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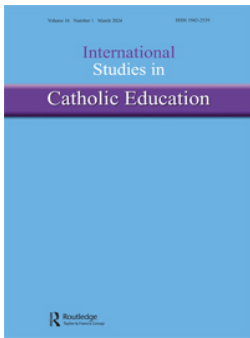**DATE DEPOSITED**
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Exploring the extent to which 'spiritual capital' is impactful in a cross-section of Catholic independent schools with a founding religious trusteeship

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Gerald Grace (2002. *Catholic Schools: Mission, Markets and Morality.* London: Routledge), borrowing from the sociological constructs of Pierre Bourdieu, speaks of the significance of the spiritual and cultural capital of religious orders in providing a substantial catalyst in the development of Catholic education in England and Wales This article endeavours to explore the extent to which spiritual capital remains impactful in a cross-section of Catholic Independent schools with a founding religious trusteeship in the UK, taking into account the changing ecclesial demography within the Catholic Church in the UK alongside contemporary education challenges. Following a critical retrieval of literature relating to the concept of spiritual capital, this article will classify and interpret research evidence based interviews with headteachers of a range of Catholic Independent schools.

Keywords: spiritual capital; charism; leadership; disposition; religious orders; distinctive

Introduction

In so far as Religious Orders were responsible for promoting education for all from the eighteenth 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, 34), who demonstrated 'ardour and fervent dedication' (Congregation for Catholic Education (CCE) 1997, n. 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, borrowing from the sociological constructs of Pierre Bourdieu, speaks of the significance of the spiritual and cultural capital of religious orders in providing a significant catalyst in the development of Catholic education in England and Wales (Grace 2002).

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The nature and definition of spiritual capital

In *The Forms of Capital* (Bourdieu 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 two further fundamental guises beyond the narrow confines of accumulated pecuniary assets available for use in the production of further monetary assets to embrace social and cultural 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 (Silva and Edwards 2005).

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:

- 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. Bourdieu also articulates the link between strong cultural capital and the building up of economic capital (Bourdieu 1997, 48–50).

In his book (Inglis 1998) on the rise and fall of the Catholic Church in the Republic of Ireland, Tom Inglis, 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 twentieth 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 capital in his adoption of the term 'spiritual capital'. Having interviewed 60 headteachers in three different cities in the United Kingdom, in the final article 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. (Grace 2002, 236)

Grace is, in effect, expressing a certain 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' (Grace 2002, 236). He maintains this spiritual capital is derived from the 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' O'Sullivan and Flanagan (2012, 45) 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's description of the Ireland of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries referenced previously, which is eschewed by Grace and other scholars such as Chris Baker (2012).

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, 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 the business 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 (Grace 2010, Article 8 – *Market Culture and Catholic Values in Education*).

Grace's emphasis on empowerment reflects definitions of spiritual capital in other contexts which resonate with concepts explored in this article. Senan D'Souza suggests

that spiritual capital means 'power, influence and disposition [habitus] created by a person's or an organisation's spiritual belief' (D'Souza 2012) while Chris Baker speaks of the transformative influence of spiritual capital (Baker 2012). 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 the limitations of his application of the concept of spiritual capital in asserting that 'the resources of spiritual capital in Catholic schooling extend well beyond the that possessed by individual headteachers' (Grace 2002, 238). In this context the resources of spiritual capital are also constituted in school governing bodies, in classroom teachers, in priests and school chaplains, in parents and not least in the students themselves.

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' (Arthur 2002). 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 use of the term *habitus* by which he means a lasting, general and adaptable way of thinking and acting in conformity to a systematic world-view (Bourdieu 1990, 54–65). 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 notion 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 Thomas Groome's concept of the depth-structures of Catholicism. Groome (1998) argues that the most effective schools have a characteristic set of ideals – 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' (the total culture) of the school.

The connection between Grace/Bourdieu's use of the term *habitus* with 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' (Groome 1998, 56).

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. Timothy Cook 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 (Cook 2003).

While a full discussion around the nature of culture is beyond the scope of this article, 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. Thomas Sergiovanni and John Corbally define culture as 'the system of values, symbols and shared meanings of a group including the *embodiment* of these values, symbols and meanings' (Sergiovanni and Corbally 1984, viii), echoing Groome's description of depth-structures. Marcellin Flynn's 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, 39)

Spiritual capital; beyond Gerald Grace

In an article entitled *Religious and 'spiritual' capitals: the experience of the celebration of Mass in the English Catholic secondary school* (Casson 2013) Dr Ann Casson suggests that the celebration of Mass in school may function as a means of maintaining the memory of the Catholic faith tradition. Casson refer to Grace 12 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, 237). Casson examines the experience of Mass 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, reflecting the claim that the Eucharist

> 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.

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.

The centrality of the celebration of the Eucharist in generating spiritual capital permeates Casson's article.

