives an authentic life when she professes and proclaims mercy—the most stupendous attribute of the Creator and Redeemer."¹³ Similarly, Pope Francis, in his Bull for the Year of Mercy, speaks of these painful situations in the world today and challenges us to open "our hearts to those living on the outermost fringes of society: fringes modern society itself creates."¹⁴

This is his vision, as an extension of the Church's evangelizing mission, creating a culture of accompaniment and healing, a culture that makes the Church's teaching on mercy accessible, where people feel welcome to approach and receive God's mercy. They approach like the woman who anoints Jesus (Lk. 7:37-50), like the man with the withered hand (Mt. 12:9-14), like Zacchaeus (Lk. 19:5) who climbs a tree to see Jesus, and like the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn. 4:1-42). Francis reminds us that we are called to heal the wounds of these little ones, in "whom Christ himself is present."¹⁵ We can do this when mercy informs our sense of justice. This balance is achieved when therapeutic jurisprudence is exercised, when the desire to heal and rehabilitate accompanies the fulfillment of the law. Pope Francis gives an example of this approach in a conversation with Italian journalist Andrea Tornielli, included in his book *The Name of God Is Mercy*.

At one point, Francis mentions the account of the adulterous woman in John's Gospel. In his analysis, he reminds Tornielli, "the law stated that she must be punished."¹⁶ Francis goes on to say, "Jesus forgives. But here there is something more than forgiveness. Because ... Jesus goes beyond the law that demanded stoning."¹⁷ In other words, Jesus knew the woman's heart: he could see her, including her weaknesses; and he forgave her and called her to new life, to change her ways (a spiritual work of mercy), no doubt challenging and disturbing those who desired that she be punished. Jesus' approach to this woman and others inspired Francis' "program of life."

¹² Pope John Paul II, Encyclical *Dives in Misericordia*, 1980, n. 15. www.vatican.va. Accessed January 23, 2018.

¹³ *Ibid.*, n. 2.

¹⁴ Pope Francis, Bull of Indiction for Holy Year of Mercy, n. 15.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Pope Francis, *The Name of God Is Mercy*, xv.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Similarly, this is the Christian program highlighted by Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, in which he declares, “the programme of Jesus—is a ‘heart which sees.’ This heart sees where love is needed and acts accordingly.”¹⁸ Jesus reveals that mercy calls for correction and conversion, not punishment and vengeance, prompting us to question any system of thought that includes harm in its understanding or definition of mercy. Jesus demonstrates a therapeutic approach to conversion, healing the disease of sin, offering the restoration of life or salvation. This means all need for forgiveness implies the need for healing. This truth is clearly demonstrated in the healing of the paralytic (Mk. 2:1-12).

Although the need for healing does not imply the need for forgiveness, as was the case with the healing of the blind man (Jn. 9:1-12), the paralytic needed to hear more than the words “Your faith has made you well.” He needed to hear, “Your sins are forgiven.” Although the healing of the paralytic is a sign that Jesus has the authority to forgive sins, the forgiveness inspired the healing of the paralysis, showing that forgiveness precedes healing, leading to truth and an internalization of the logic of God’s plan for his divine laws. Repentance and conversion are the fruits of divine justice, but as was the case with the paralytic, some type of encounter with mercy is needed first.

Using Jesus as his example, Pope Francis challenges us to go beyond our understanding of justice and inform it with God’s mercy. “With mercy and forgiveness,” he says, “God goes beyond justice, he subsumes it and exceeds it in a higher event in which we experience love, which is at the root of true justice ... If God limited himself to only justice, he would cease to be God and would instead be like human beings who ask merely that the law be respected. But mere justice is not enough.”¹⁹

This means mercy offers healing, the therapeutic aspect of care, while justice offers the correction, the juridical aspect of care. Francis reminds us, like Pope Benedict, that God’s mercy does not compromise God’s authority. Similarly, the bishops gathered at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 declared, “God is not changed by showing mercy.”²⁰ God does not lose anything. We, on the other hand, have everything to gain. Mercy does not suggest weakness. This potential outcome inspired John Paul II to say, “Outside the mercy of God there is no other source of

¹⁸ Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (On Christian Love), 2005, n. 31b. www.vatican.va. Accessed January 23, 2018.

¹⁹ Pope Francis, *The Name of God Is Mercy*, 78.

²⁰ Council of Chalcedon, “Letter of Pope Leo to Flavian,” in Norman J. Tanner (ed.), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, Vol. 1 (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 80.

hope for human beings.”²¹ Mercy heals and encourages new beginnings, inspiring hope for others. This means there is no substitute for divine mercy, not even justice on its own.

Dr. Alexandre Kalomiris, an Orthodox theologian, in his reflection on Eastern patristic thought on sin and mercy, offers an interesting interpretation of the Greek word *diakosuni*, translated as “justice.” He writes, “[the] Greek word *diakosuni* is a translation of the Hebrew word *tsedaka*. The word means ‘the divine energy which accomplishes man’s salvation.’”²² It is parallel and almost synonymous with the word *hesed*, which means “mercy, compassion, love” and to the word *emeth*, which means “fidelity, truth. This is entirely different from the juridical understanding of justice.”²³ This means divine justice is concerned with mercy and healing. Divine justice is housed in what Kalomiris calls a “hospital of souls.” Compare this view to Francis’ model of the Church as a “field hospital,”²⁴—an expression he has used in interviews and in official papal teaching.

