

## A Theology of Migration: Mercy and Education

One of the mandates of UNESCO is to make education accessible to all, in law and in fact, and in this respect, Maltese governments have certainly delivered. Where the education of children and young people is concerned, the principles of non-discrimination, of equality of opportunity and treatment, and of (intellectual and moral) solidarity<sup>2</sup> have been respected, and the constitutional right of all children to attend school has not been denied, regardless of the legal or social status of the parents. All children up to the age of sixteen are entitled to free education and are legally obliged to attend school.<sup>3</sup> Access to education to Third Country Nationals (TCNs) is granted through various Regulations: those concerning the status of long-term residents (Third Country Nationals), those concerning the common standards and procedures for returning illegally staying TCNs, those concerning the right to family reunification, and so on.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pauline Dimech obtained her doctorate in systematic theology from the University of Durham and is currently a full-time lecturer within the Faculties of Theology and Education, University of Malta.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960); The World Declaration on Education for All, and Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs (1990); the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960); the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989); and the Convention on Technical and Vocational Education (1989); the World Declaration on Educational for All (1990); The Recife Declaration of the E-9 Countries (2000); the Dakar Framework for Action - Education for All: Meeting Our Collective Commitments (2000).

<sup>3</sup> Children of an applicant for asylum have the same access to state education and training in Malta as a child of Maltese parents born on the island (Laws of Malta: Refugees Act, chap.420).

<sup>4</sup> EU citizens, TCNs with long-term residence status, beneficiaries of internal protection and asylum seekers may apply for an exemption from the payment of fees which are normally charged for state educational institutions.

However, “there are no policies or incentives that support such access to compulsory-age education, higher education or vocational training,” which means that the support is not on a basis equal to national citizens. Nor is there, in Malta, a specific policy relating to the education of migrants, or a policy on the inclusion and integration process for (im)migrant students and families.<sup>5</sup> In the absence of such explicit national policies, individuals working within the Education Division (including head teachers), the Emigrants’ Commission, the Jesuit Refugee Service, the University’s International Office, and the UNHCR Malta have had to develop administrative “policies” in order to compensate for the absence of an overarching national vision, thus ensuring that children of (im)migrants and TCNs do not become victims. Im(migrant) children also have access to an LSA (Learning Support Assistant) should that be considered necessary.

In this article, the term *im(migrants)* is being used very widely. The children and young people to whom we refer in this article may be sons and daughters of Maltese parents who have just returned from abroad; of highly skilled and business im(migrants) arriving from both the EU and from outside it;<sup>6</sup> of irregular, undocumented, unauthorized migrants arriving from various countries; of refugees, asylum seekers, people forced to move due to factors such as war, environmental catastrophes or development projects who are seeking refuge.<sup>7</sup> They could also be foreign students who arrive with temporary permission to stay in Malta. The tourist is not an (im)migrant, but the (im)migrant may be temporary, in the sense that he/she could be using Malta as a step towards resettlement in another country.<sup>8</sup> If these (im)migrants are residing in Malta long enough to send their children to school, then they too would qualify as the object of this study.

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<sup>5</sup> Carla Camilleri and Neil Falzon, *Malta Integration Network: A Way Forward for a National Integration Policy in Malta* (Malta Aditus Foundation, 2014), 22.

<sup>6</sup> For the purposes of this article, children of Maltese parents who have lived abroad, and of non-Maltese Europeans who have transferred themselves to Malta, are being treated in the same way as other (im)migrants, simply because the educational challenges for their offspring are very similar.

<sup>7</sup> We are aware that the legal protection for refugees is generally better fostered than that of economic migrants - the category of economic migrants is not even recognized - whereas undocumented immigration would be the most controversial, even from a theological standpoint.

<sup>8</sup> The labels “temporary” and “permanent” are being used cautiously. Many immigration specialists agree that the labels are no longer good descriptors of migration outcomes. As Catherine Dauvergne has pointed out “rather than reflecting results - what migrants actually do - they instead reflect outcomes desired by states.” Catherine Dauvergne, *The New Politics of Immigration and the End of Settler Societies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 127.

In trying to combine the reflection on the (im)migrant with those of theology, education and mercy, there is not much to go on. Theological reflection both on the migrant, and on education, is still scarce, and, in Malta, it is practically non-existent. Combining these along with the reflection on mercy has not been an easy task. What I offer here are only a few reflections on the subject.

## **Ethical and Cultural Values, and Anthropological Vision**

I am especially interested in the ethical and cultural values which impact on the education of children of migrant parents in Malta. There is a lot to be said about the ethical and cultural values of the Maltese, but I am especially concerned about those values which impinge directly on the way the Maltese Education System works. I use the phrase *education system* very widely: to refer to the whole educational structure, consisting of schools and other agencies responsible for the education of students and for the successful organization of such an education.