In *Renewing spiritual capital: the National Retreat for Catholic Headteachers and the National School of Formation: the impact on Catholic headteachers in the UK* (2018) 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 23 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, 69).

In focusing on the impact of the National School for Formation (NSF) on nurturing spiritual capital among headteachers, Friel speaks of the 'pedagogy in the Congregation's 1982 document' (Congregation for Catholic Education 1982) which he suggests focuses on the relational aspects of spiritual development as opposed to the doctrinal. He goes on to reference a small-scale research study framed around an emailed questionnaire to 20 headteachers following which discourser analysis was employed to discern what Grace (2002, 12) described as 'central meanings and discourse categories, those aspects of their discourse to which they devoted most time and to which they returned as a point of reference.' Such points of reference included, classically, upbringing which has been a feature of the Church's education mission since the time of St Thomas Aquinas[3] and featured prominently in Grace's 2002 study. Friel claims that, in addition, interviewees tended to emphasise the impact of Catholic local and global social action in relation to resources of faith as opposed to the Church's teaching on education or doctrinal issues. The reference by one headteacher to the purpose of Catholic education was to 'produce good Christians who would make the world more peaceful' reminded the author of the seminal aim of the Salesian educational system which permeates the primary and secondary Salesian sources, the phrase 'honest citizens and good Christians' appearing first in St John Bosco's 'Plan for the Regulation of the Oratory' in 1854. In this context it is also worth noting that the Congregation'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 from the outset, reflected in the Congregation affirming comments about the impact of religious in schools and its profound regret regarding the diminution of the presence of teaching religious (CCE 1982, 4).

Spiritual capital – contemporary challenges

There has been much written about the impact of the decline in the number of religious in schools. In a wider context scholar such as James Arthur (2013) have questioned whether 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 that the Church's unique teaching on the educational purpose of presenting a Catholic worldview to children. This article 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 Head Teacher, Deputy Heads and the Head (Co-ordinator) of Religious Education 'are to be filled by baptised and practising Catholics' (McMahon 2009). 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 (Catholic Education Service of England and Wales 2022) reports that overall 45% of teachers in schools in England and Wales are Catholics constituting 57.3% of Primary teachers, 37.7% of Secondary teachers, 22.5% of teachers in VI Form Colleges and 31.2% of teachers in the independent sector. The statistics do not, however, affirm whether or not these teachers are practising Catholics as defined by Mgr. Marcus Stock (Stock 2009, 6):

> … 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.[4]

If Grace Davie (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 could be at least postulated that the religious lives of a proportion of the overall 45% of Catholic teachers will not reflect Stock's specific definition. 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, a critical moment has been reached when there is a need to move from defining spiritual capital to researching effective means of sustaining it.

This is the focus of the research that follows drawing, as it does, on qualitative research findings which intentionally mirror the approach taken in Grace's seminal 2002 research into Catholic school leadership. However, in contrast to this initial research the focus is not on the Catholic schools which receive their funding from the state, but those schools which are fee paying (what in the UK are referred to as private or independent schools) and are members of the Catholic Independent Schools' Conference (CISC).

Methodology

In inviting schools to participate this study sought to include a variety of different types of independent school – junior, senior, 'all through' (one Head over junior and senior schools), boarding, single sex, co-ed – across a number of dioceses. For his research, Grace interviewed 60 Heads, representing about 3% of the total number of maintained Catholic schools at the time. Our task was not so arduous

Anonymised Identifier	Junior School	Senior School	All Through	Boarding	Day	Gender
School A		X			X	Boys
School B			X		X	Co-ed
School C	X				X	Co-ed
School D		X			X	Co-ed
School E			X		X	Co-ed
School F		X		X		Co-ed
School G		X		X		Girls
School H		X		X		Co-ed
School I		X		X		Co-ed

Figure 1. CISC schools involved in research interviews.

due to the much smaller number of CISC schools – 104 in total. 13 Heads were invited to participate and 11 responded – 11% of the total number of Heads in CISC. The schools that responded were drawn from six dioceses and The breakdown of schools in terms of type of school is displayed below in Figure 1.

The religious congregations referenced in the research are as follows: Society of the Holy Child Jesus; Josephites; Brothers of the Sacred Heart; Salesians; Oratorians; Jesuits; Benedictines and Mary Ward, Congregation of Jesus. And the questions posed were:

- What is your understanding of the distinctive charism of this school?
- Describe the benefits of sustaining this charism
- What is the nature of the relationship and the extent of collaboration between the school and the founding Religious Congregation?
- What formation programmes are in place for staff in relation to the charism? How are they impactful?
- Is the distinctive charism a key concern for staff and governors? How is this exemplified?
- What do you believe are the challenges in sustaining your distinctive charism?
- How is it relevant today?