Early on in his papacy he said:

I see clearly that the thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds And you have to start from the ground up.²⁵

In the same interview, he went on to warn against two extremes: a legalistic approach that does not understand the human condition, and a lax approach that does not understand or recognize the complexity of sin—that dismisses the reality of sin. In other words, he is promoting an approach of therapeutic jurisprudence: an understanding of human behaviour and the need for healing due to the consequences of sin.

In a recent address to the John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family, Francis emphasized the need for healing, the need for theologians and pastors to “smell of the people and of the street” and to “pour oil and wine” on peo-

²¹ Pope John Paul II, Homily, Dedication of the Shrine of Divine Mercy, August 17, 2002, n. 1. www.vatican.va. Accessed January 23, 2018.

²² Alexandre Kalomiris, *The River of Fire* (St. Nectarios Press, 1980), 31.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Pope Francis, *The Name of God Is Mercy*, 52.

²⁵ “Pope Francis: The Interview,” *America*, September 30, 2013. www.americamagazine.org/pope-francis-interview. Accessed January 23, 2018.

ple's wounds.²⁶ This closeness to people's needs and wounds gives people hope. They experience the grace of Jesus Christ: a grace, he says, that "can rescue them, give them new courage and heal them." He concluded by saying, "let us sustain the rescue of the creative plan at all costs." Francis sheds new light on the healing dimension of salvation, which is an experience that can begin in this life. It is more than "rescue from the eternal fire" (Mt. 25:41). When Jesus saved people, he made them well (Mk. 5:34). All people, by virtue of their baptism, are called to participate in this rescue plan, assisting the ministerial priesthood in their care of souls. This rescue plan, or program of life, then, must engage the Marian dimension of what it means to be Church: those baptized Christians who attend to the healing needs of the vulnerable in the community.

The Church Is Marian (The Marian Is the Therapeutic)

Just as the model of therapeutic jurisprudence reconciles the tension between mercy and justice, showing how love and truth are never in opposition, the Marian dimension of the Church complements and completes the Petrine dimension. Not only do these dimensions reflect the collaboration between the priesthood of the baptized and the ministerial priesthood, they reflect the lived reality of being male and female, created in the image and likeness of God. Complementarity between the sexes has been affirmed over and over again in official Church teaching, most especially in the catechesis of John Paul II, namely, the Theology of the Body.

Recently, Pope Francis highlighted this truth when he said, "The difference between man and woman is not for opposition, or subordination, but for communion and creation, always in the image and likeness of God."²⁷ Several scientists and medical experts, such as Louann Brizendine, Miriam Grossman and Daniel Amen, have used their research to support this teaching on complementarity.²⁸ The fields of anatomy, histology, neurology and physiology all support these differences in men and women, celebrating our strengths and contributions made to a variety of sectors. Pope John Paul II celebrated the achievements of women in his 1988 Ap-

²⁶ Pope Francis, Address to the John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family, October 28, 2016. zenit.org/articles/popes-address-to-john-paul-ii-institute-for-studies-on-marriage-and-family. Accessed January 23, 2018.

²⁷ Pope Francis, General Audience, April 15, 2015. www.vatican.va. Accessed January 23, 2018.

²⁸ See Louann Brizendine, *The Female Brain* (New York: Morgan Road Books, 2006), and Miriam Grossman, *You're Teaching My Child What?* (Washington: Regnery Publishing, 2009). See also the research of Daniel Amen. Dr. Daniel Amen's research involves the study in changes in neurobiology and endocrinology with infatuation and sexual intimacy.

ostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* (The Dignity and Vocation of Women), in which he said:

The Church gives thanks for all the manifestations of the feminine ‘genius’ which have appeared in the course of history, in the midst of all peoples and Nations; she gives thanks for all the charisms which the Holy Spirit distributes to women in the history of the people of God, for all the victories which she owes to their faith, hope and charity. She gives thanks for all the fruits of feminine holiness.²⁹

This feminine “genius” refers to the special sensitivity shown by women in a variety of settings: women’s ability to read character and vulnerability and the gift of their gut instinct, the second brain. In a recent general audience, Pope Francis said that we “have not yet understood in depth what things the feminine genius can give us ... It is a path that must be crossed with more creativity and more boldness.”³⁰

The Marian dimension of the Church includes this feminine “genius.” Leadership in the Church, as we know, is not limited to the ministerial priesthood or the Petrine dimension. This leadership and attention to human need is present in the Scriptures. Recall the account of the wedding at Cana (Jn. 2:1-12); it is Mary who notices that the wine has run out! And we cannot forget the woman who anoints Jesus—an account that is found in all four gospels. Luke’s account shows how Jesus highlights the woman’s attention to his need:

Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment.” (Lk. 7:44-46)

This woman’s sins were forgiven because she showed great love (v. 47). “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy” (Mt. 5:7).

Brizendine, Grossman and Amen use their research to show how the female brain is wired to respond to vulnerability and need in the community. Mary and the woman who anoints Jesus demonstrated the feminine genius in action, the Marian

²⁹ Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* (The Dignity and Vocation of Women), 1988, n. 31. www.vatican.va.

