Catholic schooling in Chile

The need for rebuilding spiritual capital within the rules of the market culture

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Introduction

It is difficult to make a fair reading of education in Chile without pointing to what the Catholic Church has meant institutionally and symbolically in its history. Formal schooling in Chile bears the profound mark of the Catholic Church's participation as a provider of education. Even though the Chilean society is experiencing an accelerated process of secularization,¹ the Church's weight cannot be overlooked by anyone. The Catholic school is an institution with a long history since before Chile was established in an independent Republic in 1810. It lives within a tension, on the one hand benefitting from the rules of the market and the favourable treatment by the Chilean state, and on the other hand, compromising its mission because of playing precisely with rules of the market culture.

The work of Gerald Grace is fundamental for approaching that tension because he has critically observed how Catholic schools deal with two impactful processes. One of these processes is secularization. The other process is the hegemony of capitalism and its logic in the realm of education.

In this chapter, I aim to offer a view on the current state of Catholic education at the school level in Chile using Grace's key concept of spiritual capital and the market. With those concepts, I plan to show the present and envision the future of Catholic schools in Chile.²

Spiritual capital and its values

Grace uses the concept of spiritual capital, meaning the 'resources of faith and values derived from a commitment to a religious tradition' (Grace, 2002, p. 236), in very secularized contexts. I propose here that he understands that we live, in his own UK, elsewhere in the West, and in countries like Chile, in a secular age (Taylor, 2009). In a secular age, we have experienced the process of secularization as a cultural phenomenon in which we do not live in a transcendental frame, but within an immanent frame. For an organization like the Catholic school, and for the actors involved in that organization, to start living within an immanent frame

has affected and continues to affect how it understands itself. That is why the notion of spiritual capital, which I consider to be Grace's most significant contribution to the field, turns out to be of relevance within the context of secularization. As Grace claims:

...the spiritual capital of the Catholic schooling system in England (and by implication elsewhere) is what has provided the dynamic drive to its mission in the past and helped it to preserve, in the main, its mission integrity in the challenges of the present. The renewal of its spiritual capital thus becomes the crucial question for the continuance of its distinctive mission in the future.

(Grace, 2016, p. 35)

Spiritual capital at the level of the leaders, the schools, and the system provides both a lifeguard and a lighthouse for a Catholic education that navigates in a secular ocean. Grace is conscious that "the crucial question for the future is: are the reserves of spiritual capital in the Catholic school system being renewed or is the system in contemporary conditions living on a declining asset?" (Grace, 2016, p. 43) Catholic schools are good for societies' pluralism and diversity. If they want to continue or to recover their relevance, they have to assume the new immanent frame, commit to their mission and do whatever they can to increase their spiritual capital.

Educational markets in capitalist societies

In capitalistic societies, for Catholic schools to succeed at the same time as staying faithful to their mission, it is not easy. To run a school with Catholic values and principles in a capitalistic society means to live in the tension between being faithful to the Gospel's principle of the option for the poor and surviving in a market of different educational values where the option of shutting down the school is around the corner. How does one understand Catholic education in this context? How does one keep a school Catholic in this tension? This question requires a reflection at the level of the Church hierarchy. In this respect, Grace poses the question about why the post-Vatican Council II Church calls Catholics to *embrace* almost unreflectively *Humane Vitae*, but only to *consider* the document, *The Catholic School* (1977), which includes norms and inspirations for creating a more just society. Such a question reveals that Grace's concern for the future of Catholic education relies not only on the practice of millions of Catholic teachers and leaders around the world but also on the leadership at the highest level in the Church.

Grace knows that capitalism and the forces of the market impose pressure over the school system in general, and over the Catholic school in particular. That is why his reflection upon the market has been so present in his research work. Just considering his 20 most referenced articles on Google Scholar, it is

seen how prevalent the topic of the market is. Using the Q.D.A. software Nvivo, I studied the frequency and the context where the concept of the market is used in the 20 articles. As Table 12.1 shows, the use of the concept is used in connection to several topics ranging from teachers' marketplace to culture, passing through curriculum and values.