In sharing initial findings, the intention was to allow the Heads to talk for themselves, as their words capture most eloquently the joys and challenges of what it is to 'live the charism' of their founding Religious Congregation in the midst of daily life in their schools. Therefore the research evidence emanates from the head-teachers themselves.

The distinctive charism of this school

Each headteacher had a clear understanding of the nature of their school's distinctive charism. All drew upon a knowledge of the history of their founding congregation which was particularly impressive as none of the headteachers had spent their lives – either personal or professional – exclusively within their current charism:

> I didn't really know an awful lot about them … ..[so] when I started, one of the things I wanted to do was get under their skin..to try and understand what the charism was. And so what I did was I went on a trip to meet the Provincial and I went down to one of their retreat centres and just spent some time in prayer and just really finding out more about them actually (Head I).

For every Head, their leadership could only be authentic and effective if they could fully 'own' and articulate the charism:

> When I came here, using the word 'Love' in a school environment … I thought, "Come on, that's a bit soft!" but it's explicit here … and I think what I would say is the distinctive feature of the school, is very much a feeling of our charism, being a real, palpable heart of the school (Head A).

The mottos and mission statements of the schools based upon their founders' values formed a common 'touch point' for all aspects of school life, for example in the sense of the values and characteristics of a founder being 'the spine … the heart of the school to do with behaviour and character and spirit … ' (Head J). This was also explicit in the pedagogical approach of each school: ' … she wrote a book of studies, so we've actually got the book she wrote which was saying why children were to be educated in the way they were; the way that teachers should treat their pupils; the way in which the pupils should behave' (Head G) and further characterised by an inclusivity of expression ' … not losing sight of the Catholic tradition but very much rooted in the image of God' (Head E). Another Head described it as a 'pedagogy of trust … we're hard-wired in our God-given nature to be hopeful. And therefore what we're doing in a school, is we're kind of unleashing that hope'(Head B).

   This inclusive characterisation extends to formal processes and policies:

> … how you articulate your values is very important because you can't assume there's any innate understanding of any of them. So giving the language and embedding the language in performance appraisal, behaviour policies. Training your staff to recognise why they matter and how to speak about them, whether they're Christians or not. And then you start to see, perhaps … the values are then spoken back to you (Head H).

As one Headteacher put it, ' … it just doesn't date!' (Head B)
   Headteachers also exhibited a clear understanding of their role as leaders in not only communicating the charism but inhabiting it, modelling it for staff, parents and pupils and ensuring it forms the structural spine of the school: ' … I think its interesting that we, as lay leadership, are very interested in continuing to understand, to articulate and to model the, if you like, the cultural heritage that we have from the Order..'. This is not always easy but Heads were adamant that the charism had to be a 'living' one, inclusive 'whilst at the same time not losing sight of the Catholic tradition but very much rooted in the image of God … . you don't have to be Catholic, but you do have to understand the values' (Head E).

The benefits of sustaining distinctive religious charisms

All Heads deftly articulated the benefits of the charism to staff, pupils and families of the Catholic faith and those from other faith and life perspectives. For them it was the *raison d'etre* of their schools and as one Head put it: 'If we can't be a school in this image, really then there's questions to be asked as to whether or not the school should carry on' (Head B). Another said it 'roots the community in a very clear spiritual sense. It's quite difficult sometimes to pin down an ethos, whatever that means. We have tried to distil what that looks like in what we call the twelve characteristics.[5]..and so when we're trying to describe who we are and what we do we go back to these … It helps us keep a 'true North', but it also helps us define what we do' (Head K). The charism is what the schools sees itself accountable to, it sets the bar and all aspects of school life are measured against it. As such it forms the character of the school and all within it:

> … a school is about people. And ultimately the values of the community are absolutely foundational in the formation of the person. So if those values are what you live by and set your standards by, I would say that's the root to a happy and fulfilling life (Head I).

For one Head who leads a girls school it's about confidence in oneself and having a sense of oneself:

> … there's so much pressure on [young women] to fall into stereotypical behaviour and put themselves into a category … [the benefit of sustaining the charism] is about that sense of actually finding out who you are and what makes you and actually being proud of that … knowing that you have a role to play and something to contribute as yourself, I think, is phenomenally important … ..giving children the confidence to be themselves and not feel they've got to put themselves into a box is really key(Head G).

This sense that the charism is a critical aspect in discerning personal formation is also shared by others: ' … [the charism] is about the sense of actually finding out who you are and what makes you and actually being proud of that' (Head K). As such, it offers a life experience that is distinctive and extends to all members of the school community: ' … [it] gives you a way of living your life and I think our non-Catholic parents appreciate that and see that and our Catholic parents … obviously … ' (Head D). There is also an appreciation that if the life-formation of the charism is ignored and unnurtured, then something precious will be lost: ' … the charism for this place … . that's what's been founded here and … if you disconnect yourself from it something about the essence of the school will fall' (Head H).

