

# **Pursuing Justice in a Jubilee Year of Mercy**

## **How Do Justice and Mercy Work Together?**

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### **Introduction: A Jubilee Year of Mercy**

Pope Francis' announcement of an Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy on April 11 of this past year caused a great deal of excitement around the world. It had become clear from the very first days after his election as pope that the theme of mercy would be central to his pontificate. At his first celebration of the Sunday Angelus in St. Peter's Square after his election, he sounded the theme that has come to characterize his pontificate: the call to experience God's mercy. God's infinite capacity for love and forgiveness has become a constant refrain in the Pope's proclamation of the Gospel.

He began to set out his understanding of mercy in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*. He says there that at the very heart of being a Christian is our encounter with Jesus Christ. To experience that encounter is to experience God's mercy, which means that "when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved." He quotes there the Book of Lamentations: "the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning." (EG 6; Lam 3:32-33).

But it is in his Bull of Indiction for the Extraordinary Year of Jubilee, *Misericordiae Vultus* ("The Face of Mercy") that he expands most clearly upon his understanding of mercy. As was the case in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Jesus Christ stands as the principal revelation of God's mercy. He is the "door of mercy," that is, the way by which we come to

know the Father's mercy. The Pope does not see mercy as just one more way of experiencing the presence of God, but with his predecessor Pope John Paul II, he sees mercy as revealing the central mission of Jesus Christ as sent by the Father. To quote Pope John Paul's 1982 encyclical on mercy, *Dives in Misericordia*, "mercy constitutes the fundamental content of the messianic message of Christ and the constitutive power of his mission." (DM 6) Moreover, the late Pope says, mercy reveals the truth about God and about ourselves. The truth about God is that mercy—unbounded loving kindness—is who God is. The truth about ourselves is that we have been created in God's image and likeness. Each human being bears in this image and likeness a dignity that we struggle to comprehend (DM 6).

Now mercy must be understood in this biblical sense, and not be restricted to its more modern, juridical meaning as an indulgence extended to wrongdoers by a judge or magistrate who foregoes the right to punish wrongful acts. It is hard for us to escape this more narrow meaning of mercy. Seen in this more restricted sense, mercy seems to be a way of bypassing the serious effects of sin. Mercy, biblically understood however, does not mean indifference to evil, sin, wrongdoing, and injustice. Rather, mercy must be understood in its most biblical sense as found in the Hebrew word *hesed*, sometimes translated as "steadfast love" or "loving kindness." In the Old Testament *hesed* is considered one of the most fundamental characteristics of God: One who is slow to anger and abounding in kindness (cf. Num 14:18). This great love is revealed to us in God's forgiveness of sins and of wrongdoing. God, Pope Francis reminds us, never tires of forgiving us; if anything, we are the ones who tire of seeking God's mercy. (EG 3).

What does it mean to live out of this great love that is God's mercy? The Pope has pointed on a number of occasions to two sources of such a life: the Beatitudes and the parable of the Last Judgment in Matthew 25. In the Beatitudes we find the postures that should identify the Christian

(indeed, the Pope refers to them as “the identity card of a Christian”): being poor in spirit means not being so filled up with worldly things that one has no place for God in one’s life; being meek, so as to understand the plight of those who lack the necessities of life; hungering and thirsting for justice; being merciful so as to better grasp the depth of God’s mercy; being peacemakers; and being willing to suffer persecution for justice’s sake.

The parable of the Last Judgment in Matthew 25 spells out in concrete steps where we are likely to encounter Christ: caring for the hungry and the thirst, for the stranger, for the naked, for those who are sick and for those who are in prison. These places of encounter have been enshrined in our tradition as “the corporal works of mercy.” In *Misericordiae Vultus* the Pope notes both these and the spiritual works of mercy (MV 15), but seems to lay special emphasis on the corporal works, perhaps to underscore the concreteness with which we need to encounter these opportunities of mercy.