In what follows, I present the Chilean education and the types of Catholic schools within that system, using the concepts of spiritual capital and market provided by Grace in his writings between 1985 and 2013.

The Chilean educational subsystem

Before the institutional frameworks that would lead to talk of an educational system in Chile, Catholic missionaries carried out formal education in the colonial period—c. 16th to 18th centuries—creating schools. Schools proved to be successful institutions for the transmission of the faith. Behind that function, there was, and there remains an undoubtedly evangelizing impetus. The Catholic school is proposed as an institution for the service of letters, but also

Table 12.1 Presence of the concept of market and related themes in 20 most-cited articles

<i>Article</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Themes</i>
(Grace, 1985)	4	Teacher labour market
(Grace, 1989)	12	Market place-system
(Grace, 1991b)	1	Teacher labour market
(Grace, 1991a)	18	Education as a commodity, market culture
(Grace, 1991c)	9	Education as a commodity, market culture
(Grace, 1993)	17	Education as a commodity, market relations of schooling
(Grace, 1998)	39	School choice, market culture, Free market provision of education
(Grace, 2000)	22	Marketing, managerialism
(Grace, 2001)	25	New right market doctrines, market relations of schooling
(Grace, 2003a)	9	Market values, market practices
(Grace, 2003b)	13	Market values, market materialistic culture
(Grace, 2004)	4	Market and secular curriculum
(Grace, 2006)	5	Market forces
(Grace, 2008)	26	The market-driven education system, market values
(Grace, 2009c)	6	Market values
(Grace, 2009b)	2	Market values
(Grace, 2009a)	1	Market values
(Grace, 2010)	6	Secular market, marketing
(Grace, 2012)	3	Market-dominated consumer culture
(Grace, 2013)	8	Market idolatry, market competition

of piety. In more up-to-date language, Catholic schools were a fundamental piece of the Chilean education system, and at the same time, one of the few formal spaces where the teaching and transmission of faith and values can remain possible.

It has been studied how Catholic schools have an institutional relationship more or less coupled with the Catholic Church in their contribution in forming the religious consciousness of their students and, in that sense, contribute to social pluralism as a democratic value (Smith, Longest, Hill, & Christoffersen, 2014). Catholic schools are also relevant in being more effective in standardized test results, graduation rates, and promotion to tertiary education than non-denominational public schools with equal resources (Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982; Neal, 1995; Ravitch, 2013). Catholic schools can also create community environments that would promote learning (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993), citizen security, and even social cohesion (Brinig & Garnett, 2014).

In Chile, the tendency has been to understand Catholic schools as depending on the Catholic Church in terms of their property, operation, and funding. Male and female Religious Congregations as school owners have been understood in the history of Chile as the image of what the Catholic school consists of (CIDE, 1971).³ This image mutates from the reforms of the 1980s. At the beginning of that decade, a comprehensive reform took place. With the coup d'état of 1973, a process of making education less segregated by implementing the *Escuela Nacional Única* (E.N.U) was interrupted. The socialist ideology underneath that project was replaced with one of the most radical neoliberal reforms in education in the world. Inspired by a group of students who had studied in the School of Economics at the University of Chicago, the military government implemented several neoliberal policies. In particular, decentralization policies took away power from the central government, privatization policies empowered private citizens and intermediate groups (like the Catholic Church) to erect schools, and a financing system was created in the service of financing the demand on the side of families via school vouchers.

New actors entered the system to carry out Catholic educational projects. Until that time, the schools in Chile consisted of two types of dependency: (a) municipal, where 100% of the funding is public, or (b) private schools paid by individuals with no public funding. Since 1980, subsidized private schools have joined the two other types of schools. In these schools, the funding was mixed, i.e., public and private, but 100% public funding predominated. This new type of school gave rise to the creation of Catholic schools, explosively, not only for an elite but for all kinds of families.