³⁰ Pope Francis, General Audience, April 15, 2015.

dimension of the Church, showing mercy and identifying need, and inspiring both men and women. We are called to be like Mary, Pope Francis says, “who cared for Jesus, [and] now cares with maternal affection and pain for the wounded of the world.”³¹ This Marian genius was celebrated by Pope Benedict, who underscored the “maternal mission of Mary.”³² In an interview with Vittorio Messori, Benedict challenged Christians to see Mary as “figure, image and model of the Church,” shielding against “a [solely] masculinized model.”³³ He laments the thought of a theology or ecclesiology that no longer has a place for Mary. She is, he says, “an example to which every Christian—man and woman—can and should look.” This is why, in the words of John Paul II, inspired by the ecclesiology of Hans Urs von Balthasar,³⁴ “the Marian dimension of the Church precedes the Petrine.”³⁵

The ecclesiological notion that the Marian dimension precedes the Petrine is evident in the private revelations of two women who went on to inspire papal teaching on mercy and ecclesiology. St. Faustina Kowłaska (1905–38), “the great apostle of divine mercy in our time,” inspired the rediscovery of mercy in the teaching of John Paul II³⁶ and Adrienne Von Speyr (1902–67), a Swiss Catholic physician/mystic inspired the work and thought of von Balthasar, John Paul II and Pope Benedict.³⁷ The “feminine genius” of these female mystics influenced papal teaching on mercy and insight into the Marian dimension. Their insights preceded official Church teaching on these very important subjects. These private revelations affirm the specific vocation of women in the Church, pointing to the feminine or

³¹ Pope Francis, Encyclical *Laudato Si'* (On Care for Our Common Home), 2015, n. 24. www.vatican.va. Accessed January 23, 2018.

³² Pope Benedict, General Audience, February 17, 2007. www.vatican.va. Accessed January 23, 2018.

³³ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, “Don’t Forget Mary,” 1984. www.crossroadsinitiative.com/media/articles/dont-forget-mary-cardinal-ratzinger-pope-benedict-xvi. Accessed January 23, 2018.

³⁴ See Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Women Priests? A Marian Church in a Fatherless and Motherless Culture,” *Communio* 22. 1, 1995: 164-170.

³⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, n. 27.

³⁶ See Pope John Paul II, Homily, ‘The Canonization of Sr. Mary Faustina Kowłaska, April 30, 2000. www.vatican.va. The homily closed with the following words: “And you, Faustina, a gift of God to our time, a gift from the land of Poland to the whole Church, obtain for us an awareness of the depth of divine mercy; help us to have a living experience of it and to bear witness to it among our brothers and sisters. May your message of light and hope spread throughout the world, spurring sinners to conversion, calming rivalries and hatred and opening individuals and nations to the practice of brotherhood. Today, fixing our gaze with you on the face of the risen Christ, let us make our own your prayer of trusting abandonment and say with firm hope: *Christ Jesus, I trust in you! Jezzu, ufam tobie!*”

³⁷ See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *First Glance at Adrienne von Speyr* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981).

Marian dimension of the Church. Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Saint John Paul II encouraged such reflections during their respective papacies.³⁸

Pope Francis has sustained this tradition in continuity with his predecessors, as he stresses the Marian dimension in many practical ways. It is this Marian dimension that will sustain his vision of therapeutic jurisprudence. On November 1, 2016, in an in-flight interview, he was asked a question on women's ordination. Not only did he repeat the Church's position on the non-admission of women to the ministerial priesthood, but also he seized the opportunity to emphasize the gifts of women and the Marian dimension of the Church. He said, "There is no Church without the feminine dimension," and that Mary precedes all others. He celebrates the maternal dimension of the Church in several documents, declaring Mary to be "more important than the bishops."³⁹ More recently, in *Amoris Laetitia*, he describes a mother who, moved by mercy, approaches and searches for her children. He writes that the Church is a "Mother who, while clearly expressing her objective teaching, "always does what she can, even if in the process, her shoes get soiled by the mud on the street."⁴⁰ Here jurisprudence (following the Church's legal teaching) meets the therapeutic approach by encountering the wounded and joins in the struggle, an approach to be considered by both men and women. The same mother who corrects her children is the one who nurtures them back to health, emphasizing the need for the Marian dimension to influence the Petrine dimension.

Earlier in the same exhortation, he stresses that the world would be "dehumanized"⁴¹ without a maternal approach to suffering, then calls us to witness to God's tenderness:

In such difficult situations of need, the Church must be particularly concerned to offer understanding, comfort and acceptance, rather than imposing straightaway a set of rules that only lead people to feel judged and abandoned by the very Mother called to show them God's mercy. Rather than offering the healing power of grace and the light of the Gospel message, some would

³⁸ See John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, n. 46. See also Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger's Introduction to John Paul II's encyclical *Redemptoris Mater* where he affirms Mary's mediation as the "female dimension in salvation history," underscoring female participation and influence in the Church. See John Paul II, *Mary: God's Yes to Man* (Ignatius Press: San Francisco, 1987), 32.

³⁹ See Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, nn. 45, 104.

⁴⁰ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, n. 308.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, n. 174.

“indoctrinate” that message, turning into “dead stones to be hurled at others.”⁴²

To emphasize this point, he keeps coming back to the account of the adulterous woman and the woman of Samaria.⁴³ He highlights Jesus’ tenderness as he approaches and encounters these women, calling them to new life and offering them the gift of divine health. Here the encounter with mercy leads to the truth and fulfillment, showing how Jesus, the way that is love incarnate, leads to truth and new life (Jn. 14:6).