Therefore, the sense of continuity of the charism and its traditions whilst a responsibility for Heads, is also a strength: ' … it's the fact that our mums who went here as girls and our new staff … all recognise it and understand it in the same way. That's really important, that continuity it's one common shared language..bringing the benefits of this charism to lots and lots of different generations' (Head J). This Head went on to describe, in rather more commercial terms, the distinct advantages of this shared language and vision. He told a story about a representative of an organisation that works with non-experts, including children, to solve problems in business who visited the school. 'And when the lady was leaving, she was looking around the school and looking at the crucifix and values and she said, 'Do you know what you've got here? Companies would pay millions for this, this sort of ethos … this … ' as she

put it ' … branding. You've got it here in buckets..the feel of the school, the ethos and the children talk about it and understand it.' And I thought, she's hit the nail on the head. And she was saying this as an outsider … and I hadn't really thought about it in that way'. The Head finished by saying: 'And if you look at the opposite: what are the disadvantages of not sustaining it? Becoming a school which is not a Catholic school … that would not be … well that's unthinkable really. Nobody would ever want to do that because that, in cynical marketing and corporate terms, that's the USP' (Head J). Another Head, reading from the founding Congregation's Constitution, summed it up like this:' … you could spend a lot of time with a lot of people trying to come up with something … but this is brilliant! I've got it here in front of me. It needs to be a community of faith and love, prayer and the Eucharist … .it needs to be built up as a human community, knit together by fraternal [*sic*] relationships where each member brings their own talents and knows they're recognised, accepted, heard, encouraged challenged … that sort of inclusivity which is so important in the schools is in there as well … ' (Head I). Therefore the charism, defined centuries before, speaks to the heart of schools today and continues to benefit them pedagogically, pastorally, spiritually and even commercially forming and defining relationships: 'It binds us together as a community. There isn't anybody in the building who doesn't 'get it' and doesn't think 'that's what it's about'' (Head E). This communal sense of spirit and purpose is not without its challenges, some of which are explored in the next question.

The nature of the relationship and the extent of collaboration between the school and the founding religious congregation

This question elicited a broad range of responses. Some Heads enjoyed extremely positive relationships and where this was the case, it was often because the Congregation still had a visible presence in the school, usually living nearby and contributing to areas of chaplaincy and governance. One Head described it as 'strong … but not controlling and it's benefitted us in lots of ways' (Head E) whilst another spoke with real affection about his/her relationship with the former Head, a member of the Congregation, who still lives on site: 'I know for some people … having their predecessor living on the site is a nightmare but in theory and in practice I can absolutely, hand on heart say, that it has been nothing but an advantage. And I've found X an inspiration because she has such experience. And she's one of those people that you can go and ask advice from and she won't give you advice, but you leave feeling better and having made a decision. And I think that's a great skill … But that support and working with the Congregation has always been really important' (Head G). This illustrates how powerful the contribution of the Congregation can be in supporting Heads in realising their charism in the contemporary landscape.

However, other Heads shared a more dislocated relationship with their founding Congregation, largely due to historical or legacy issues. Some of these are a consequence of the sexual abuse scandal that has devastated the lives of some former pupils of CISC schools and their families: 'One of the really difficult things that I've had to deal with over the years but it's beginning to settle down now..is dealing with historic abuse. So quite a lot of my dealings with the Order has been over those sorts of issues which has been pretty difficult … we're trying to make sure that we are keeping as many connections as we can, but they are quite difficult … ' (Head I). The other main area of contention is on finance and assets largely due to

the manner in which different Congregations have negotiated a withdrawal from their schools in the last number of years. Contemporary Heads have inherited this legacy and this can make the relationship with the Congregation rather exacting. As one Head put it: ' … it was pretty acrimonious at the time because it was all to do with money … surprise, surprise! I think it's probably fair to say..I wouldn't say they're [the relationships] informal … informal is probably too 'not enough' … So we have those links. I wouldn't say that on a daily basis they're really kind of strong' (Head F).

All Heads agreed that relationships with their founding Congregation are very much in transition, not simply because of the issues previously raised but also due to the diminishing number of vocations to Religious Life and the increasing age of the members of the Congregations. One Head said: ' … our chaplain is a priest of the Congregation. He's the young one from the House – he's 70!' (Head A). Another, referring to the very positive relationship shared with the Congregation, referenced the number still in the community but saw a positivity in what is also a challenge: 'And all 3 of them believe that the school is the vehicle for their charism. They're realists. They haven't got any young members, in England anyway, so the only way that the charism is going to continue is through the schools and therefore they support the school in all they can. And I think that's the joy for me … ' (Head C). This optimistic embrace of the new relationship engendered by these changes is echoed by a third Head: 'So that's in a state of transition, mostly for the good really. … it's a transition away from operations and control and … you know … 'landlording', that type of relationship … and it's into a new relationship which is working collaboratively at the eve of formation. I mean obviously the sacramental support I can take that as a given for now. What we want strategically is to have input from the Congregation into our own formation programmes for leaders and staff … I mean if the average age was 40, we'd be talking about something different … but the average age is 73 … ' (Head H).