In this context, I am using the term to include State, Church, Independent schools, as well as Departments and personnel, both within the Education Division and elsewhere, that contribute to education or ensure that the system functions efficiently. It also includes policies, whether officially structured, or simply practised. It has to be said that there are various agencies outside the school system which are involved with education, even that of migrants, inasmuch as they provide some form of educational service.<sup>9</sup> In this sense, the educational system would include Catholic schools, parishes, welfare agencies and other Church bodies which have education as one of their roles; as well as entities such as the ETC (Employment and Training Corporation) and the Directorate for Lifelong Learning.

Rather than reflecting on the actual decisions made with regard to education, we need to dig into the deeper question, namely, into the ethical and cultural values, the anthropology, which underlie such decisions, that is, which shape the curriculum frameworks and the policies which we create, the handbooks which we compile, the demands which we make, the practices which we encourage. Our ethical and cultural values, our anthropology, will always impact our

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<sup>9</sup> On 8 December, as a concrete sign of commitment to the Jubilee Year of Mercy, the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) launched an advocacy and fundraising campaign, entitled “Mercy in Motion,” to implement the JRS Global Education Initiative, which aims to robustly expand both formal and informal education programmes - spanning from primary school to university, and including vocational and teacher training. It will ensure that the potential of thousands of refugee children and young adults is not wasted.

policies, whether we are cognizant of this or not. When these values are negative, their impact on the education system can be formidable. I will only mention some of the *educational vices* which are rampant in our schools, and which, I am convinced, affect the children of migrant parents more deeply than they do Maltese children.

These vices include the distrust of the stranger, the endorsement of stereotypes, the sanctioning of individualism, the belief that it is advantageous to hoard, the view that it is noble to compete, the pride which comes from one's language, culture and religion. There is the perception, which is not always based on reality, that there are only so many jobs, so much money, so many resources and so much opportunity to go around, and that these resources should not be *wasted* on foreigners. Such perceptions may drive us to avoid cooperation, become conceited, fail to appreciate the wealth of the other, and make choices that are neither welcoming nor hospitable.<sup>10</sup>

At this point I would like to comment on three issues. First, the issue of performance. The provision of a free place within our education system is not sufficient. Migrant children need to perform to the best of their ability. Clearly, efforts to apply the right to education are still far from ensuring that each child is either attending full time, or performing well.<sup>11</sup> The issue of performance is important, particularly because we are here dealing with a vulnerable group.<sup>12</sup> The extent of gaps in educational achievement faced by TCN students has been noted, as has the higher dropout-rates where TCN students are concerned. The EU Commission maintains that school systems ought to “adapt to the increasing diversity of the student body to deliver high-quality education for all,” starting as early as pre-school. The Commission proposes that school staff should be trained in managing diversity, and that staff should include teachers with migrant backgrounds.<sup>13</sup> With children from migrant parents, special care

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<sup>10</sup> Gloria L. Schaab, “Which of these Was Neighbour?: Spiritual Dimensions of the US Immigration Question,” *International Journal of Public Theology* 2, no.2 (2008): 199.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Pace et al., “Unaccompanied Minors in Malta: Their Numbers and the Policies and Arrangements for their Reception, Return and Integration,” (European Migration Network, Malta, May 2009), [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/european\\_migration\\_network/reports/docs/emn-studies/unaccompanied-minors/18.\\_malta\\_national\\_report\\_on\\_unaccompanied\\_minors\\_final\\_version\\_8dec09\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/reports/docs/emn-studies/unaccompanied-minors/18._malta_national_report_on_unaccompanied_minors_final_version_8dec09_en.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> As Gioacchino Campese has said, a preferential option for the poor would make irregular migrants, and those who do not *legally* belong to a society, who are invisible, voiceless and vulnerable, the protagonists of our theological thinking. See “The Irruption of Migrants: Theology of Migration in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” *Theological Studies* 73, no.1 (2012): 3-32, 26.

<sup>13</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the

is needed, and the following ought to be competently administered: the initial assessment, the decision concerning the location of the school placement, the provision of additional instruction in the English language, the assistance for the acquisition of the school uniform, the psychological support for children who have been traumatized by the relocation, the support of a social worker, the granting of social benefits, the offer of courses, lessons and workshops which facilitate social integration, the efforts at family reunification, and so on. All these factors encroach on the overall performance of the students concerned, and must therefore be professionally handled.

