Professor Gerald Grace and the concept of 'spiritual capital'

Reflections on its value and suggestions for its future development

John Lydon

Introduction

In so far as Religious Orders were responsible for promoting education for all from the 18th century to Vatican II, teaching was synonymous with professed members of Religious Orders dedicated to teaching the poor after the pattern of Christ (Wilson, 1883, p. 34), who demonstrated 'ardour and fervent dedication' (Congregation for Catholic Education (CCE), 1997, par. 15). *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* refers specifically to four Religious Orders as setting the standard for the Church's mission, particularly to the marginalised.¹ Rather than 'hoarding the precious treasure as though obsessed with the past',² Gerald Grace (2002), developing from the sociological constructs of Pierre Bourdieu, speaks of the significance of the spiritual and cultural capital of Religious Orders in providing a significant dynamic in the development of Catholic education.

The nature and definition of spiritual capital

In *The Forms of Capital* (1997), Bourdieu begins by arguing for an inclusive rather a reductionist view of 'capital', defining the concept as a reality broader than a reserve of wealth in the form of money or property owned by a person or business and human resources of economic value. He suggests that capital presents itself in three further fundamental guises beyond the narrow confines of accumulated pecuniary assets available for use in the production of further monetary assets to embrace social, cultural and religious capital. Bourdieu defines social capital as made up of social obligations ('connections') which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital, thus reflecting a fundamental Bourdieusian belief in an interdependent relationship between the three forms of capital: economic, social and cultural. He also, in 1991, developed a fourth form of capital, i.e. 'religious capital', against which Grace developed spiritual capital.³

In the context of Grace's use of Bourdieu, the concept of cultural capital is more germane. Bourdieu argues that cultural capital exists in three forms:⁴

- Embodied state – in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body
- Objectified state – in the form of cultural goods
- Institutionalised state – in the form, for example, of educational qualifications.

Bourdieu claims that he developed the notion of cultural capital to explain the unequal academic achievement of students from different social classes rather than uphold the traditional view that academic achievement was simply the consequence of innate ability or aptitude. In a tangential attempt to explain why some schools appear to have maintained a distinctive Catholic ethos it would, presumably, be possible to include mission statements and written accounts of distinctive charisms of, for example, Religious Orders, in the 'objective state' category in so far as they constitute an articulation of the lived reality (an 'embodiment' of) of such charisms. With regard to the institutionalised state, the schools which have emerged as a result of the long-lasting dispositions of members of Religious Orders could be regarded as having accrued cultural capital in this context, representing the expression of the distinctive charism or ethos by a living institution or community.

Of the three forms of cultural capital, the 'embodied state' resonates most distinctively with Grace's use of Bourdieu who, in articulating the concept of cultural capital, refers to the renunciation and sacrifice that may be involved in acquiring it. He recognises that embodied cultural capital is, to an extent, conditioned by a person's social background. He also recognises, however, that such capital can be acquired by access to education and that such acquisition will be critically dependent on the extent to which an individual can gain access to education. Bourdieu suggests that a family 'endowed with strong cultural capital' is a necessary 'precondition for the fast accumulation of cultural capital', thereby highlighting the importance of the family in promoting the acquisition of cultural capital (1997, pp, 48–50). Bourdieu also articulates the link between strong cultural capital and the building up of economic capital.

Tom Inglis (1998), in his book on the rise and fall of the Catholic Church in the Republic of Ireland, applies Bourdieusian principles to the way in which religious capital was built up by Catholics in order to guarantee access to other forms of capital. Developing Bourdieu's fundamental principle regarding the interdependence of the different forms of capital, Inglis demonstrates that the most successful people, socially and politically, in the Ireland of the 19th and the 20th century up to the 1960s, ensured that they embodied the Church's teaching and traditional rituals, recognising that such an embodiment was important in being socially accepted and gaining respect.

Like Inglis, Grace builds on Bourdieu's concept of cultural and religious capital in his adoption of the term 'spiritual capital'. Having interviewed sixty Catholic headteachers in three different cities in the United Kingdom, in the final chapter of his book Grace provides the first formal definition of spiritual

capital: 'Spiritual capital is defined here as resources of faith and values derived from commitment to a religious tradition' (2002, p. 236).