The value of a positive relationship and an onsite presence of the Congregation is very obvious to the Heads for whom this is a lived experience: ' … there's that formal governance representation at that level and then there's more informal relationships with members of the Order often coming to assemblies and performances … it just links us to our past and our mission as a Catholic school' (Head J). Another Head expressed the transition as a shift of 'the 'power balance', if you like, towards the school. But they are just..they are immensely supportive and I don't feel that I can't take everyday things to them. I don't ever feel that things are 'off limits' (Head D). The Head who spoke about the 'young' priest aged 70, said: ' … he has his joke of the day and every pupil goes up, especially in Year 7, and says, 'What's today's joke Fr X?' He's a presence and I think he illustrates, and very strongly I think, the nature of our charism. So the physical presence of a priest of the Congregation is very important for us to have a clarity of connection to [our Founder]' (Head A).

This connection is also made with other schools of the Congregation both nationally and internationally: ' … it ties you up with something that is infinitely bigger than you could ever be as a sole trader. You're also, actually, part of something where people, again, share the values without having to be one type of school … you've got a resource which is terribly rich and also European and world-wide' (Head E). Where Congregations have developed this relationship between schools in a pragmatic, strategic sense, Heads agree that it supports them in maintaining and realising the charism in their individual schools by building relations with other 'family'

members and developing resources for use internationally in terms of staff formation and formation for leadership: 'It's something that we take more seriously now than perhaps we did 15–20 years ago … So I think going forward, the links we have with sister schools are and will be stronger. And have to be. Because the Congregation in the UK are much older, similarly in America. The African province is more vibrant but very different and brings a very different expectation … And yet, those links are there. So it's very obvious that there is the same motivating force … . We come together and it's social, it's sharing good practice and it's just keeping together (Head G). This sense of 'keeping together' will be further explored in terms of staff formation in the next section.

The nature and impact of formation programmes

All Heads had some formation programmes in place, particularly in terms of the induction of new staff to the school, although most felt there was more they could do in terms of the ongoing formation of staff in the charism. One of the challenges they met was pitching the content to match the broad range of knowledge and experience of faith, and the Catholic faith specifically, that staff have. One Head observed, 'I think it's a work in progress being absolutely honest with you … Because for staff coming in, many of them come in 'unchurched' with no concept or understanding of Catholic schools and with very pre-conceived ideas about what a Catholic school is. That has been a journey and the staff have made tremendous progress on that. Because it's been about giving them the confidence to see how what they're doing and what is important to them is actually reflecting the values of the school, even if they're not Catholic. So even though their motivation may be coming from different sources, the reason that they are comfortable and the reason they love what they're doing comes from the same charism' (Head G). I find this a powerful and moving response: it not only isolates the problems inherent in developing staff in sympathy with the charism but it is also so resolute in its celebration of that charism as the vocational, pedagogical imperative that all staff come to realise. This Head went on to make an interesting point: ' … being able to employ Catholic staff has made a big difference. And the more the non-Catholic staff engage with the Catholic ethos the easier it is to appoint Catholic staff who take it seriously … ' (Head G).

The interplay between sustaining the ethos with an ever-decreasing number of Catholic staff and making the charism understandable and relevant to all staff is something that preoccupies all Heads. On the subject of inducting new staff, one Head said: 'Even if they're not Catholic, Christian, or people of faith … they've been appointed because they are going to be able to kind of work with us or at least be neutral … but you can't do too much of that because it's not giving anything to your spiritual capital. But you can carry a few and you've got to … you've got to carry a few. I think that in the main … they're committed and are drawn to the charism and are not drawn to the Roman Catholic Church. There's a lot of that' (Head B). Another Head commented: 'It's not quite the same when you don't live it out or go to Mass' (Head A). This is an interesting comment, revealing, as it does, the sense of there being almost a 'tipping point' in terms of the Catholicity of the staff which, if breached, makes sustaining the charism of the school potentially impossible. This Head went on to say: 'And I have found it really quite important to increase the number of Catholic staff. Because you've got to have a core group who takes this in with their mother's milk. So I don't actively employ someone

who's useless but happens to be Catholic, but I do take it as a great joy when I can say, 'Yes! We've got one!' (Head A).