Secondly, there is the issue of the inclusion of these children into the school community. The dean of law at the University of British Columbia, Catherine Dauvergne has said that “many of the problems of migration derive from the binary thinking...that instantiates the contemporary politics.” Her complaint is that these binaries are “woefully bad at nuance.”<sup>14</sup> In Malta, the dualistic mindset of inclusion and exclusion is especially prevalent within the educational context. When used too generically, this language tends to become unhelpful, or even divisive. Inclusion should be seen more as a continuum towards which we aspire. For this reason, the conclusions reached by someone like Colin Calleja and his colleagues in 2010, who concluded that professionals working in Maltese schools lacked the basic cultural and heuristic tools required to work with a multicultural/multi-ethnic classroom, have serious implications.<sup>15</sup>

No doubts can be shed on the multilingualism and multiculturalism in Maltese classrooms. Empirically - though not necessarily ideologically - multiculturalism is real, especially in schools, and this requires a certain amount of commitment on the part of practitioners. Various studies carried out locally have identified the different challenges that migrants face, have examined the different policies employed in Malta, or have suggested policies that could be beneficial to migrants on the Maltese islands.<sup>16</sup> One undergraduate study, carried out by Ruth Chircop and Moira Kind, emphasized “the necessity for education to foster contact among social groups.” The concept is that propounded by “contact” theorists,

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European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, “European Agenda for the Integration of Third Country Nationals,” com (2011) 455,6, eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52011DCO455&from=EN.

<sup>14</sup> Dauvergne, *The New Politics of Immigration*, 203.

<sup>15</sup> Colin Calleja, Bernard Cauchi and Michael Grech, “Education and Ethnic Minorities in Malta,” Malta: The e-spices Learning Partnership, 2010, [www.academia.edu/304662/Education\\_and\\_Ethnic\\_Minorities\\_in\\_Malta](http://www.academia.edu/304662/Education_and_Ethnic_Minorities_in_Malta).

<sup>16</sup> See for example Kirsten Caruana, “Integrating Students With an Immigrant Background in European and Maltese Schools: a Review” (B.Ed.(Hons.).diss., University of Malta, 2014).

namely that “if you bring together members of different social groups in settings such as schools, increased harmony among the groups is likely.”<sup>17</sup> Chircop and Kind concluded that the schools which were most successful “tended to focus on students’ sense of security, acceptance, and friendships with their peers and teachers.”<sup>18</sup> In another undergraduate study which was carried out in 2010, the suitability of the proposed educational plans was investigated, with the intention of measuring whether these plans inspire humanitarian attitudes as regards irregular immigration. The results shed light on the importance of integrating irregular (im)migrants into the educational system.<sup>19</sup> In another under-graduate study, it was concluded that little or no preparation was being undertaken by schools to cater for migrant students. It was said that students were simply expected to adapt and integrate within the system together with the other local students.<sup>20</sup> The issue of language differences is especially distressing to all involved. Resources are limited, although language is one of the biggest obstacles both for inclusion within the schools and for integration within society.<sup>21</sup> The commitment to social justice and inclusion is evident in the National Minimum Curriculum, as well as in most policy documents and education reforms in Malta. The National Minimum Curriculum itself offered six principles as the foundation for an inclusive approach: entitlement, diversity, continuation of achievement, learner-centred learning, quality assurance, and teacher support. A theology of mercy would require that these educational documents, as well as the educational practices they propose, be examined through the virtue of mercy, understood as a virtue that surpasses justice.

Thirdly, there is the issue of education beyond compulsory school age. This issue is closely related to that of citizenship and of integration. In Malta, TCNs, and their descendants, face various problems where employment and residency are concerned. As has been said, “many of the policies developed in relation to residence permits and employment licenses tend to have a restrictive and exclusionary orientation and their implementation in practice is dilatory, variable and highly discretionary. In most cases, it is difficult to obtain a legal status

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<sup>17</sup> Ruth Chircop and Moira Kind, “Multiethnicity and Education” (B.Ed.[Hons.] diss., University of Malta, 2005), 17-18.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>19</sup> Stephanie Mamo Portelli, “The Attitudes of Students and Teachers towards Irregular Immigration: Can Education make a Change?” (B.Ed.[Hons.].diss., University of Malta, 2010).