John Honner, in an article on Pope Francis’ vision for a Marian Church, believes Francis offers a practical response to the “abstract principles” of the Marian and Petrine dimensions of the Church.⁴⁴ Francis challenges us to give examples of the lived reality of these two principles, by encouraging women in leadership, giving them decision-making roles,⁴⁵ embracing a “Marian style” (pastoral care) of evangelizing,⁴⁶ and most especially highlighting the maternal dimension of the Church. This means love and tenderness can conquer hearts. Francis puts it this way: “Contemplating Mary, we realize that she who praised God for ‘bringing down the mighty from their thrones’ and ‘sending the rich away empty’ (Lk. 1:52-53) is also the one who brings homely warmth to our pursuit of justice.”⁴⁷ Mary’s example provides the foundation for how to reconcile mercy and justice: in other words, therapeutic jurisprudence. Just as one can be maternal and Marian without compromising the truth, one can be just and truthful without compromising the call to be merciful. Have we achieved this balance when it comes to truth and mercy?

Perhaps there continues to be tension in interpreting and analyzing Francis’ papacy because, although we write about it and talk about it, we haven’t figured out how to reconcile the two dimensions of the Church: the Marian and the Petrine. They do not stand in opposition; rather, as John Paul II once noted, the “link is profound and complementary.”⁴⁸ The Petrine is at the service of the Marian, made clear at the foot of the cross (Jn. 19:26-27) and in Mary’s words: “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn. 2:5). In the account of the wedding at Cana, Mary identifies the need in the community (the feminine genius), brings it to her Son’s attention, and directs

⁴² Ibid., n. 49.

⁴³ Ibid., nn. 27, 38, 64.

⁴⁴ See John Honner, “The Marian Church of Pope Francis,” 2013. maristyouthinternational.wordpress.com/2013/09/12/the-marian-church-of-pope-francis-john-honner. Accessed January 23, 2018.

⁴⁵ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 104.

⁴⁶ Ibid., n. 228.

⁴⁷ Ibid., n. 288.

⁴⁸ Pope John Paul II, “Christmas Greetings to Members of the Roman Curia and Prelature,” December 22, 1987, n. 3. www.vatican.va. Accessed January 23, 2018.

the attendants to follow Jesus' instructions, trusting in his judgment. Her care and concern inform the decision-making process. Mary directs the Petrine dimension, demonstrating that we become another Mary before we become another Christ. Doing God's will informs the juridical aspect of the Church. Similarly, Pope Benedict once said that the "Petrine aspect ... is included in [the] Marian aspect. In Mary, the Immaculate, we find the essence of the Church without distortion."⁴⁹ This means the Petrine dimension is fruitful when it complements the Marian dimension, when it is like Mary. Although this seems logical, integrating this teaching into day-to-day governance and ministry is challenging.

What does it mean to be Marian in the world today? In addition to doing God's will, as was the case with Mary's *fiat* and being a disciple of Christ, Francis believes it involves showing the Church's "maternal side, her motherly face to a humanity that is wounded. She does not wait for the wounded to knock on her doors, she looks for them on the streets, she gathers them in, she embraces them, she takes care of them, she makes them feel loved."⁵⁰ A Marian Church is like the woman in the parable of the lost coin (Lk 15: 8-11). She searches, finds and rejoices in the lost being found and saved. Accompanied by the lamp of truth, her love for her people moves her to search for the lost.

This love, observes Francis, is "the primary reason for evangelizing."⁵¹ The New Evangelization strives to find those lost in the house—the conversion of the baptized. Hearts need to be touched by God's mercy so they can experience the transformation that leads to divine health. A wise person once said, "If we can get to people's hearts, their minds and bodies will follow." This captures what Francis calls "the Logic of Pastoral Mercy."⁵² Mercy sees with the heart. Ignorance of factors that influence human behaviour, however, obscures our spiritual sight and may keep us from showing mercy to others, from seeing them the way God sees them, understanding their prenatal⁵³, postnatal, genetic and cultural experiences.

⁴⁹ Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, "Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary," December 8, 2005. www.vatican.va. Accessed January 23, 2018. Benedict XVI writes, "In her, God has impressed his own image, the image of the One who follows the lost sheep even up into the mountains and among the briars and thorn bushes of the sins of this world, letting himself be spiked by the crown of thorns of these sins in order to take the sheep on his shoulders and bring it home."

⁵⁰ Pope Francis, *The Name of God Is Mercy*, 6.

⁵¹ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 264.

⁵² Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, n. 308.

⁵³ Prenatal influences such as the exposure to environmental toxins in utero and sperm exposed to toxins can harm the developing fetus. See Jeanette M. Soby, *Prenatal Exposure to Drugs/Alcohol: Characteristics and Educational Implications of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Cocaine polydrug Effects* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Ltd., 2006) and Christi Tolo Pasaro, Ruth E. Little, David A. Savits, John Noss and the ALSPAC Study Team, "Effects of Paternal

Pope Francis must be aware of these influences, inspiring him to recommend an interdisciplinary approach to human formation,⁵⁴ to this program of life. This time is for him a “*kairos* of mercy,” an opportune time,⁵⁵ a time for “experts in humanity” to be agents of God’s mercy in the field hospital. The Marian Church, with the priesthood of the baptized, can staff the field hospital with a variety of gifts and training from different disciplines and professions. According to John Paul II, they must see themselves as the Church, bringing their expertise and training to a world “at this difficult, critical phase of the history of the Church and world.”⁵⁶

Mercy Informed by Knowledge

In 1985, Pope St. John Paul II said, “We need heralds of the Gospel who are experts in humanity, who know the depths of the human heart, who can share the joys and hopes, the agonies and distress of people today, but at the same time contemplatives who have fallen in love with God.”⁵⁷ In other words, experts in humanity are people who know the human condition and know and communicate God’s love and mercy. It is interesting that John Paul II put out the call for “experts in humanity”—not experts in religious education—implying that we must go beyond our limited understanding of human behaviour and engage other disciplines. The program of human formation, when rooted in mercy, is character development and self-knowledge, directed by God’s love and our ability to reason.