Grace is, in effect, expressing a certain embodied quality which he had encountered when interviewing his sample of headteachers, a quality which becomes a 'source of empowerment because it provides a transcendent impulse which can guide judgement and action in the mundane world' (2002, p. 236). He maintains this spiritual capital is derived from the prior formation experienced by those headteachers in their secondary schools and teacher training colleges, with a particularly powerful influence arising from the various Religious Orders present in these institutions. His assertion that the building up of such capital has a positive effect on the maintenance of Catholic distinctiveness in schools is analogous to Inglis' assertion regarding the positive effect of religious capital on the maintenance of distinctive Catholic communities in Ireland in the period under review. Linking with Grace's *resources of faith* idea, Michael O'Sullivan (2012) includes Religious Congregations in his list of 'resources of faith' alongside the Bible, Church traditions, the resources of theology and spirituality, Christian scholars, practitioners, practices, publications, martyrs, missionaries and international networks of Christian faith-based organisations. O'Sullivan's definition of spiritual capital as 'a society's capacity for authentic social change' links spiritual and religious capital, reflecting Inglis' description of the Ireland of the 19th and 20th centuries referenced previously (1998, p. 45).

The embodiment of spiritual capital

While Grace recognises that the building up of spiritual capital will, in the first place, involve a knowledge of the deposit of, in this case, the Catholic faith, the crucial nature of such capital resides in the ability of school leaders to embody such capital. He refers to this specifically in his enriched definition of spiritual capital (Grace, 2010, p. 120) encompassing personal witness to faith in practice, action and relationships. In other words, the extent to which spiritual capital constitutes a source for empowerment will be in proportion to the extent to which headteachers embody such a resource by demonstrating a personal faith commitment together with an ability to make that which is spiritual and transcendent a living reality in dealing the mission of everyday life in schools. In the context of Grace's work in general, the efficacy of such capital will be tested most rigorously by the extent to which schools are able to maintain a distinctively Catholic culture in the face of the relentless challenges posed by the pervading culture of consumerism, which Grace highlights as a potentially corrupting influence (see Grace, 2002, pp. 180–204). In 2010, Grace published an article giving a more detailed analysis of spiritual capital, and his position can be summed in these terms:

- resources of faith and values derived from a vocational commitment to a religious tradition (in this case the Catholic tradition);
- a source of vocational empowerment because it provides a transcendent awareness that can guide judgement and action in the mundane world so that those whose own formation has involved the acquisition of spiritual capital do not act in education simply as professionals but as professionals and witnesses;
- a form of spirituality in which the whole of human life is viewed in terms of a conscious relationship with God, in Jesus Christ and the saints, through the indwelling of the Spirit;
- a form of spirituality which has been the animating, inspirational and dynamic spirit which has empowered the mission of Catholic education internationally largely (although not exclusively) through the work of Religious Congregations with missions in education in the past;
- a form of spirituality now in urgent need of renewal in the contemporary world of Catholic education faced with growing secularisation, ideologies of secularism, global marketisation and materialism and the decline of Religious Congregations in the field of education;
- a form of spirituality which needs to be reconstituted in lay school leaders and teachers by formation programmes which help them to be Catholic witnesses for Christ and not simply professional deliverers of knowledge and skills as required by the secular state and the secular market.

Grace's emphasis on empowerment reflects definitions of spiritual capital in other contexts which resonate with concepts explored in this chapter. For example, D'Souza suggests that spiritual capital means 'power, influence and disposition [habitus] created by a person's or an organisation's spiritual belief' (2012, p. 160) while Baker (2012, p. 7) speaks of the transformative influence of spiritual capital. In reviewing and contrasting research in Catholic education in the pre- and post-Vatican II periods, Grace articulates findings which point to the extent to which a distinctive Catholic ethos has had a positive influence on behaviour and academic outcomes. He does not, however, explore in any depth specific characteristics in respect of individual leaders in relation to the resources of faith that contribute to such an ethos or culture, the latter being Grace's preferred term. It could also be argued that Grace focuses on the influence of headteachers as opposed to leadership teams or core groups of committed teachers. He does, in fact, recognise this in asserting that 'the resources of spiritual capital in Catholic schooling extend well beyond the that possessed by individual headteachers' (2002, p. 38). He goes on to suggest that senior leaders can be, in some schools, embodiments of spiritual capital (Grace, 2008).