This trend starting in the 1980s and that stopped, in terms of the number of elite schools, came as a result of the two ideas that concerned Grace's work. One is that market rules, market values, and marketing make it possible for Catholic schools to offer Catholic education in more places, to more students. On the other side, without spiritual capital deposited in the laity, it would have been impossible to make it grow in the way as it did.

Types of Catholic schools in Chile⁴

Currently, the Chilean education system is composed of three types of schools: municipal, private subsidized, and private. At the same time, when thinking about their relationship to the Catholic Church, three types of Catholic schools emerge: oriented, recognized, and sponsored by the Catholic Church. These three types of Catholic schools intercept with the three types of dependency in Chile, creating an educational subsystem with varying degrees of institutional coupling (Weick, 1976) to the Catholic Church (see Figure 12.1).

Under the prism of religious orientation (oriented schools), in Chile, schools of all dependencies can declare to have a religious orientation, including a Catholic orientation. Therefore, for the state, schools that receive full funding, and are owned and operated by municipalities, can be considered Catholicly oriented, just as those that receive funding are owned and are privately operated, as is the case of the private subsidized and private (Celis & Zárate, 2015). Halfway between these two realities are schools that receive full or partial state funding, and those that are privately owned and operated.

From the perspective of the direct or indirect responsibility of the Catholic Church over schools, the above situation changes in two ways. On the one hand, there will be schools that are recognized by the Church (recognized schools), thus receiving a seal of catholicity on the part of the ecclesiastical authority. This process is carried out in each diocese of the country and represents both for the Catholic Church and for schools, a light coupling (Weick, 1976). However, it is not as light as in the case of oriented schools. The Church is not related either financially, or legally to the schools she recognizes (Secretary Status Rationarium Generale Ecclesiae, 1970). On the other hand, some schools are sponsored by the Catholic Church directly through dioceses or Religious Congregations and foundations (sponsored schools).

According to the Ministry of Education’s directory of educational schools, considering religious orientation, in Chile, one in four educational schools defines itself as Catholic (27.2%). In the case of schools operating under a

Figure 12.1 Catholic schools subsystem. Types of schools depending on their relationship to the Catholic Church

private subsidized dependence, this proportion increases slightly (28.5%). The proportion decreases slightly for municipal schools (25.1%). Considering enrollment, one in six students in Chile attend a Catholic school (16.6%), one in four in private subsidized (26.3%), and one in three in private (39.4%) (Passalacqua, 2006).

Benefitting from the rules of the market

Given the picture described above, it can be seen that the school education provided by the Catholic Church in Chile enjoys the sympathy of the state. The Church receives essential degrees of freedom and autonomy in the educational system, which operates as a market. In specific terms, Catholic schools, in all of the three types identified here (oriented, recognized, or sponsored), receive a subsidy from the state. In most cases, this is 100%. In return, the state exercises control over the school, but not because the school is Catholic, but because it is a school receiving a state grant.

The accountability mechanisms that exist in Chile are robust and put pressure on the school (Falabella, 2016). They are mechanisms installed since the neoliberal reform of 1980 in the middle of the military dictatorship. Neither at that time nor today has there been in Chile a movement against the Catholic schooling mission. If a school is categorized as insufficient for four years in a row by the Education Quality Agency,⁵ that school will be closed, just like any school, confessional or not. If a school performs poorly in national standardized tests, or if it is denounced for anti-inclusion practices, or for altering student attendance against which the voucher is paid, it will be punished by the Ministry of Education. It is unthinkable to believe that the Catholic character of the school would cause this.

Given the equal treatment in the market, Catholic schools, and for this purpose, all the confessional schools, enjoy a benefit that can be perceived as an additional grant. Every school in Chile, confessional or not, has to provide Religious Education. Students can exempt themselves from enrolling in religion classes. Their parents just have to express that desire. However, the school is obliged to offer the religion class. For a public school, oriented or not by the Catholic Church, this is an obligation: it is the law. In the case of schools oriented, recognized, or sponsored by the Catholic Church, offering religion classes is a duty and, therefore, the state matches its responsibility with the mission of the Church. It is the state that pays for such religious formation. Despite this being the case today, such religious formation is called into question by many sectors in Chile that propose alternatives to the subject (Montecinos, Moya, Vargas, Berkowitz, & Cáceres, 2017).