Experts in humanity know how to balance justice and mercy because they have taken into account the many factors that limit or prevent the human person from flourishing. They have followed Jesus’ command to be merciful: “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy” (Mt. 5:7). Unfortunately, however, they know that the reverse order of this beatitude is not always true: “Blessed are those who have received mercy, for they will be merciful.” Jesus, an expert in humanity, makes this point in the parable of the unmerciful or unforgiving servant (Mt. 18:21-34). This parable shows how mercy should lead to restoration and conversion and when it doesn’t, restitution and justice are needed to bring about order and restoration. The servant who receives mercy does not extend it to others. He has forgotten what it feels like to be desperate, focusing instead on self-preservation and vengeance. This desire to advance oneself and to seek vengeance is met with divine justice. When an encounter with mercy does not change someone for the better, a

Alcohol Consumption Before Conception and Infant Birth Weight,” *Teratology*, Vol. 57 (1998), 294-301.

⁵⁴ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, n. 203.

⁵⁵ Pope Francis, *The Name of God Is Mercy*, 6.

⁵⁶ Pope John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*, n. 15.

⁵⁷ Pope John Paul II, Address, October 11, 1985.

correction is in order. Justice brings the correction and healing intended by mercy. God desires conversion and will use mercy and justice to inspire this transformation. Francis' motto celebrates the change or conversion that should come when one receives mercy. The hope is that those who receive mercy will be merciful.

Mercy challenges us to be patient, generous, kind, self-giving and courageous, and to empathize with those we may be tempted to consider unworthy of God's forgiving and compassionate love. In order to be capable of mercy, Francis says, we need God's assistance, because on our own we risk being impatient and judgmental. God's grace informs our understanding and our ability to reason, making us more merciful.

Francis knows that accusations and judgment of people's hearts are obstacles to God's mercy (Lk. 18:9-4). Jesus, as Pope Benedict XVI says, "sees with the heart" and invites us to do the same. Take a closer look at the logo for the Year of Mercy: Jesus, the Good Shepherd, carries a wounded man, perhaps one who is lost, abandoned, addicted or imprisoned. Jesus and the man share one eye: Jesus restores the man's spiritual sight so that he can see himself as God sees him, with dignity and love. Jesus knows this man, his history and his pain. The man sees Jesus, his love and truth; and Jesus sees the many with our eyes so we can be partakers in the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). The almond shape of the eye represents the human and the divine. Without the restoration of spiritual sight, we risk being harsh, focused instead on self-preservation, operating through a fear-based vision of humanity that does not offer hope. This reminds me of Martin Luther King's reflection on the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37), found in his 1968 speech "I've Been to the Mountaintop."⁵⁸ In the time of Jesus, King said, the road to Jericho was a dangerous road, "conducive for ambushing." He believed that the Levite, like the priest, did not stop to help the wounded man because he was worried about himself, possibly thinking, "If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?" In other words, his fear of being ambushed kept him from clothing the naked and tending to the wounded. King believed that Jesus' parable showed how the Good Samaritan reversed the question by asking, "If I do *not* stop to help this man, what will happen to *him*?" The Samaritan demonstrates how, at times, fear and the desire for self-preservation keep us from doing the right thing.

This parable and Jesus' own words on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk. 23:34) should challenge us to examine those factors that may limit a person's ability to reason and know the full consequences of actions, making them less free to respond to God's will. Jesus would

⁵⁸ See Martin Luther King, Jr., "I've Been to the Mountain Top" in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 279.

have been aware of the dynamics of group and individual evil: how fear, despair and pride can seduce people into doing the most despicable of things, possibly keeping them from extending and receiving mercy. Sharing in Jesus' insight into the human condition informs our sense of mercy. Some of the factors we should take the time to examine include our family of origin and cultural influences, the culture of fear and intimidation that seduces people into choosing death, and prenatal and postnatal influences and inherited traits.

Francis is open to this conversation. He shows some awareness of these factors affecting families,⁵⁹ and recommends the development of more family ministry programs to accompany families. These programs would facilitate their healing, as a family is "the nearest hospital,"⁶⁰ and "shepherd" people in mercy.⁶¹ A major influence on culture and family is the "fear factor."

Some people have been raised in an "honour/shame" system of living that places more emphasis on protecting family honour than being there for a family member who is hurting due to a bad decision or moment of weakness: the end goal is to hide, deny and shun as a way to deal with these situations. You can see how this approach encourages people to hide their vulnerabilities from God and others. Jesus, when he healed the man with the withered hand, asked him, "Stretch out your hand" (Mt. 12:9-14). He encouraged the vulnerable to approach, to come out of hiding, and to receive mercy and healing.