What are the implications of embracing mercy as the central theme of the Gospel or, as Pope Francis describes it, the “beating heart of the Gospel”? (MV 12) Let me mention three such consequences to which he draws special attention. First of all, embracing mercy requires an ongoing, even daily, encounter with Jesus Christ. Christ is “the door of mercy,” (MV 3). It is in this encounter that we experience once again the overwhelming love that is offered to us, a love that calls us to a deeper conversion to Christ. It is within this ever deepening conversion to Christ that we begin to plumb the depth of the mystery of God’s mercy. We are indeed all sinners and in need of God’s mercy. But it is only in grasping more fully the depth of God’s mercy that we come to realize how greatly we need that mercy. Such realization is mirrored in the testimony of many saints who proclaimed that they were the greatest of sinners. We may attribute such comments to hyperbole on their part, knowing what we do about their holy lives. But what those

saints are revealing is what can only be experienced by those who have keenly felt God's merciful hand in their lives. Growth in this appreciation of mercy comes from that continuing encounter with Christ, the face of the merciful Father. In other words, we will only be effective in witness to God's mercy if we can mirror that mercy in our own lives and then show it to others.

Second, our witness to mercy finds its most suitable expression when it is directed to those who have been pushed to what Pope Francis calls "the existential peripheries," that is, the margins of existence. They are the persecuted, the downtrodden, the oppressed; those whose precarious existence makes them most vulnerable to the indifference, the neglect and the outright wrongdoing of others. These are the ones who are most in need of God's loving kindness. For us to be instruments of God's mercy means to "go forth" to those peripheries. Pope Francis himself exemplified this by choosing to make his first trip out of Rome after his election not to some important city or shrine, but to the refugee camps on the island of Lampedusa in the Mediterranean. Little did any of us realize at the time how prophetic and far-sighted this gesture would become, in light of the massive migration that has been pouring into Europe from Africa and the Middle East, a migration that is shaking Europe to its very foundations. But peripheries are not always physical ones. They can be deeply existential as well. One thinks of the plight of the elderly who are left alone by their families,<sup>1</sup> or the women migrants caught in the gap between the mores of their homelands, which restricts them to the private sphere of their homes, and the new and alien environment in which they now find themselves.

This leads to a third implication of embracing mercy. Our "going forth" as a genuinely missionary Church is our participation in the "going forth" of the Son and the Holy Spirit into

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<sup>1</sup> South Korea now has the highest suicide rate per capita in the world. The elderly who feel abandoned by their children constitute the largest group in this statistic along with adolescents and young adults.

the world for the sake of redemption and reconciliation. In this mirroring of the activity of the Holy Trinity, we become most authentically who we are meant to be—created in the image and likeness of God. We become “merciful like the Father,” which Pope Francis has called the “motto” of this Jubilee Year (MV 12). Here the Pope holds up as an example the image of the merciful father of the parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15, but also of the Father, the First Person of the Trinity, who sends the Son and the Holy Spirit into the world for the forgiveness of sins and the transformation of all things. We are called to be, as Pope Francis puts it toward the conclusion of *Misericordiae Vultus*, “missionaries of mercy,” such that those who encounter us experience God’s mercy as “a source of liberation.” (MV 18).

Most recently, just a little over ten days ago, Pope Francis released a long interview that expanded, in a very human way, on what had led him to view mercy as so central to his own faith. Entitled *The Name of God is Mercy*,<sup>2</sup> this interview with Italian journalist Andrea Tornielli contains moving stories from Francis’ own life and ministry that illustrate how his experience of God’s mercy has shaped his own spirituality, and how he hopes it will move the entire Church to a new place of compassion and forgiveness. Indeed, the publication of this little book gives us an opportunity to step back from the Pope’s recent writings and actions and ask: what are the most important things that he is trying to communicate to us in his message for this Jubilee Year of Mercy?