Links with Aquinas, Groome and Flynn: *Habitus*, depth structures and culture

Notwithstanding these limitations, the concept of spiritual capital as articulated by Grace is regarded by James Arthur as 'a major insight or thesis in the

context of maintaining the mission and integrity of Catholic schooling' (2002, p. 1). In attempting to draw out what is constituted by the concept of 'spiritual capital' in relation to the individual headteacher, Grace draws on Bourdieu's (1990) use of the term *habitus* by which he means a lasting, general and adaptable way of thinking and acting in conformity to a systematic worldview. In defining *habitus* as deep-structured cultural dispositions within a community or institution, Grace's use of the term disposition resonates not only with Bourdieu's ideas but also with Aquinas' concept of habitus or disposition as an abiding characteristic in relation to the individual person.

The theme that *habitus* is a perennial as opposed to a transitional reality constitutes a seamless connection between the work of Bourdieu and Grace on the one hand and Aquinas on the other. Grace's use of the term 'deep-structured' further resonates with Groome's concept of the depth structures of Catholicism. Groome (1998) argues that the most effective schools have a characteristic set of ideals, most notably that they value people, they are optimistic about people and society, they promote community and relationships, they help to develop spirituality, they emphasise issues of justice and peace, they respect diversity, and they teach critical thinking. For Groome, these values arise out of the *depth structures* or *core-convictions* of Christianity and they are embedded deeply in the ethos and style (what can be called the total culture) of the school.

The connection between Grace/Bourdieu's use of the term *habitus* and that of Aquinas is encapsulated by Groome when he suggests that the characteristics of the depth structures of Catholicism 'often exist beneath Catholic Christianity's institutional expression or accidental features. *Much as the deep structures of people's characters shape who they are*, so the depth structures of Catholicism combine as its distinctiveness, albeit with varied expressions' (1998, p. 56; emphasis added).

The concept of *habitus* is linked intimately with that of school culture since the latter derives from the collective contributions of members of a particular school community. Cook (2003) makes the claim that when religious communities staffed Catholic schools, socialisation of teachers occurred naturally as the religious communities went about their work. He then goes on to emphasise the significance of communities of religious in designing and building Catholic culture in the Catholic schools of the USA.

While a full discussion around the nature of culture is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is interesting to note that the following definitions of culture, on the one hand, and Catholic culture on the other are linked in that both emphasise the importance of 'embodiment'. One definition of culture is 'the system of values, symbols and shared meanings of a group including the *embodiment* of these values, symbols and meanings' (Sergiovanni and Corbally, 1994, p. viii; emphasis added), echoing Groome's description of 'depth structures'. Alternatively, Flynn's (1993, p. 39) definition of Catholic school culture reflects the first definition, replacing the word 'embodiment' with a more specific reference to the activity of the members of the school community and its formative influence:

The culture of a Catholic school expresses the core beliefs, values, traditions, symbols and patterns of behaviour which provide meaning to the school community and which help to shape the lives of students, teachers and parents. In short it is the way we do things round here.

(Flynn, 1993, p. 39)

Spiritual capital and vocation

Grace argues cogently that spiritual capital is derived from the past school leaders and teachers who have been immersed in the *habitus* of the depth structures of the Catholic school system, particularly that found within schools sponsored by Religious Orders. Such spiritual capital has, according to Grace, benefitted the Catholic educational mission internationally, particularly in the context of Catholic school leadership. He then goes on to suggest that the leadership modelled by members of Religious Orders has led to the promotion of a sense of vocation among Catholic school teachers and leaders and, as a result of programmes of formation, led to the realisation that the mission of a teacher constitutes being both a 'professional and a witness' (Grace, 2002, p. 134). The sense in which having a vocation and being a professional are, in essence, simply aspects of the pathway of discipleship seems to be encapsulated in the two references to the word 'vocation' found in Vatican II's Declaration on Christian Education:

Beautiful indeed and of great importance is the vocation of all those who aid parents in fulfilling their duties and who, as representatives of the human community, undertake the task of education in schools. This vocation demands special qualities of mind and heart, very careful preparation, and continuing readiness to renew and to adapt.