<sup>20</sup> Maria Vella, “The Teachers’ Perception of Immigrant Students’ Experience in Maltese State Secondary Schools” (B.Ed.[Hons.].diss., University of Malta, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> David E.Zammit, “Consultative Assessment on the Integration of Third Country Nationals,” (Report Prepared for the International Organization for Migration, 2010), 25, [www.academia.edu/3219916/Consultative\\_Assessment\\_of\\_Integration\\_of\\_Third\\_Country\\_Nationals](http://www.academia.edu/3219916/Consultative_Assessment_of_Integration_of_Third_Country_Nationals).



which is sufficiently long-term to promote social integration (citizenship).”<sup>22</sup> In this respect, education may be seen to be dishonest and deceitful. It seeks to prepare the descendants of im(migrants) to be fully immersed in the school community, and “to be more successful and more active participants of society,” while knowing that, “it is difficult to obtain a legal status which is sufficiently long-term to promote social integration (citizenship), and that there will always be areas of ordinary social life where TCNs are segregated or treated differently from ordinary Maltese residents.”<sup>23</sup> As things stand, children of *foreign* parents (whether from countries within the EU or from countries from outside the EU, whether born in Malta or elsewhere) will never be able to acquire Maltese citizenship. Maltese law does not allow citizenship by birth on a purely *ius soli* basis, but requires that children who are born in Maltese territory, to also be born to at least one parent of Maltese citizenship. While TCNs may apply for long-term residence status, regulated by Maltese Subsidiary Legislation (SL) 217.05, obtaining this long-term residence is quite difficult, because the criteria are tough.<sup>24</sup> Even so, citizenship will not follow long-term residence, at least not automatically. The son or daughter of TCN parents will always remain “foreign.” The question then arises, as to whether there will ever be a time when an (im) migrant child is entitled to free tertiary education. The risk of migrant children remaining “perpetual strangers” is very real.<sup>25</sup>

## Theological, Religious and Spiritual Values

My second interest is in the theological, religious and spiritual values which currently inform our decisions, not only for hosting and integrating migrants, but, more specifically, the policies and decisions in the educational field, or which ought to be informing such decisions. Specific data about these values is lacking,

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>23</sup> In Malta, marriage and kinship are “the principal official modality of social integration.” The varying tariffs for water and electricity is one example of social discrimination. The number of security checks which non-Maltese have to undergo is another example. Zammit, “Consultative Assessment,” 22-23, 28.

<sup>24</sup> In the past, every person born in Malta was automatically entitled to Maltese citizenship. However, since 2001, that law only applies to people born before August 1, 1989. The European Network on Statelessness (ENS), and the UNHCR have been pressing the European Union to fulfill its pledge made in 2012 that all member states would accede to the 1954 UN Statelessness Convention. To date, Malta has not signed it.

<sup>25</sup> This phrase is taken from Allan Fugueroa Deck, “At the Crossroads: North American and Hispanic,” in *We are a People: Initiatives in Hispanic American Theology*, ed. Roberto S. Goizueta (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 2-3.

but we would imagine that the language of justice and mercy would have a place in this context. My intention is to bring into the conversation the theology of mercy which Pope Francis strongly invokes, and to relate a theology of migration that is motivated by mercy to current educational policy and practice on the Maltese Islands.<sup>26</sup>

The associate professor of law at DePaul University, Allison Brownell Tirres, is one example of an academic who has sought to encourage scholars and practitioners of immigration law to look critically at the role of mercy. While being aware that scepticism about mercy is strong, and that some believe that it contravenes justice, she maintains that mercy is a necessary countermeasure to the unrelenting harshness of criminal law today, especially where immigration law is concerned. She argues that “the lack of procedural and substantive protections for (im)migrants, the acceptance of unfettered discretion and lack of oversight of agency action, and the political subordination of noncitizens all push in the same direction - towards sovereign mercy rather than equitable justice.”<sup>27</sup>

As a theologian, my main concern is not to explore the legal intricacies or to question the sovereignty of the State. Neither is it simply to encourage the clergy, lay workers and parishioners to show mercy by providing educational opportunities to migrants during the entirety of their migration process, although this activity may not be without importance. This article is meant to, firstly, admit that there might be a natural disinclination towards (im)migrants and their families. Catherine Dauvergne, has argued that, at a time “when more people want to move than ever before, there are no longer any places on earth that see this movement as ordinary, expected, and valued in and of itself.” The crisis of asylum, a deep fear of Islamic fundamentalism, and the end of ideological multiculturalism have made hospitality more difficult.<sup>28</sup> Secondly, in this article, I recommend that all our theological, religious, and spiritual values ought to be fuelled by mercy, and that the (im)migrant ought to be the object of our mercy. More particularly, this article is meant to propose mercy as a hermeneutical tool. It is meant to persuade the Maltese, and educational practitioners, that mercy is

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<sup>26</sup> The word “policy” is being used widely, since a national policy focusing on TCN education in Malta is yet to be published. My conclusions are based on research carried out by others who have explored the experiences, and degree of integration of TCN students within the Maltese education system, as well as the challenges and opportunities faced by these students and their families. See for example, Neil Falzon, Maria Pisani and Alba Cauchi, *Research Report: Integration in Education of Third Country Nationals* (Malta: Foundation for Educational Services, 2012).