Mercy, of course, has many dimensions, as Pope Francis has indicated. But four stand out here in a special kind of way. First of all, there is *compassion*, that expression of trying to feel what others—especially those who are suffering—are feeling. It involves too not only feeling what others feel, but also acting to relieve their suffering in any way we can.

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<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, *The Name of God is Mercy* (New York: Random House, 2016).

Second, that feeling for others makes us want to *go out* from our own comfortable place to embrace those who suffering and bring them in to a circle of compassion and care. This going out, what the Pope has called a “Church going forth,” makes us of “missionary disciples of Christ.” As the Jubilee Year unfolds, the Pope plans to commission “missionaries of mercy,” both for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, but also more broadly for what to him gives concrete expression to God’s abounding mercy.

Third, mercy manifests itself most acutely in the experience of *forgiveness*. We are all sinners and in need of God’s forgiveness. But in being forgiven, we are in turn called upon to forgive others. Forgiveness frees us from a bondage to the past, and opens up horizons for the future.

Fourth and finally, mercy is the most complete revelation of God’s *unbounded love*. As we have already seen, that unbounded love of God is the best way to understand the meaning of the mercy of God. It is not so much about being saved from the punishment we deserve for our sins as it is coming to realize how much deeper and broader is God’s love than anything we could have imagined.

As we ponder Francis’ words about mercy, in *Misericordiae Vultus* and in the interview, it becomes clear that one of the Pope’s intentions in sharing his inmost thoughts is to deepen our own interior disposition to show mercy to others. Mercy is not just something for ourselves to experience and consider; it is intended to give shape to our discipleship in all its forms.

Now as we try to comprehend what this being merciful is calling us to be and do as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, a question inevitably arises: How does living a life of mercy relate to other commitments we have made in our lives? I am thinking here about our commitment to justice. Justice has always been part of a Christian’s commitment to discipleship, but for many it has taken on a special place in Christian discipleship since the Second Vatican Council’s call to

engage the modern world, and especially since the first Synod of Bishops who took up the question of justice in an explicit way. As such, it has become especially important as a way of living out the apostolic charism of religious institutes. Justice is about maintaining right relationships—right relationships between ourselves and God, with one another, and indeed with all creation. Justice is about each receiving one’s due, and especially about restoring situations where justice has not been done. People in consecrated life especially have become accustomed to seeing the pursuit of justice as central to living out their vocation in the world.

So how does justice relate to this emphasis on mercy? For some, mercy seems to pull us in another direction. Rather than living up to the exacting measures of making sure that each is receiving one’s due, or in challenging those structures that block that from happening, mercy can seem to be ignoring the stern challenges and high standards to which justice calls us. As already noted, in some languages, “mercy” is a technical term in the legal system, where a judge decides to forego meting out the full punishment a wrongdoer deserves, reducing or even eliminating the punishment altogether. In such situations, mercy seems to bypass or even negate the claims of justice. In such settings, where justice is not pursued, mercy seems to make trivial injustice and the suffering of the victims of injustice. How are justice and mercy to be brought together?

We must begin by asking how Pope Francis sees the action of mercy in the face of the claims of justice? In paragraphs 20 and 21 of *Misericordiae vultus*, he acknowledges the claims of justice as an essential part of civil society. He insists that mercy should not be seen as being “soft” on wrongdoing and sin, or ignoring the legitimate claims of justice. To understand the relation of mercy and justice, he says, we need a shift in perspective, from focusing solely on justice to a wider perspective that sees both justice and mercy from the perspective of God’s love. Mercy and justice, he says, “are not two contradictory realities, but two dimensions of a

single reality that unfolds progressively until it culminates in the fullness of love.” (MV 20)

Thus, justice must not be looked at in and for itself, but within the wider perspective of God’s eternal plan for all creation.