(*Gravissimum Educationis*, 1965, par. 5)

The notion of witness reflects the sacramental perspective, that all ministry should be modelled on that of Christ, in the context of discipleship and the call to all the baptised to share in His divine life. While the sacramental perspective in general is rooted in the Incarnation and expresses the belief that God is encountered in the world through the mediated presence of Christ and the Church, more specifically in the context of Catholic education this perspective focuses on the person of the teacher who, in essence, models his or her ministry on that of Christ. Both Cook and Grace recognise that the intensive formation programmes of Religious Orders ensured that teachers were immersed in the culture of their particular Congregation and, while there were distinctive characteristics within such cultures, the notion of modelling or emulation constituted a consistent paradigm.

Spiritual capital: Going beyond Gerald Grace

Scholarship around the concept of spiritual capital has been referred to in this chapter. This section of the chapter will focus on recent articles published in *International Studies in Catholic Education*. In an article entitled 'Religious and 'Spiritual' Capitals: The Experience of the Celebration of Mass in the English Catholic Secondary School' Casson argues that the celebration of Mass in school may function as a means of maintaining the memory of the Catholic faith tradition. Casson refers to Grace twelve times in the article, acknowledging the cogency of his enriched definition of spiritual capital and noting his assertion that 'in twenty-first century England, the transmission of the Catholic faith through family and parish is considerably weakened, and in many cases not there at all' (Grace, 2002, p. 237). Casson examines the experience of Eucharistic liturgy in three Catholic secondary schools through the lens of religious and spiritual capital. She found that all of the students in the schools participated in the celebration of the Eucharist and regarded it as being for all members of the school. The view that the Eucharist contributed significantly to the building of community within the schools was expressed frequently by both students and staff involved in the study:

A view expressed frequently by all participants was that the celebration of Mass within school engendered a 'sense of community' within the Catholic school. A 'sense of community' is a key factor in the development of social capital. The findings discussed here suggest that the community was focused solely on the Catholic school, rather than the traditional trinity of school, parish and family. Nevertheless this 'sense of community' enabled these Catholic secondary schools to maintain a Catholic ethos within the school; it enabled Catholic liturgies to take place and gave students space and time to encounter Catholicism.

(Casson, 2013, pp. 211–212)

It could be argued that Casson is responding to one of the criticisms of Grace's work expressed earlier by citing the celebration of Mass as a specific characteristic of a *resource of faith*. She concludes by suggesting that celebrations of the ritual of Mass are still occurring in Catholic secondary schools and could be viewed as a source of spiritual capital for many students. The Catholic school does appear to generate spiritual capital, giving young people a resource of Catholic beliefs, Catholic values and attitudes that they can use and develop in their future lives (Casson, 2013). The centrality of the celebration of the Eucharist in generating spiritual capital permeates Casson's article but much more research will need to establish if this is the case for all Catholic schools.

In 'Renewing Spiritual Capital: The National Retreat for Catholic Headteachers and the National School of Formation: The Impact on Catholic Headteachers in the UK', Raymond Friel (2018) explores the concept of

'spiritual capital' among the headteachers and to evaluate the impact of two major new initiatives in England and Wales: the National Retreat for Catholic Headteachers and the National School of Formation. He cites Grace twenty-three times, arguably the most cogent being his connecting the work of Grace and Richardson:

The need was for more spiritual resources to support Catholic headteachers in the ministry of leadership, to help them grow in holiness. Richardson (2014) in his research into the theological dispositions of Catholic headteachers concluded that their dominant disposition was 'relational', very much in line with Grace's (2010) expanded definition of spiritual capital. They have a relationship with God and other people. One of the main traits associated with this disposition was 'less concern with being faithful to a set of beliefs and more concern with living faithfully in the light of the teaching of Jesus Christ under the guidance of the Church'.