<sup>27</sup> Allison Brownell Tirres, “Mercy in Immigration Law,” *Brigham Young University Law Review* 2014, no.6: 1563, <http://digitalcommons.law.byu.edu/lawreview/vol2013/iss6/6>.

<sup>28</sup> Dauvergne, *The New Politics of Immigration*, 27, 35.



*the* tool with which to evaluate not only our current legal framework, but also our educational policies and practices.

Probably because of the highly disturbing images on the social media of desperate (im)migrants forced to flee their country, and the rising death toll because of migration, the first theologian who comes to mind is the German Catholic theologian Johann Baptist Metz, the theologian who admitted the tragedy of Auschwitz and claimed that a particular kind of mysticism was needed to help overcome the heart-rending experiences which were witnessed as a consequence of it. According to J. Matthew Ashley, the strand of Christian spirituality which Metz picked up was “one that is much more engaged and irritated by the presence of evil in creation, as well as by the lack of (or perhaps better, by the still outstanding) response on the part of God.” Metz suggests a “mysticism of open eyes.” Here, theological reflection takes the form of “protest” and of “insistent questioning.”<sup>29</sup> From Metz’s viewpoint, man must not allow himself neither to be anaesthetized (*Unmündigkeit*), nor to go back to the time before the Enlightenment.<sup>30</sup> As with Metz’s interpretation of Auschwitz, I believe that, with regards to migration, what is required is not “moral self-recrimination and half-hearted overtures” but a searching examination of the very foundations of the spiritual and intellectual worldview which could allow such a catastrophe, forget it, or see it as simply an event of the past. Metz had said that theology “should never see its goal as ‘solving’ the question of suffering, but rather as sheltering it and clearing a space for it to irritate us, and thereby to move us to hope, to remembering the great deeds of God, to resistance, to action.”<sup>31</sup> I agree fully with Metz’s powerful theological interpretation of human tragedy. As a Christian, and as a theologian, I cannot remain unsympathetic, I cannot remain indifferent to the sorrow of (im)migrants, and I must allow myself to hope and to worship, but also to contest and to get involved.

Within the Judeo-Christian view, the call to be neighbour and to exercise hospitality remains the most fundamental starting point. In Deuteronomy, the call was to welcome the stranger, because Israel itself had been a stranger (Dt 10:18-19). In Isaiah, we have discourse about social justice and inclusion (Is 11:6-8), and about the welcome, care, and solidarity towards the migrant (Is 58:

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<sup>29</sup> J. Matthew Ashley, “Introduction: Reading Metz,” in Johann Baptist Metz, *A Passion for God. The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 14.

<sup>30</sup> Metz was committed to critical dialogue with the Enlightenment because of its focus on anthropology as that which legitimates theological statements. Ashley, “Introduction: Reading Metz,” 11.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

5-7).<sup>32</sup> The call to be neighbour and to exercise hospitality provides what Gloria L. Schaab has described as “valid and unequivocal dimensions of a religious and spiritual basis for the immigration discussion.”<sup>33</sup> *Populorum Progressio* states: “We cannot insist too much on the duty of giving foreigners a hospitable reception. It is a duty imposed by human solidarity and by Christian charity, and it is incumbent upon families and educational institutions in the host nations.”<sup>34</sup> For its part, the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, while emphasizing the mentality of hospitality, goes further by urging reforms and commitments that are not simply national but global in scope and application.<sup>35</sup> Throughout the Year of Mercy, Pope Francis repeatedly invoked the concept of mercy, which he maintains, is a virtue which goes beyond justice, since mere justice is not enough.<sup>36</sup> The idea is that justice requires stereotypization, whereas the humanization of the individual enables us to go beyond justice. The Pope’s encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si*, provides activists, educational practitioners, pastoral agents, and everyone else, with the anthropology that ought to underlie all action vis-à-vis migrants. “Every man and woman is created out of love and made in God’s image and likeness (cf. Gn 1:26). This shows us the immense dignity of each person, ‘who is not just something, but someone.’”<sup>37</sup>

Addressing the Cardinal Newman Society, Sister Anne Catherine of the Dominican Sisters of St Cecilia, describes education as a work of mercy “because it extends God’s love in the world.” She adds that “it is a mercy for teachers to offer their students solid content knowledge and to teach them skills that

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<sup>32</sup> Giacomo Danesi, “Per una teologia delle migrazioni,” in *Per una pastorale dei migranti: Contributi in occasione del 75o della morte di Mons. B. Scalabrini* (Rome: Direzione Generale dei Missionari Scalabriniani, 1980), 75-128.

<sup>33</sup> Schaab, “Which of These Was Neighbour?,” 187. Robert McAfee Brown extends this concept of judgment from that of individuals to that of nations. See Robert McAfee Brown, *Unexpected News: Reading the Bible with Third World Eyes* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1984), 127-141.