The view the Pope is presenting here is a familiar one in Christian tradition. It is a response to the question about how human attempts or understandings of justice are to be viewed from the perspective of God’s mercy and justice. It takes its view from the ultimate reconciliation of all things in God through Christ; that is, from the perspective of the Final Judgment, when all our conundrums about why justice has been so incomplete in our world will be resolved by the superabundant mercy of God. How all this will happen remains a mystery for us at this time. We trust and believe, however, that God will resolve these mysteries when the Lord comes again. That is what lies behind what we profess in the Creed about the resurrection of the body, the resurrection of dead: all the injustice we now see will somehow be undone in the eschaton, in that Final Time.

A second way that our Tradition has viewed the relation of justice and mercy has been to see the imposition of justice as what appears to be punishment to be really an act of mercy by which God puts us back on the straight path to our destiny, as having been created in the image and likeness of God. Seen from this perspective, the punishment of justice may be experienced as painful, but it is really for our own good, gently bringing us back to our true selves, the creatures we are meant to be. It puts us again in right relationship with God so that we can experience being fully alive as the creatures we are intended to be.

These two ideas—that all will be made right at the end of time, and the punishment that justice requires is in the end an act of mercy—have long been part of Catholic thinking on how mercy and justice relate. One can read Pope Francis’ reflections on this difficult matter—about whether



demands of justice negates mercy—as his recognizing how complex the picture might be. But we should realize that responding to these thorny questions is not his principal concern. He is mostly concerned about helping us understanding the breadth and depth of God’s mercy, and how we must dispose ourselves more completely to becoming instruments of God’s mercy. All the ramifications of embracing mercy can be taken on later, in a second step. In doing this, he finds himself somewhat in the same position as Pope John Paul II did when he confronted the same question in *Dives in Misericordia*. Rather than trying to respond to the questions that necessarily arise when trying to think about mercy and justice together, the late Pope focused on how mercy can keep enacting justice from turning to revenge and cruelty—certainly an important caution that we need to continue to hear. But it does not answer all the questions that we have about how justice and mercy relate to each other. At its very best, what Pope Francis’ approach helps us to do is understand the divine perspective on mercy and justice: the justice we human beings think is needed in a situation and the justice we try to enact have always to be placed within the larger horizon of God’s mercy and love. It reminds us also about the need to test continually our own dispositions as we try to pursue justice—that we not assume that our judgments and our understanding equal those of God’s. In other words, what just and mercy mean in the lives of individuals—both the lives of wrongdoers and the lives of those pursuing justice—must be kept within the divine perspective.

But these perspectives, as important as they are, do not help in illuminating a broader picture. This broader picture is that of how to pursue *social* justice in the light of mercy. And charged as so many of you here are with the shaping and guiding of a ministry of social justice for your religious institutes, how do you explain this relation of mercy and justice to others? The traditional understandings of the relation of mercy and justice best help us comprehend how

mercy and justice come together in God and in individuals standing before God. They are not as helpful in understanding what we confront in the work of social justice—how to help the “sinned-against,” the victims of social injustice; how to unmask the injustice that tries to disguise itself as righteousness; how to address the structural elements that sustain injustice over longer periods of time. These unanswered questions about injustice perhaps reflect the relative short period of time that we have been directing attention to of social justice as compared to the much longer history of reflection on issues about individuals and justice. The Catholic Social Teaching that has been developed over the past 125 years still leaves a lot of fundamental questions to be examined, even as new issues arise for us (such as those about “caring for our common home” that Pope Francis has addressed in his encyclical *Laudato Si*).

Our questions about social justice ministry and its relation to mercy cannot be not in contradiction to, or on a separate path from, what Pope Francis has envisioned for the Church. As already mentioned, he finds the Beatitudes and Matthew 25 some of the best guides for learning how to live a discipleship of mercy. And both the Beatitudes and the parable clearly include social justice ministry in their purview.