The North American community and culture is not exempt from this fear-based thinking. Let's consider the many forced adoptions that took place in Canada between 1945 and 1973. In her research on forced adoptions in Canada, Kathryn Blaze Carlson discovered that 350,000 unmarried Canadian mothers were persuaded, coerced or forced to place their babies for adoption. She concludes that such traumatic separations often sprang from fear of public shame. This fear of shame and judgment has inspired other choices, regretted by many.⁶² For several years I worked as a Project Rachel counsellor in the Diocese of Hamilton, Ontario. Project Rachel is a ministry of healing and reconciliation for men and women who have suffered due to the pain of abortion. Of those I counselled, fear of public shame was at the top of the list when it came to the many factors that influenced a young woman's choice to terminate a pregnancy, followed by fear for her future. Again we can see how fear of exile can influence a person's behaviour. Some of this fear-

⁵⁹ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, n. 309.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, n. 321.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, n. 322.

⁶² For more on this topic, see Josephine Lombardi, *Experts in Humanity: A Journey of Self-Discovery and Healing* (Toronto: Novalis, 2016), 62–63.

based thinking begins in their family and culture of origin, challenging us to examine those thoughts and actions that are not life giving.

This fear-based thinking has contributed to a culture of despair and death, revealing that fear is not a fruit of the Holy Spirit; it is the opposite of love. Being irrational, it is the opposite of love in action. Rooted in pride and self-preservation, fear, judgment and accusation can keep us from doing and saying the right thing, forgetting that fear and despair will lead us to do the very things we condemn.

Francis recalls a touching encounter with a woman who was abandoned by her husband, left to raise their young children on her own, taking temporary jobs here and there, struggling to provide. Sadly, in a desperate state, she started to prostitute herself to provide for her family. Francis, as her parish priest at the time, remembers a moment when his words affirmed her dignity as a person. It was Christmas, and she brought her children with her to church to thank the parish staff for the assistance they had given her. He tells it this way:

They called me and I went to greet her. She came to thank me. I thought it was for the package of food from Caritas that we had sent to her. “Did you receive it?” I asked. “Yes, yes, thank you for that, too. But I came here today to thank you because you never stopped calling me Senora.” Experiences like this teach you how important it is to welcome people delicately and not wound their dignity. For her, the fact that the parish priest continued to call her Senora, even though he probably knew how she led her life during the months when she could not work, was as important as—or perhaps even more important than—the concrete help we gave her.⁶³

An expert in humanity would understand the desperation that leads to such choices, and would communicate God’s mercy and accompany people so they can choose life-giving actions. Recall the woman at the well: an encounter with Christ’s mercy transformed her, satisfying her thirst and giving her new life. How can we better serve those who are wounded, those who may not have received proper human formation in the home? Francis believes we can do better when it comes to marriage preparation.⁶⁴

In looking at the formation offered for couples preparing for marriage and men preparing for holy orders, the two sacraments of service, we find a huge discrepancy in the time and resources allotted. The formation process for the two sacraments varies drastically. Some engaged couples receive only a weekend ses-

⁶³ Pope Francis, *The Name of God Is Mercy*, 61.

⁶⁴ See Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, nn. 205–208.

sion, whereas candidates for holy orders receive anywhere from five to ten years of formation in four areas: human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral. Many people will be married at some point, but do not receive proper or adequate formation in the internal curriculum,⁶⁵ areas of parenting, conflict management, human sexuality, and other life skills such as forgiveness, managing anger, and the role of faith, which recent developments in neuroscience are showing is so beneficial to our physiology and brain health. This lack of preparation encourages the transmission of non-life-giving habits, learned in one's family of origin, to future generations.

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis touches on these issues and calls for more attention to the preparation of married couples, noting the many social, emotional, economic, cultural and psychological factors that may hurt and damage marriages, and reminding young couples that the Church will accompany them in good times and in bad. Moreover, he urges us to be mindful of the unique needs of widowed, separated and divorced Catholics, and those in what he calls "reconstituted families."

How do we accompany and encourage individuals who are grieving the loss of a relationship, those who have been abandoned, those who have been abused, those who desired to reconcile, but found themselves alone and rejected? How do we facilitate an encounter with Christ's mercy and healing love? Does our Prayer of the Faithful reflect this reality? Fortunately, many dioceses offer support programs and resources for people in these situations, but we can do better when it comes to promoting awareness of the lived reality of family life and preparation for marriage, encouraging couples to consider Retrouvaille or Marriage Encounter as opportunities for healing. How can the Petrine dimension and Marian dimension embrace one another in an integrated approach to human formation?

We need an equivalent of Serra International, which promotes vocations to religious life. Here's an idea: What about creating and promoting "Monica International," named after St. Monica, mother of St. Augustine? St. Monica prayed for the conversion of her son, St. Augustine and is an excellent example of the need for feminine influence in the life of the Church. Just as vocations to religious life and the ministerial priesthood require prayer and encouragement, single people and others called to marriage and parenting are in need of discernment, prayers and support. As a community of believers, Monicans, both male and female, would make it their mission to pray for all families, working with dioceses and offices for family life to prepare and promote courses and resources to assist young people who are discerning marriage, visiting high school classes; facilitating "Come and See" weekends with families willing to adopt young discerners; hosting discernment

⁶⁵ See Lombardi, *Experts in Humanity*, 7.

seminars, including testimonies from married couples who have seen it all; sharing their own vocation stories; giving spiritual support; and working with Monica chaplains who offer regular masses for the preparation and protection of marriage. We are all called to holiness, regardless of our state of life. Unfortunately, some limit their understanding of the call to holiness to a particular state of life or to the chosen few. How can we inspire the desire for holiness in marriage and family life?