<sup>34</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio: On the Development of Peoples*, #67, 26 March 1967, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_enc\\_26031967\\_populorum.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum.html).

<sup>35</sup> Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, “*Welcoming Christian Refugees and Forcibly Displaced Persons: Pastoral Guidelines*,” (Vatican City, 2013), [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/corunum/corunum\\_en/pubblicazioni\\_en/Rifugiati-2013-INGL.pdf](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/corunum/corunum_en/pubblicazioni_en/Rifugiati-2013-INGL.pdf).

<sup>36</sup> Pope Francis affirms that wherever there are Christians, everyone should find an oasis of mercy, *The Name of God is Mercy: A Conversation with Andrea Tornielli*, trans. Oonagh Stransky (London: Random House, 2016), 119, 138-139.

<sup>37</sup> Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si: On Care For Our Common Home* (2015), no.65.

will help them go forward and take their place in the world.”<sup>38</sup> Writing of the theology of immigration, Gioacchino Campese from the Scalabrini International Migration Institute in Rome, said that when inspired by hospitality, such a theology would emphasize that “being with” is as important as “doing for” or “giving to.”<sup>39</sup> This language is easily applicable to the educational context. Within the context of education, mercy demands being with others: sharing oneself, one’s knowledge, one’s lunch, one’s time, one’s thoughts, one’s resources. Mercy requires intercession, advocacy, social reconciliation, solidarity. It denotes acknowledging that educational resources may not always have been used well. It entails helping “those on the move discover an inner identity that fosters their own agency.”<sup>40</sup> The school is the perfect place for such a spirituality of “being with,” since it is that safe place of proximity where we may vigorously educate ourselves about our neighbours, learn to appreciate different heritages, be open to encounter difference, and even strive to work on behalf of common causes. The school is the place where conversion from xenophobia, the overcoming of the fear of the stranger, is made possible. Within the safety of our schools, it is possible for us to become comfortable with those who have a strange language, a distinctive ethnic origin, a different tradition, an unusual way of doing things, and a different religion. The school could actually become the place where the ancestral heritages of other peoples may be embraced, preserved and even shared.

In his article, “Crossing the Divide: Foundations of a Theology of Migration and Refugees,” Rev. Daniel G. Groody, director of the Centre for Latino Spirituality and Culture at the University of Notre Dame, applied four theological constructs as foundations for a theology of immigration. These four constructs are: (1) the *Imago Dei*, (2) the *Verbum Dei*, (3) the *Missio Dei* and (4) the *Visio Dei*.

The theology of the *Imago Dei* allows us to root the person in the world very differently than would be permitted when using legal or social constructs.<sup>41</sup> Here, the emphasis is on the humanity of the (im)migrant. As Dauvergne has said, “How we imagine immigration affects how we regulate it, measure it, and theorize it, and how we relate to migrants themselves.”<sup>42</sup> We seriously need to

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<sup>38</sup> <http://www.cardinalnewmansociety.org/CatholicEducationDaily/DetailsPage/tabid/102/ArticleID/4592/Catholic-Education-%E2%80%98Extends-God%E2%80%99s-Love%E2%80%99-as-a-Spiritual-Work-of-Mercy.aspx#sthash.PgfT8eDd.dpuf>, accessed June 18, 2016.

<sup>39</sup> Campese, “The Irruption of Migrants,” 29.

<sup>40</sup> Daniel G. Groody, “Crossing the Divide: Foundations of a Theology of Migration and Refugees,” *Theological Studies* 70, no.3 (2009): 644.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 644-645.

<sup>42</sup> Dauvergne, *The New Politics of Immigration*, 212.

ask about the vision of humanity which we wish to project. The theological construct of the *Imago Dei* could easily be used to challenge policies, decisions, procedures, practices, states of affairs, or courses of action, which lead to any of the *educational vices* which were mentioned earlier, namely, the distrust of the stranger, the endorsement of stereotypes, the sanctioning of individualism, the belief that it is advantageous to hoard, the view that it is noble to compete, the pride which comes from our language, culture and religion.