Nonetheless, how might we formulate the relation of justice and mercy from the requirements of social justice and the ministry of social justice in this Jubilee Year of Mercy? I would like to offer some proposals here. These begin with a parallel situation in which I found myself some years ago, when the Special Synod for Africa was convoked to look at reconciliation, justice and peace for that continent. Then the question was: does pursuing reconciliation become a path that diverges from the search for justice? The question was a legitimate one, inasmuch as some people saw talk about reconciliation as a way of bypassing the difficult work of pursuing justice. Such language had been heard earlier, especially in the 1980s, in Latin America. There one could

hear calls for reconciliation that meant forgetting the sufferings of the past in order for opposing parties to go into the future together. Most typically, those who encouraged this line of forgetting the sufferings of the past were not the victims, but the perpetrators of wrongdoing who did not want the past to be revisited, lest their misdeeds be discovered and they be called to justice. Moreover, opponents of theologies of liberation claimed that the true stance of a Christian was for reconciliation, not liberation. On this view, liberation meant conflict. Reconciliation, on the other hand, meant coming together in the communion God intended (and, incidentally maintaining the unjust status quo). In reaction to these distortions of the Christian understanding of reconciliation, it became impossible even to speak of reconciliation in its legitimate sense in some parts of Latin America. It led some groups at the time to reject discussion of reconciliation altogether, saying instead that there could be no reconciliation until there was complete justice. While this represented a sincere commitment to the continuing struggle for justice, it failed to realize that there was no complete justice in the world short of the Lord's coming at the end of time. That meant there was no point to working for reconciliation in the meantime. It was somewhat naïve about the workings of justice and how difficult full justice is to be found in an imperfect world. And it foreclosed working, for example, toward forgiveness.

What the discussions of those years helped do is refine both what could be understood as practices of genuine Christian reconciliation and also the limits of justice in a fallen, finite world.<sup>3</sup> It came to be realized that reconciliation is not just an end-goal, but also an arduous process that contains many other actions. Chief among those actions was the pursuit of justice. So any claim at reconciliation that sidestepped pursuing justice was not genuine Christian reconciliation at all. Could our current attempt to find social justice's place in the merciful plan

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<sup>3</sup> I actually tried to do this in a presentation for the JPIC Commission of the USG/UISG entitled "Justice and Reconciliation" given on November 30, 2009.

of God yield the same kind of refinement of mercy and justice for us, as did refining our understandings of reconciliation and justice did at that time?

### **Three Dimensions of Justice**

To start examining this possibility, let me turn to the three dimensions of social justice, familiar to anyone working in social justice ministries. These three go by various names, but I will present them as (1) punitive or retributive justice, (2) restorative justice, and (3) structural justice.

*Punitive or retributive justice* is concerned with the punishment of those who have committed injustice in some significant way. Important within the larger picture of pursuing social justice is who should engage in carrying out punitive justice. The concern here is that punishment can become excessive in trying to make right what has gone wrong. If undertaken without sufficient supervision and control, it can become simple vengeance or retaliation. This in turn can create a new injustice, and in so doing perpetuate a cycle of violence rather than bringing violence to an end. Consequently, in pursuing social justice great attention is given to the conditions under which punitive justice should be administered, and who should be considered the ones to mete out punishment. The general understanding is that it should first be carefully and fairly determined whether wrongdoing has been committed, and that the punishment should be suitable to the offense committed. How to conceive what should be the limits and the goals of punishment have to be considered as well. Models of balance usually frame this thinking: the punishment restores the “balance” of proper relationships between the parties. And once the kind of punishment has been determined, not just anyone can carry out the punishing action. Those who do it must be vested with legitimate “authority” to do so, i.e., be designated to act on behalf of the victims by the larger community.

In terms of a ministry of social justice, social justice ministers do not see themselves as carrying out the punishment themselves. Rather they see their roles as calling the community's attention to acts of injustice that need to be redressed, and bringing wrongdoers to the point of trial and subsequent punishment. They may also be involved in monitoring that the punishment remains within the bounds of justice.