How can we seize the opportunity to be preventative, forming people for marriage and parenting and assisting couples who are facilitators of marriage preparation? Francis recommends expanded marriage preparation courses. The existing courses could be extended to include some of the research on family-of-origin issues, unhealthy habits associated with conflict management, and how unresolved past hurts can harm a relationship. We should include some of the fascinating research of Sarah Hill, Daniel Del Priore and Bruce Ellis on fathers and daughters—how a daughter’s exposure to a loving, nurturing father can slow down her reproductive journey and prevent at-risk sexual behaviour.⁶⁶ Educating people, starting from the adolescent years, on the various factors that may keep them from knowing God’s plan for them and their flourishing is a must. For example, research on the developing adolescent brain shows how teens’ neurobiology may keep them from reasoning properly and assessing consequences.

Neuroscientist Jay Giedd and other researchers who have studied the risks associated with the developing adolescent brain have reported that accidents are the number one cause of adolescent mortality, followed by suicide and homicide.⁶⁷ Car insurance brokers are aware of this research on the teenage brain and use it to set insurance rates for young drivers—rates are higher for young men because it takes longer for their brains to develop, making them vulnerable to risky behaviour. The science of sex is another topic in need of exploration and sharing. The research of Daniel Amen, a psychiatrist and brain disorder specialist, shows how bonding hormones are released during sexual intimacy, how our brain chemistry changes when we are infatuated and falling in love, how this can diminish our ability to reason, and how outside of marriage this can lead to bonding to the wrong person for an indefinite period of time, putting people at risk for pain, disappointment and regret.⁶⁸ The good news is that we can use this research to defend the Church’s teaching on sexuality and marriage. This education must also include awareness of good prenatal health for mothers and fathers, especially for those discerning and desiring the vocation of marriage.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 101–102. See also, Paul Raeburn, “Where’s Dad?” *Scientific American Mind* (May/June 2014): 45–51.

⁶⁷ Lombardi, *Experts in Humanity*, 85.

⁶⁸ See Daniel Amen, *The Brain in Love* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2007).

Research shows that maternal and paternal prenatal health care, or lack thereof, can affect their child's physiological and psychological development. Although it is beyond the scope of this article to address all defects or disabilities that are outside our control and understanding, we can examine a few factors that can be controlled. Studies on prenatal development and health show that the exposure of a fetus to environmental toxins (including alcohol, some prescription medications, street drugs and pesticides) can cause neurological damage, slow down or prevent the formation of conscience, and cause learning disabilities or physical defects.⁶⁹

People used to think it was only the mother's prenatal habits that influenced the health of her unborn child. Today, research shows that sperm health, like the mother's prenatal health, contributes to the overall well-being of a fetus. Studies done over the past 20 years have shown the link between exposure to toxins and defective sperm. A project coordinated by researchers at the University of South Florida in 1997 includes peer-reviewed medical journal articles showing the connection between men who have experienced environmental and chemical exposure and increased learning disabilities and other intellectual and functional deficits, and hyperactivity in children.⁷⁰

This research shows that fetal health depends a great deal on the health of the mother, the father and the environment, encouraging educators and parents to acknowledge the "formative influence of these prenatal and perinatal experiences on later moral development."⁷¹ This information should be passed on to adolescents who may be tempted to use toxic substances and should be included in marriage preparation courses, especially in the unit on parenting. This special care and attention must continue postnatally.

British psychologist John Bowlby was one of the first to study what is known as attachment theory. He believed that early bonds between children and their caregivers "have a tremendous impact and continue throughout life."⁷² This early nurturance and care leads to attachment and trust of caregivers. Children who do not form early attachments may develop behavioural problems and difficulty in relationships. Studying the formation of conscience from the toddler stage to early school age, Grazyna Kochanska and Kathleen T. Murray discovered that positive, warm, consistent interactions between mother and child could lead to positive interactions with others as the child develops, meaning that the first three years of life

⁶⁹ Lombardi, *Experts in Humanity*, 73–79.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 78–79.

⁷¹ Milicent Adams Dosh, "Prenatal and Perinatal Foundations of Moral Development," *Journal of Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Health* 13 (1999), 213–214.

⁷² See Kendra Cherry, "What Is Attachment Theory?", 2017. www.verywell.com/what-is-attachment-theory-2795337. Accessed January 23, 2018.

are key to moral development.⁷³ This research needs to be passed on to those employed by educational and religious institutions and all those who are entrusted with the care of the very young and vulnerable, so that they are aware that there are young people dealing with prenatal and perinatal trauma.

This means that the human person is more fragile and complex than may have been previously thought or expected. It is not a given that all people can reason freely or form a conscience. Harsh parenting can lead to poor self-regulation, changing a child's physiology and weakening his or her immunity.⁷⁴

Some people might be set up to be less free to respond to God's will due to intergenerational trauma. This means genetic inheritance is an important factor to consider when it comes to knowing oneself and others. Dr. Gabor Maté is a Canadian physician who specializes in neurology, psychiatry and psychology, as well as the treatment of addiction. He and others have studied the interaction between the emotional environment and a person's physiology. This research reveals that "Genes are turned on or off by the environment. For this reason, the greatest influences on human development, health and behavior are those of the nurturing environment."⁷⁵ The field of epigenetics examines this process of change in gene function.