The second foundation identified by Groody is that of the *Verbum Dei*. Here, the incarnation is interpreted as a migration, as a crossing of borders, as a “journey into otherness and vulnerability,” as an entering “into total identification with those who are abandoned and alienated.” In addition, Jesus is seen as the paradigm of the migrant, through whose light, migrants and refugees may reframe their own story. Just like Jesus, migrants leave the countries which they know, undergo dangerous journeys, and take up residence in a foreign land. This may be explained through kenotic theology, since becoming a migrant “entails emptying [oneself], ... radically surrendering everything [one owns], without any assurance that what [one loses] will come back to them.”<sup>43</sup>

The third foundation which Groody identifies is the concept of the *Missio Dei*. Here, migration is understood as a call to cross borders and to overcome barriers, and as such, is a way of thinking about God and human life and an expression of the Christian mission of reconciliation. According to Groody, the *Missio Dei* challenges our idolization of the State, of religion or of an ideology, all of which tend to exclude and to alienate others. This *Missio Dei* can become, for the receiving community, “a ministry of generous hospitality, one that is mutually enriching for those who give and those who receive, and one which involves creating space.”<sup>44</sup> In this context, the theologians Ignacio Ellacuria and Jon Sobrino deserve a mention. According to Ellacuria, the *principal* sign of the times “by whose light the others should be discerned and interpreted” is “the historically crucified people.” Ellacuria defined “his life, and his vocation as a Jesuit and as a human being in terms of ‘a specific service: to take the crucified people down from the cross.’”<sup>45</sup> The significance of the title of one of Jon Sobrino’s books is evident: *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified people from the Cross*.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Groody, “Crossing the Divide,” 651.

<sup>44</sup> See Cathy Ross, “Creating Space: Hospitality as a Metaphor for Mission,” ANVIL 25, no.3 (2008): 167-176, [http://biblicalstudies.gospelstudies.org.uk/anvil/25-3\\_167.pdf](http://biblicalstudies.gospelstudies.org.uk/anvil/25-3_167.pdf).

<sup>45</sup> Robert Lassalle-Klein, “Jesus of Galilee and the Crucified People: The Contextual Christology of Jon Sobrino and Ignacio Ellacuria,” *Theological Studies* 70, no.2 (2009): 348, 354.

<sup>46</sup> Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (New York: Orbis, 1994).

Finally, there is the *Visio Dei*. This theological concept emphasizes not just the ultimate priority of God and his kingdom, but also the benefit of trying to interpret situations, events and people as God would. This obviously has implications on the way we view immigration, migrants and refugees. As Groody puts it, “the *Visio Dei* shapes people’s ethical dispositions and offers a new way of perceiving the *Imago Dei* in those whose dignity is often disfigured by dehumanizing stereotypes and demeaning public rhetoric.”<sup>47</sup>

Each one of the four theological constructs (*Imago Dei*, *Verbum Dei*, *Missio Dei* and *Visio Dei*) has two consequences, both very relevant to us. The first of these is that each one includes a set of moral demands. For instance, through a consideration of the humanity of the migrant (*Imago Dei*), rather than on his or her legal status, it is possible to construct policies which are more human, more merciful, and ordered towards the good of society’s weakest members, as well as towards the common good. The second consequence is that these constructs provide a theological vision of reality which will be further developed in the following section.

## Locus Theologicus

So far, I have referred to the ethical and cultural values which impact on education, to the theological, religious and spiritual values which ought to inform the decisions which regard migrants and their education, and to the concept of mercy which Pope Francis is strongly trying to invoke. The next step is to promote a theology of migration which sees the migrant child as a *locus theologicus*.

Hispanic and Asian-American theologies of migration have been emphasizing how the faith experience of migrants can become a privileged *locus theologicus*.<sup>48</sup> Immigration certainly has an effect on religious experience. To see it as a *locus theologicus* is to see the experience of immigration as one of the fundamental resources for theological discourse. Immigration is here viewed as a theological reality rather than as a social one upon which theology may shed light. This means that migration is seen as a reality where God is present, where God can be seen to work, and, possibly, where God’s mercy has been experienced. It is a way of thinking about God and about what it means to be human in the world.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, migration can be seen as a theological method, that is, as a tool and an approach for doing theology, one that would help theologians to pursue the

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<sup>47</sup> Groody, “Crossing the Divide,” 661.

<sup>48</sup> Campese, “The Irruption of Migrants,” 10-18.

<sup>49</sup> Groody, “Crossing the Divide,” 642.

thinking about God, engage with the world, become familiar with the history and experience of our ancestors, comprehend the current migration movement and appreciate the human and faith experiences of the (im)migrant. You could say, as the professor of sociology from the University of Carolina at Chapel Hill, Jacqueline Hagan, has said, that theology is *learning from* the very reality of migration.<sup>50</sup>

Seen as a theological reality and as a theological method, the experience of migrant children and young people within our schools becomes itself a *locus theologicus*. The migration experience informs these young people concerned, who are then able to see God and his works, and to approach God, from a standpoint that is quite out of the ordinary. To say it in a more personalist fashion: from the human and faith experiences of the (im)migrant child, we can learn about God. (Im)migrant children and young people in our schools have their own stories to tell, and they can provide a particular vision of God and of human life. Young migrants may more easily identify with the concept of God as migrant and as pilgrim, than a Maltese child or youth who has not travelled. Such children are a *locus theologicus* both as children and as migrants.<sup>51</sup> The struggles involved in attempting to settle down, however temporarily, in a foreign country (in our case, the Maltese islands), are also material for theological reflection. On the other hand, a spirituality of neighbour and hospitality that is well lived will, in itself, be a *locus theologicus*, ie., “a privileged *locus* where God reveals Godself.”<sup>52</sup> Mercy requires charitable works, but it also requires a space for the survivor to speak, and listening ears on the part of the audience, who will in turn acknowledge the suffering of others and, possibly, act to alleviate some of it.