Much of the work of social justice concerning punitive justice takes the form of *advocacy*. This has been an important dimension of social justice ministry for international religious institutes. The networks of communication we have at religious institutes because of our transnational extension throughout the world—from the sites of poverty and injustice where the religious institutes conduct their ministry to centers of power to which they have access because of their international scope—help magnify our voices in pointing to injustices and advocating for redress, and restoration. Advocacy does this through acts of recognition and witness.

*Recognition* is an important part of justice because often victims are left (or pushed) out of the picture. Think, for example, of large-scale building projects that are presented as creating huge benefits for the common good. One such current example would be the Belo Monte hydroelectric plant being built in the Xingu region of the Amazon in Brazil. It will be the third-largest hydroelectric dam in the world, and is presented as providing much-needed electricity that will allow development of large parts of Brazil. What is less talked about is the thousands of indigenous peoples that have been displaced by the project. Advocacy for those poor and indigenous peoples by the Church and secular organizations has brought to public awareness the grave injustices that are involved in this project, even though such efforts have been unable to stop the project itself. This kind of advocacy is clearly an act of justice. It is also an act of mercy because it has brought those shoved to the peripheries to the center of attention and concern, at

least in some circles. We are thus reminded that inclusion of those at the peripheries is an important part of mercy as Pope Francis envisions it. Recognition renders victims visible when there are those who prefer that victims remain silent and invisible.

*Witness* is a specific form of recognition, and is concerned especially in attesting to what has already happened or may be happening still. It provides an alternate narrative to the one presented as the “official” or “true” narrative by the powerful that is intended to be understood as the normative story not only of what “is,” but also what “has to be.” The work of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions and similar projects around the world in the past forty years have been put forward as alternatives to the narratives that the victors or the powerful wish to impose on a past. Helping to establish those alternate narratives by accompanying victims in their efforts to tell the story from their perspective is an exercise in witness and truth-telling has been an important part of a ministry of social justice. Such witness changes the flow of history; it represents how the mercy of God overcomes past wrongdoing as narrated so often in the Psalms.

Witness too can be seen as an act of mercy. For what witness does is point to truth. Truth, truthfulness and trustworthiness are also attributes of God. They are attested to repeatedly in the Old Testament, along with mercy and justice. Indeed one of the things that makes the mercy of God so compelling is its reliability and enduring character. This finds its voice in the litany that is found in Psalm 136, which begins “Give thanks to the Lord for He is good; his mercy endures forever.” In that Psalm, recalling God’s trustworthiness in making creation a firm and reliable place in which to live is then followed by thanksgiving for how God rescued Israel time and time again from adversity, and continues to rescue us in our own time. Witness is a ritual act of being reminded how God loves us deeply and eternally, even beyond our faults and shortcomings.

Trustworthiness reminds us of an important part of mercy, and truth-telling is thus a practice of mercy.

*Restorative justice* focuses upon the healing of victims rather than the punishment of wrongdoers. There is so much that must be considered in restoring the lives of victims after injustice has occurred that the focused measures of punitive justice cannot undertake. When loved ones are dead or disappeared, when one has had to flee one's homeland, when high-level acts of so-called "reconciliation" cause new suffering at the grass roots, someone has to address these wounds, and it is often religious institutes that try to do so. Here restorative justice and the corporal works of mercy intersect in a profound way.

Restorative justice also aims at healing relationships between victims and wrongdoers. Restorative justice does not replace punitive justice in legal systems, but is now being used in many places within legal systems as a way of bringing together convicted wrongdoers and the surviving family members of victims. Such bringing together of wrongdoers and victims can set the stage of apology and forgiveness. And as we have seen, forgiveness is one of the outcomes of mercy most important to Pope Francis.

In recent years, restorative justice has been taken up explicitly into the social justice ministries of many international religious institutes, such as the Africa Restorative Justice Project that was conducted by the Africa Faith and Justice Network some years ago, that worked to heal the wounds after civil conflict in Burundi and elsewhere. (Unfortunately, recent events in Burundi have made it necessary once again.)