Notwithstanding this, all Heads feel that their schools are enriched by the diversity of their staff and their generosity of spirit in engaging with their charisms. One Head said:

> I think we have seen better relationships across the school. In particular, I think there are 3 who either have or are about to sign up for the *MA in Catholic School Leadership* at St Mary's. And in one case we're talking about someone who's not Catholic, is gay but feels as if they've found something of interest. I think that's a bit of a win. I think there's huge potential that we haven't really got to yet on this question of how far it improves relationships between or creates collegiality (Head H).

Where formation programmes are embedded, Heads can see their impact in the relationships between staff and pupils 'because you hear them saying things to the children and you think 'Ohh, that's good! That came from that [formation training] … ' (Head D). Again, the interplay between the values and charism of the Congregation and what might be termed the 'Gospel values of the Catholic Church' are highlighted: 'You know, if you said to my average member of staff, if you said the phrase 'Gospel values', they'd probably freak and go 'I don't know what you mean' but if you said the phrase '[name of Congregation] values', they'd reel them off, they could tell you how they've got zeal in their lessons, how they've got pastoral care, how they collaborate. And I see that reflected in what they're doing with the children' (Head D). This success is partly due to the quality of the formation on offer. One Head said: 'We carefully vet who we've got so that actually, people come away and say, 'I'm thinking about it. That was really inspiring''(Head E). In this, as in all aspects of school life, the Heads are the shepherds who know their flock and who skilfully provide a bridge between the charism of the Order and its contemporary realisation, 'because we want to belong … and we want to explore that thing inside our heads and hearts that's not easily packed away' (Head A). How this is exemplified with governors or trustees is the focus of the next question.

Charism and governance

Again, there was a broad range of responses to this question with many of the issues raised mirroring those outlined above with regards to staff. One Head said: 'I think induction for governors is key. We were very mindful that lots of the governors had no idea. They were very committed to the school, I can't fault them, and they want to do the right thing but they don't necessarily know the context. So induction for governors is equally important and is something that a core of governors are buying into'(Head G). One school sees this as such a priority that all governors are invited to take a retreat in the Congregation's 'spiritual home' in France: 'We try and encourage the governors to do the retreat. That's paid for, they don't have to pay for that themselves. We want them out there. But it is difficult to get them out there because of their busy lives. It's more important, really..well not 'more' but 'as' important as getting the leadership orientated. It's on the same level' (Head B). The critical importance of the decision-making processes of governance being knowledgeable about, informed by, aligned to and protective of the charism cannot be underestimated: if they are not, then there will be a drift away from the founding principles of the Order and the very nature and purpose of the school will be threatened.

This is starkly elucidated by the same Head who went on to say: 'I suppose, governors are recruited for different reasons … So understanding of the real core purpose of the school, is not always developed in them. And this is a real danger for schools. If you have too many governors who are there just because they're going to give good legal advice, or help with the next building project or that kind of stuff, then you're heading in a dangerous direction. As ultimately you've got to ask yourself, if anything ever comes to a vote on a board, who's going to win? And if that balance tips, then on the key decisions the school's in trouble'(Head B). Another Head, echoing this point, felt that the challenges in recruiting and forming mission-sensitive governors were greater for Catholic independent schools: ' … you should ask my friends who are Heads in the maintained sector. Their governors are very interested in mission and there's obviously a diocesan representative on the Board and the Heads are held to account from a Catholic point of view. I don't think that's the experience in Independent Catholic schools as much … ' (Head H).

Notwithstanding these challenges, the establishment of formal lines of accountability to governance through reporting strands such as Ethos Committees was a common feature in all schools and ensured that an explicit and transparent mechanism was in place for the vitality of the charism to considered in its own right as well as how it informs and is impacted by strategic priorities. In one school where every governor is Catholic, the Head said: 'So there's a framework there and I would say they [the governors] are very mindful about … they want to know what we're doing as a faith community. That's one of the major reporting strands into the Education Committee and into the governing body … They're as bothered about what we're doing for people's spiritual development as what the academic outcomes are going to be' (Head E). Another Head, whose governing body is made up of 'Catholics … , other Christian denominations, secular people and now a Muslim'(Head K) echoes this: ' … the governors think about the spirituality of the school the entire time … Ethos is cherished on our board, it's overseen by the Governance Committee … and all manner of papers will come forward to Board … So yes, it's forefront, I would suggest, on the Governing Body's agendas' (Head K). This foregrounding of the charism in terms of 'Ethos' is also prominent and explicitly referenced in strategic developments which, in terms of governance, is one means of 'future proofing' the identity of the school and its charism: 'The first pillar of our strategic plan is 'Ethos and Culture' and not academic. So, yes, it is key because it does underpin everything and this is what I take greatest pride in … ' (Head C).