In my view, one theologian who could shed light on migration as a *locus theologicus* is the German Reformed theologian Jürgen Moltmann. In comparison with Metz, Moltmann claims that there would be no “theology *after* Auschwitz” had there not been a “theology *in* Auschwitz.” Moltmann is not just referring to the *Shema* of Israel and the Lord’s Prayer which were prayed in Auschwitz, but to the elements of faith, hope and charity which were present even within this place of terror.<sup>53</sup> While the experience of Auschwitz and the experience

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<sup>50</sup> Jacqueline Hagan, *Migration Miracle: Faith, Hope and Meaning on the Undocumented Journey* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

<sup>51</sup> Bert Roebben has written about “raising children as *locus theologicus*,” and about children’s theology, in *Seeking Sense in the City: European Perspectives on Religious Education* (Münster: Lit, 2009).

<sup>52</sup> Campese, “The Irruption of Migrants,” 29.

<sup>53</sup> Jürgen Moltmann maintains that God was in Auschwitz and Auschwitz was in God. “The suffering of those in Auschwitz was taken up in the grief of the Father, the surrender of the Son



of migration are not identical, there are some situations when the conditions are similar. Many (im)migrants narrate stories of terror, despair and betrayal, either experienced before the journey, during the journey, or upon arrival in their new homeland. What is significant is that these stories often reveal a faith vision, a faith experience, a theological reflection that is lived out within that same experience. In such calamitous situations, the idea is not to justify the suffering, but to acknowledge that there is also a deep level where the individual, or even the people, are conversing with God. (Im)migrants are characterized by a continuous attempt to make sense of their experience, and it could be a great initiative if we were to seek to discover how migrants have been using religious resources - as a form of cultural capital - during the entirety of the migration process, from decision making, through the journey, to the arrival.

There are three implications that emerge from this reality of migration as a *locus theologicus*. First, we ought to make better use of the experience of children, of young people, and of their parents within the educational context. It is discouraging to have aggressive parents who make unreasonable demands on our system, but it is also unfortunate to have parents who never react to the school's policies or practices.<sup>54</sup> Secondly, it may be an expression of mercy to provide (im)migrants with an education *for* migration, that is, one which prepares them not just for multiplicity, but also for territorial movement, human mobility, and relocation, as well as one which provides them with an education for stability, consistency and tradition.<sup>55</sup> Migration is itself a spiritual experience. Forced relocation should certainly not be accepted uncritically. However, the state should facilitate the relocation of individual im(migrants), whenever requests are reasonable. Thirdly, such an education should be extended to Maltese children and young people as well, since all our students will be relating closely to im(migrants), and many of them will be on the move at some point or other in their lives (whether for study, for work, or for love!). It is not just im(migrants) who need this education *for* migration. This shift should be reflected in the content and method of our education, as well as in our theology. Mercy requires it.

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and the power of the Spirit." See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. R.A. Wilson and John Bowden (London: SCM, 1989), 278.

<sup>54</sup> Zammit, "Consultative Assessment," 26.

<sup>55</sup> Dauvergne argues that immigration is no longer about "settlement" or "society." She emphasizes the "shift away from permanence as a core immigration value." Dauvergne, *The New Politics of Immigration*, 124.

## Conclusion

This article has tried to address three points: first, the ethical and cultural values, and the anthropological vision, which impact on education; secondly, the theological religious and spiritual values which ought to inform our decisions and our policies, including the concept of mercy which Pope Francis strongly invokes; and thirdly, the view that immigration and the (im)migrant, including the (im)migrant child and young person, are a *locus theologicus*, a source of reflection on God and his mercy, or a demand made upon others for mercy. Research is required on various aspects related to this subject matter. For instance, we know very little about the role which the theological, religious and spiritual values of (im)migrants play throughout the migration process, as well as about the role which these values play in the creation of policies and practices vis-à-vis (im)migrants. In this article, I have tried to offer mercy as a hermeneutic for interpreting some of the most fundamental dimensions of the education of (im)migrants, as well as a different vantage point for making educational choices in their regard. I am certain that there is a lot that still needs to be said, but hope that this article will have at least initiated the conversation.

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