Even more innovatively, social justice efforts at restorative justice are being taken up in the collaboration between religious institutes. This has been most in evidence in the Solidarity with South Sudan Project, the common effort of 260 religious institutes of women and men and donor

agencies to rebuild the educational, medical, and pastoral infrastructure of South Sudan and develop sustainable agricultural practices. And even more recently, the UISG project with refugees begun in Agrigento and environs in Sicily represents another effort at restorative justice.

Along with these obvious acts of social justice as mercy, it should be noted also how restorative justice, by bringing wrongdoers and victims together, is a powerful forum for forgiveness. For example, the use of restorative justice within the framework of punitive justice—was used in some of the sentencing of those who were involved in the genocide in Rwanda in the *gacaca* courts. There convicts were sentenced to helping build houses and tend gardens for the surviving family members of victims of the genocide. Such a use of restorative justice shows how works of justice can flow into enacting mercy and encouraging forgiveness. Here again we see that social justice is not opposed to mercy but rather can become constitutive of the possibility of a key aspect of mercy—namely, forgiveness—being able to happen at all.

The third form of justice important to social justice ministry is the identification and combating of sinful social structures that perpetuate cultures of injustice. Addressing these issues is commonly referred to as pursuing *structural* justice. While social justice ministries recognize how injustice springs from the perversity of the human heart, it knows at the same time that social structures that have absorbed so much human sin and that sustain an environment that legitimates and even encourages unjust action are part and parcel of the human arena. These are portrayed already in the Book of Genesis, how the cities that grew up became breeding grounds for iniquity.

A great deal of the efforts of religious institutes in social justice ministries is directed toward combating structural injustice. One of the most significant of these on an international scale in recent years has been human trafficking. Efforts against human trafficking are directed not just at



rescuing individual victims, but also at raising awareness how such networks of trafficking are legitimated by larger economic and social configurations. How the migrant flow into Europe has been exploited by human traffickers is a poignant example of how widely the tentacles of this particular form of structural injustice reach. Other sanctioned cultural customs, such as female genital mutilation, are part of larger configurations intended to subjugate women to patriarchal structures.

The efforts at unmasking and combating sinful, unjust structures reflect in an indirect way the range and the need for God's unbounded loving kindness—God's mercy—in a world that has not yet reached the fullness for which it is intended in Christ. In so doing they show us the scope of wrongdoing and how it implicates itself into almost every pattern of human action, and undermines even the most sincere efforts at the improvement of the human condition for so many people in the world. It is in exhibiting the range and need of God's loving kindness reaching beyond the structural injustices that seem to continue to rule the world that we see God's mercy at work in the struggle against structural injustice.

## **Conclusion**

What I hope this brief look at punitive, restorative and structural justice provides is a picture of how pursuing the mercy of God does not short-circuit or second-guess the efforts of social justice. To be sure, looking at the tasks that social justice sets for itself reminds us that a purification or transformation of social structures is not something that will be completely achieved; nor that if it were achieved, injustice would disappear from the earth. The perversity of the human heart, the insidious character of evil, and the fallibility and finiteness of human imagining remind us of how much we still linger in our fallen state, and how much we are in need of God's help. Yet as we see how efforts at achieving greater social justice can renew our

commitments to alleviating the suffering of the world and lay the groundwork for forgiveness and reconciliation, we are caught up in the embrace of God's mercy, the most defining character of who God is for us. In this Jubilee Year of Mercy then, we do not suspend our efforts at social justice, but are invited to take the opportunity to see how those efforts are part of the unfolding of the mercy of God and are, at their best, suffused with that very mercy of God. In experiencing this and bearing witness to this, we come to marvel at the *magnolia Dei*, the wondrous works of God, that reveal to us not only God's grandeur and goodness, but also how deeply we are loved and cherished by that God. "Give thanks to the Lord for He is good; His mercy endures forever!"