In the case of the Catholic Church, it is the ecclesiastical authority that declares the suitability of a teacher to teach religion in a Catholic school. For many years (only since 2019 has this finished being the case), it was the ecclesiastical authority that could give the authorization of a religious teacher to teach in a public school not oriented by the Church. This attribution is a further example of what I stated

at the beginning of this chapter that the symbolic and institutional footprint of the Church is deeply imbued in the Chilean education system.

The future of Catholic schools in Chile

The Catholic Church in Chile is going through what is probably the greatest crisis in its history. The institutional decline is added to the crisis caused by abuse, especially sexual, conscience, and power abuse perpetrated by representatives of the Catholic Church. In concrete terms, in the last 15 years in Chile, 80 clerics have been accused, of whom 34 had minors as victims. A total of more than 100 people have been affected. One in four accused and convicted sex abusers served as teachers or chaplains in Catholic schools, mostly diocesan, but also in Religious Congregations such as the Marists, Salesians, Jesuits, Legionaries of Christ and others (Labrín & Sallaberry, 2018).

Although a majority of cases correspond to events that occurred 20, 30, and up to 40 years ago, that the proportion of abusers does not reach 3% of the total number of religious, and that the massive majority of school personnel are lay-people, the magnitude of the abusive acts themselves at the school level raises the relevant question about the effect that these facts have on the Catholic school. In the words of Grace, how much spiritual capital do the Catholic schools in Chile need to achieve so they can continue navigating as schools with a definite mission, in a turbulent market with some doubts about student care?

In this sense, the Catholic school faces in Chile a crisis caused by its leaders. The schools lost freedom and autonomy not by an oppressive or anti-clerical state, but because of the lack of accountability within the Church itself. The Catholic school in Chile today is looked upon with suspicion by the institution that has oriented, recognized, and sponsored it. It is the hope of educators and formators in school, for the sake of a quality education focused on the values of the Gospel whose message is more necessary than ever before, that the Catholic Church is up to the tremendous challenge that the school takes in times of convulsion.

Grace is a reminder that to be meaningful and helpful, Catholic schools in today's society need to have types of ministers, teachers, and leaders who conceive of the school and its role not only as a creator of social, economic, or cultural capital but also as a mentor of spiritual capital. It needs people who do not avoid living in the tension of the secular and capitalistic, but who learn how to live fruitfully in such tension. Gerald Grace invites the world of Catholic education to consider, again, the heart of teaching and leading in a Catholic school today, i.e. that they should 'render to God as well as to Caesar'.

Notes

- 1 Between 1998 and 2018, the proportion of Catholics in Chile decreased from 73% to 55%, and those who say they have no religious denomination grew from 7% to 24% in the same period, and to 36% in those under the age of 35 (CEP, 2018). The same

- study indicates that in 1998, 91% of the population believed in God, and that in 2018 86% of the population did. Thus, over the course of 20 years there was a 5% decrease in belief in God, and a 18% adscription to the Catholic Church institution.
- 2 Catholic school means here the different institutions that group from the preschool or pre-primary level (4–5 years of age) to the last level of secondary education (17–18 years of age).
 - 3 Being a holder refers in Chile to those who own the school, and therefore enjoys its legal representation.
 - 4 Parts of this section are also present in Madero, C. (2020). Libertad, autonomía, y accountability en la escuela Católica en Chile, in *Contemporary Issues Facing Catholic Schools* [Special Issue], *Educatio Catholica* VI (1), pp. 155–161.
 - 5 The Education Quality Agency, established in 2011, has the mission to hold schools accountable, so the education system can achieve educational quality.

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