(Richardson, 2014, p. 69)

In focusing on the impact of the National School for Formation (NSF) on nurturing spiritual capital among headteachers, Friel refers to what he sees as a pedagogy in the CCE's 1988 document *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith*, which he suggests focuses on the relational aspects of spiritual development as opposed to the doctrinal. Such points of reference included, classically, upbringing, which has been a feature of the Church's education mission since the time of St Thomas Aquinas⁵ and featured prominently in Grace's 2002 study. Friel goes on to describe a small-scale research study (built around a questionnaire to twenty headteachers, effectively mirroring Grace's methodology in 2002). Friel's analysis of his results indicates that the respondents tended to emphasise the positive impact of local and global Catholic social action as resources for faith development as opposed to the Church's teaching on education or doctrinal issues. One headteacher respondent explained that the goal of Catholic education is to produce good Christians who go on to make the world more peaceful. This chimes well with the seminal aim of the Salesian educational system, which permeates the primary and secondary Salesian sources, with Bosco's axiom honest citizens and good Christians.⁶ Marketisation and the hegemony of performativity feature among the challenges expressed by headteachers in Friel's research and have featured prominently in Grace's writings since his decision to devote his life to researching Catholic education principles.

I would add two further observations, first in relation to the 'anchor' of this emphasis on the relational, without which a degree of subjectivity could emerge in relation to the axiomatic characteristics of a Catholic spirituality for headteachers. It could be argued that being 'anchored' in a particular tradition has served the Church's education mission well since the emergence of mass state-funded education in the modern period, reflected strongly in Grace's scholarship on spiritual capital. Second, a greater emphasis on the way in which

headteachers might model this relational spirituality for the benefit of their school communities would be illuminative, reflecting the point made above, regarding the realising in practice of a spiritual and transcendent reality. This could relate, for example, to appointments to key positions within the school and the extent to which performance management is engaged through a Catholic lens.⁷

Spiritual capital: Contemporary challenges

Part of Grace's 2002 analysis was to draw attention to the significant decline in members of Religious Congregations and Orders working in Catholic schools, and to dwell on possible implications for spiritual capital. However, two decades on, the issue has shifted to the decline in the numbers of baptised Catholics attending Catholic schools. Some, such as Arthur (2013), question whether or not there is still a critical mass of English Catholic parents, teachers and pupils associated with Catholic schooling who are able and willing to sustain and ensure the Church's unique teaching on the educational purpose of presenting a Catholic worldview to children. The last part of this chapter will focus on Catholic teachers and the extent to which spiritual capital is being accrued among a critical mass in order to sustain the Catholic Church's distinctive educational vision.

Defining a *critical mass* presents the first challenge. The *Catholic Education Service* (CES) insists that, in primary and secondary schools, the headteacher, deputy heads and the head (co-ordinator) of religious education 'are to be filled by baptised and practising Catholics' (McMahon, 2009, p. 1). This must constitute a minimum and one would presume that the School Chaplain would also be included in this category. The CES, in its latest published census (2019, p. 5), reports that overall 49% of teachers in maintained schools in England and Wales are Catholics, constituting 55.5% of primary teachers and 40% of secondary teachers. The statistics do not, however, affirm whether or not these teachers are practising Catholics.⁸

If Grace Davie (1994) is right in suggesting that Europe is marked by a culture of 'believing without belonging', characterised by a profound mismatch between religious values that people profess (believing), and actual churchgoing and religious practice (belonging), it has a challenge for Catholic education. Not least, it could be postulated that the religious lives of a proportion of the overall 49% of Catholic teachers will not be practising Catholics (as defined by Stock, 2012)⁹. While it may be an overstatement to suggest that the majority have moved from an institutionally Catholic identity to a more autonomous search for spirituality, one of the key questions for Catholic school leaders revolves around the promotion and maintenance of spiritual capital as an empowering and motivating reality. In other words, perhaps a critical moment has been reached. The priority now is to move from defining spiritual capital to researching effective means of sustaining it.