These changes in physiology can be passed on to future generations, inspiring a wealth of research on family trees and inherited tendencies. Researchers are finding that our ancestors transmit more than just genes and traits. Scientists refer to the transmission of tendencies as "epigenetic inheritance."

With the presence of violence throughout the world due to civil strife and war, we have communities overwhelmed with trauma. Whether it is understanding residential school trauma among Indigenous people in Canada⁷⁶ or the plight of migrants and refugees who have fled war, economic strife and disaster, those engaged in the pastoral care of these individuals must receive some training in the area of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or stress injury. A study of PTSD symptoms in second-generation survivors reveals signs of this condition in their behaviour and in their blood, affecting their cortisol levels.⁷⁷ Those engaged in the corporal works of mercy for the homeless and the refugee should be aware of the emotional

⁷³ See Lombardi, *Experts in Humanity*, 82.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 82–83.

⁷⁵ Gabor Maté, *When the Body Says No: Exploring the Stress-Disease Connection* (Toronto: Wiley, 2011), 229.

⁷⁶ See www.ahf.ca/downloads/healing-trauma-web-eng.pdf.

⁷⁷ See R. Yehouda, S. L. Halligan and M. Blerer, "Cortisol Levels in Adult Offspring Holocaust Survivors," *Journal of Psychoneuroendocrinology*, Vol. 27, no. 1–2 (Jan–Feb 2002): 171–180.

and spiritual pain some of these people carry with them, passing it on to future generations through no fault of their own.

In Canada, the military is reeling due to new statistics that show the armed forces have lost more personnel to suicide than were killed in combat in Afghanistan.⁷⁸ This means that many men and women are suffering due to the experience of combat and are in need of healing and redemption. The type of healing they require cannot be limited to pharmaceutical therapy alone. These men and women have been emotionally and spiritually wounded; they are in need of healing and redemption.

As we can see, there are so many factors we should consider when it comes to understanding human behaviour. Knowledge and love pave the way for merciful behaviour and add some clarity to the complexity of human existence. Instructing individuals is a spiritual work of mercy. This knowledge reveals the fragility of human existence, inspiring Pope Francis to say, “Why them and not me?” during the Jubilee Mass for Prisoners on November 6, 2016. He understands that under the same circumstances, we, too, could be in prison, awaiting God’s mercy and pondering the factors that may have contributed to our actions, knowing the penal system measures repentance in years, not in conversion and remorse, waiting to encounter God’s grace and mercy so we can be made well.

In the book of the Prophet Hosea, God says, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (4:6). God desires our divine health, our salvation, and has inspired a variety of disciplines to inform our understanding of the human condition. Moreover, God’s love continues to parent us, to heal us as we strive to be like him.

Conclusion: “Merciful Like the Father”

Jesus taught, “Be merciful just as your Father is merciful” (Lk. 6:36). A culture of mercy accompanies those who need to approach, not isolating them. It touches them with a love that heals and inspires conversion. Mercy means understanding correction as healing, experiencing an encounter that gives spiritual sight. Sadly, for some, shame will keep them from approaching God, having convinced themselves they have lost God’s love due to some past mistake, possibly due to fear, making them feel unworthy of God’s mercy, a mercy that Pope Francis has called our “spiritual medicine.”⁷⁹ Imaging God as a merciful *Abba* heals these wounds, some of which are due to deficits in the parent–child relationship. This reveals a God

⁷⁸ See National Defense and the Canadian Armed Forces, *Suicide and Suicide Prevention in the Canadian Armed Forces* 2016, www.forces.gc.ca. Accessed April 7, 2015.

⁷⁹ Pope Francis, *After the Angelus*, November 17, 2013. www.vatican.va. Accessed January 23, 2018.

who searches, runs to meet us, accompanies and loves us, reminding us that “nothing can separate us from the love of God” (Rm. 8:39).

Of this truth Pope Benedict once proclaimed, “Mercy is in reality the core of the Gospel message; it is the name of God himself.”⁸⁰ It is thoughts of unworthiness, however, that keep us from knowing God’s mercy, that keep people from approaching God, from coming out of exile.

Pope Francis’ vision for the Church includes the plan to “mercify” the world, to heal our image of God, a plan that has a therapeutic or Marian dimension that accompanies the juridical or Petrine dimension. This rediscovery of mercy is rooted in a rediscovery or recovery of the Marian dimension, an approach that reads vulnerability in people, assesses and addresses human need, informs the multidisciplinary study of human behaviour, and shows how and why people respond to the juridical dimension the way they do. The Marian tells the Petrine why people act the way they do, diagnoses them and leads them to Jesus for healing so they can embrace the logic of the juridical dimension, knowing its truth will keep them spiritually healthy and safe. The Marian dimension is just as integral to the rescue plan, the “program of life,” as the Petrine dimension. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, models the balance between the two dimensions, revealing this balance in his approach to the vulnerable: they encounter his love first; embrace his truth second. Love leads to the truth just as the “Marian precedes the Petrine.” Rooted in Jesus’ desire to heal us and fulfill the law, the program reminds us that Jesus heals his people through us, his body, in mercy and truth, the Marian and the Petrine. Jesus inspires our gifts and disciplines so we can co-staff the field hospital, restoring God’s people to divine health. This appears to be the vision of Pope Francis: his “program of life.” The ocean of God’s mercy is wide.

⁸⁰ Pope Benedict XVI, *Regina Caeli* Address, March 30, 2008. www.vatican.va. Accessed January 23, 2018.