It is, however, worth noting the affectionate and realistic comment of one Head: 'So, are the governors supportive? Yes they are. Are they unanimous in what they believe it to be? I'm not sure about that! (Laughs)' (Head D). And therefore we return to the absolutely critical significance of recruiting mission sensitive governors who undergo formation so that they fully understand the distinctive context in which they are called to serve. In two schools where the Order is very active in governance, this appears to be more readily assured: 'Our foundation governors are appointed by the Congregation … that means that 3 of our governors are priests so they have an inbuilt view which is expressed … the Congregation is quite important in choosing our governors' (Head A). This level of 'hands on' commitment is not consistent and one wonders how sustainable it is moving forwards. However, where Congregations have systems in place it will ensure that where there might be a minority of governors who 'don't quite get it' (Head D) there will be a majority who do, 'proudly celebrating and talking about our charism' (Head F).

Challenges in sustaining distinctive religious charisms

Unsurprisingly, given the responses to previous questions, the majority of Heads cited Catholic succession as the main challenge to sustaining their school's charism in the years ahead. The recruitment of Catholic and Christian pupils, staff and governors, the appointment of faith committed senior leaders and Heads is key to ensuring a continuity of presence and a majority of those 'who get it' rather than those 'who don't'. As one Head put it: 'There are not enough people on the staff who believe in him' (Head A). The responsibility of this manifests itself in a number of ways. One Head, many years into the headship of his/her school, said: 'But I feel deep down, that is my fear … carrying that baton' (Head C) and, one imagines, wondering who it will be handed on to and whether the charism of the school will be as much a priority for that person as it is for the current Head? This takes us back to governance as it is the governors who will make that appointment in due course so 'governors who don't see charism as core' (Head B) are also a threat to the charism's succession. However, it is worth noting that this anxiety is not simply about appointing Catholics, per se, but about appointing those with the right disposition for the school. One Head's 'biggest concern was [appointing] well qualified Catholic Religious Education teachers with integrity and then, by association, other well-informed people who take their faith seriously and are well informed about faith … So for me that Catholic intellectualism is quite important' (Head G).

Another Head, in mock despair, posed the question: 'Where is that next generation of people who are 'normal Catholics?' I don't know where they are … or they're few and far between!' (Head D). This consideration of 'normal' Catholicism was further explored by this Head who, in terms of appointments to Headship and Senior Leadership, went on to say: 'I think it's a PR job around telling people it's a great job and it's also a PR job around not worrying that you're not good enough..and that is not just good enough academically but more importantly not 'Catholic' enough. Because when I have spoken to people about going for jobs, they say 'Emmm I don't know … I've used contraception'. And I say, 'That's not a deal breaker. I don't think you'll be asked about that at interview!'' (Head D). This is an interesting point, succinctly made, and begs the question – is there more we could be doing to dispel these perceived barriers?[6]

Another challenge identified by Heads was the 'dwindling presence' (Head C) and potential influence of the Congregation. In discussing this, one Head said: ' … it goes back to this phrase I've used before … Values everybody latches onto … but what are the beliefs? And therein lies the challenge. What is the faith? What is the belief of the school? And year on year, generation after generation … what do we believe in?' (Head C). There is a heartfelt sentiment expressed here by a Head who sees his/her school at a point where, in the next 10, possibly even 5 years, the last members of the Congregation will be gone from the school and for the first time, the school will be without their physical presence. Is the charism sufficiently embedded that it will continue to grow and be nurtured in spite of the Congregation's physical, if not spiritual, absence? Another Head acknowledges this concern but is also optimistic: ' … the fewer concrete connections with the Founding congregation then the more difficult it becomes. At the moment it's still a living relationship because we've still got them in the school … Once that goes, then that becomes really difficult, it becomes history rather than the present. But you just have to find other ways of keeping that going. There are loads and loads of Catholic schools who weren't founded by religious orders and they can flourish so there's a lot to learn there' (Head D).

This sense of maintaining the culture of the school is also a consideration in the context of being a faith school in a largely secular society:

> We're trying to give a fully complete view of education, but the world outside can sometimes dictate the agenda as to how or what it should look like. And that goes back to the point that if we then adapt too much, our counter-cultural vision of education ceases to exist. And in a sense, we're erasing our reason for being … watering ourselves down so that we become completely indistinct from the school down the road (Head B).

This is further exacerbated when one considers the very nature of CISC schools as independent, fee-paying educational establishments. One Head of a boarding school pithily summarises this point: 'But it is probably, simply being a Catholic school, being a Catholic independent, expensive independent school, even amongst independent schools, in a world which is either hostile or not interested in faith education' (Head F). Another Head expands on this but sees a positive outcome:

> The problem schools are going to have … schools like this [Catholic independent] are going to have … … is that there'll always be a percentage of parents and kids who are indifferent and don't really want us to push things beyond a certain point. But that's a creative tension, I think (Head H).