Conclusion: Spiritual capital – The primacy of witness

I have argued elsewhere (see Lydon, 2009) that, for schools with Religious Order trusteeships, it is possible to transmit the distinctive charism of the Order to committed lay people, primarily by the modelling of that charism by both religious (when present) and committed lay people. Evidence suggests (Lydon, 2009) that the majority of teachers in networks of schools founded by Religious Congregations are dedicated to maintaining the charism. They can do this in a way which retains a school's Catholic mission, despite being in a culture marked by an ever-increasing emphasis on performativity.

A second strategy could focus on a reservoir of recently retired Catholic headteachers who possess this capital. This could involve the creation of a project, ideally organised by the *Catholic Education Service*, within which such headteachers could have a critical influence on their successors. This might be an effective way of ensuring that future Catholic school leaders are theologically literate. Moreover, this could open a window for the formation of aspiring deputy heads involving recently retired heads.

It is apparent that headteachers place a greater deal of emphasis on the impact of modelling Catholic identity rather than formation programmes for aspiring heads. This point is deeply relevant to spiritual capital and Catholic schools and resonates with this author's previous research (2009) in which headteachers in Salesian schools were convinced that their distinctive ethos would be maintained by living it rather than talking about it. Talk, rather than action, is significant only in a supportive sense, contributing to solidarity around a common witness modelled on the lives of teachers themselves. This resonates with the key themes discussed throughout this chapter: community, embodiment and witness.

Going beyond Grace's emphasis on the role of headteachers in sustaining spiritual capital, I would argue that it will ultimately be maintained through the empowering witness of a core group of committed teachers. In fact, these will not necessarily all be Catholic, who have themselves been empowered to model what Flynn and Mok (2002) describe as the core beliefs, values, traditions, symbols and patterns of behaviour which provide meaning to the school community. Such example, more than words, will ensure that spiritual capital will remain a source of empowerment, helping Catholic school leaders to act as professionals *and* witnesses.

Notes

- 1 *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (1997) refers specifically to four Religious Orders: De La Salle Brothers, Piarists, Salesians and Ursulines
- 2 Quotation of Pope John XXIII in Hebblethwaite P., (1994), *John XXIII*, London: Harper Collins, p. 431.
- 3 Grace makes a strong distinction between Bourdieu's concept of 'religious capital' which equals 'power over' and his concept of 'spiritual capital' which equals 'power

- to animate others in mission. This is a facilitating capital rather than a dominating one. See Grace (2010).
- 4 For further development of the relationship between the three forms of capital see Silva and Edwards, (2005).
 - 5 In this context, it is also worth noting that the CCE's reference to forming young people to be 'agents of change' being part of the NSF pedagogy has, in fact, been the *raison d'être* of teaching Religious Congregations from the outset. This is reflected in the CCE's affirming comments about the impact of religious in schools and its profound regret regarding the diminution of the presence of teaching religious (see CCE, 1982, par. 4 for more details).
 - 6 See Lydon (2009: 168ff) where he discusses the role of parents in Catholic tradition. He makes the point that Aquinas speaks of parental responsibility as a lifelong obligation extending beyond economic support to include all aspects of formation. In this regard, Aquinas appears to use the terms 'nurture', 'upbringing' and education as synonyms, implying that education transcends the boundaries of academic and technical education to encompass formation in virtue, which Aquinas refers to as the formation of the mind and the soul. He concludes by suggesting that, since the raising of children is a challenging process, particularly in regard to moral formation, both parents are required and this is a major reason, or *the* major reason, why marriage should be a permanent union.
 - 7 Whilst teaching on the MA in Catholic School Leadership at St Mary's University, London, I lead discussions on the nature of a Catholic perspective in relation to performance management. In essence, staff should experience the dignity spoken of in the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales 1996 document ('Principles, Practices and Concerns') in terms of the relationship between staff and students. The experience should always be intrinsically positive.
 - 8 A definition of practising Catholic is 'someone who has been sacramentally initiated into the Catholic Church and who adheres to those substantive life choices which do not impair them for receiving the sacraments of the Church and which will not in any way be detrimental or prejudicial to the religious ethos and character of the school' (Stock, 2009, p. 1).
 - 9 Stock, now Bishop of Leeds, repeats this definition in his revised (2012) publication, *Christ at the Centre* (London, CTS).

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