This sense of positivity in terms of a Catholic education being counter-cultural and a means of influencing society for the common good is beautifully enunciated by another Head: 'It's the existential question, what are we destined to become? It's Newmans' 'You're a link in a chain with some purpose that you may not fully understand … ', it's all of that. And if you buy into that world view, which we do, then we have to educate people to also see the world through that filter as well. And recognise that, again, may be built into our DNA is that sense of Hope which recognises the divine in ourselves and each other' (Head B). And for another Head, this sense of hope even extends to the Church itself and the place of schools in realising a profound relationship in faith for staff and pupils: 'But you know, as much as it might be the 'Big Church' that people kick against, it will be the 'Personal Church' that gives them something different' (Head A).

Concluding observations

Purpose and meaning

The benefits of sustaining their individual charisms, outlined in the previous section, are very much what Heads feel makes them relevant to contemporary life and living. For some it is about how it supports individuals to find purpose and meaning: 'It's relevant today if that education enables us to understand who we are meant to be and become. And, you know that question is both anthropological and theological in construct' (Head B). 'I think it's about giving them the confidence and that sense of responsibility to be able to deal with things. And I also think it's about that sense of faith, isn't it? '(Head G). The significance of this is further extrapolated by another Head: 'I have this great belief in the thirst for children to have a relationship with God and, in our more adult terminology, to have a sense of the sacred and the transcendent in their lives. And if you just give in to the world it's the greatest disservice you can do them. The world offers less and less joy and happiness' (Head C).

Service of the common good

Other Heads agree but also acknowledge the wider benefits in terms of service to the common good that their charism brings to society at large: 'Reflection or spirituality or having responsibilities as a person of faith or a Christian to help others, you know. So sometimes our Muslim parents like it more. It's the irony of all the division. In our schools we have Muslim parents choosing to come here and their children are flourishing because we value religion' (Head J). And this commitment to the value and importance of faith, whilst formative in the life of the school, will remain with the pupils and staff: 'The relevance of faith within the West is decreasing … and there's no sense that the children are, necessarily, 'going to get religion'..- but hopefully they will go out with a sense of values and a sense of purpose, always, always, always for the greater good … and then they will find value and give it to a society that greatly needs it … and hopefully find some discernment of faith thereafter!'(Head K).

A pedagogy of hope

And this response beautifully elucidates the dual relevance that Heads feel their charism holds for their school communities: the significance of forming people who will transform society for the better and the hopeful tension that it might also bring them to a consideration of personal faith. This is, indeed, a 'pedagogy of Hope', as one Head articulates: 'I'm doing my little bit. I've got this thing here and it says, 'That when some students stare back at you with blank faces and simply won't engage it's easy to get disheartened. But you're reducing God's grace to your efforts and their reactions'. More often than not you will never know the impact on your students. It could be a word, a piece of scripture, a video clip they remember later that night which might prove for them to be comforting or reassuring … it might even save their life. As St Oscar Romero put it: 'We are workers not master builders'. So I'm kind of like, I'm a worker I'm not a master builder … .so I'll be the worker and that's what we're all trying to do' (Head D).

Capacity and capability

The challenge facing the reserves of spiritual capital in Catholic independent schools is the capacity for school leaders and the capability of their governing bodies to continue to make the charism of the founding congregation relevant and meaningful today for all members of their school communities. The extent to which a distinctive religious charism remains undiluted will depend critically on the number of lay leaders committed to sustaining such charisms, especially in a context in which some religious orders are approaching 'completion'. This article has emphasised the importance of formation programmes for all members of a school's community – pupils, staff and governors. However, in order for these to be impactful, there must remain a core group of teachers committed to modelling the charism, inhabiting it both professionally and personally in order to ensure that it continues to flourish, form and define the character and life of a school. This will be achieved by drawing ever closer to the living expression of the charism itself, 'It is about trying to find the dynamic fidelity; it is incarnating it in every new age without diluting it and being faithful to what it is. But that it speaks … '(Head B).

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 (1994).
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. Mgr. Stock, now Bishop of Leeds, repeats this definition in his revised (2012) publication Christ at the Centre (London, CTS).
5. The twelve characteristics are identified as follows: Following in Christ's footsteps; Valuing women's role and spirituality; Encouraging hard work and excellence; Respecting self; Embracing diversity; Valuing friendship; Pursuing cheerfulness; Seeing good in all creation; Coping effectively with failure; Working to eliminate injustice; Supporting each other through the school; Promoting Christian values of truth, justice, freedom and sincerity
6. In 1967 the guidance document *Humanea vita* was issued by Pope Paul VI, prohibiting certain types of contraceptives. There have been a range of interpretations and misconceptions since the document has been received and implemented into the lives of Catholic Christians, leading to the concern that any use of contraceptives might be regarded as a mortal sin and thus intrinsically wrong. The observation from the headteacher provides an apt illustration of this.

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Disclosure statement

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