

# Chapter 12

## Toward the Renewal of Spiritual Capital: A Contemporary Challenge for Headteachers in Catholic Schools in England



**David Fincham**

**Abstract** In 2017, I conducted the first phase of research in which I set out to explore the most pressing challenges faced by headteachers of Catholic primary and secondary schools in England. Twenty-one headteachers at a diocesan conference were invited to respond to a written question, and it emerged that one of the prevalent themes—or ‘categories of discourse’—was that of the maintenance of ‘spiritual capital’ in Catholic schools. The concept of ‘spiritual capital’ was identified and explored by Grace (2002), who indicated that it would be unlikely that sources of spiritual capital would continue to be of ongoing benefit if they were not actively preserved and sustained by the present generation of Catholic school leaders. In the context of Catholic education, this, therefore, provides a significant line of enquiry. In the light of this, I pursued a second phase of research, in which I conducted semi-structured interviews with nine of the headteachers who had taken part in the first phase of the research. The aim was to explore underlying reasons that lay behind the responses from the first phase of the enquiry and to engage in an in-depth examination of the discourse. In an analysis of the results, it was evident that, from the perspective of these headteachers, the nurturing and transmission of spiritual capital continues to represent one of the critical challenges that headteachers in Catholic schools face today. This chapter presents an examination of the responses provided by the headteachers who took part in the second phase of the investigation and to propose potential approaches toward the renewal of spiritual capital in Catholic schools in the future. Whilst the sample was small, my hope is that the findings of the research and the contributions made by the headteachers who took part will encourage more headteachers and leaders in Catholic schools to engage in the debate.

**Keywords** Catholic education · Leadership · Mission · Spiritual capital

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## Introduction: Context

In 2017, I began a research investigation, the first phase of which comprised an open question presented to twenty-one headteachers of Catholic primary and secondary maintained schools at a diocesan conference in England. They were invited to indicate the three most pressing challenges of their role as a headteacher in a Catholic school. Nineteen of headteachers responded to the question.

Having elicited responses from this first phase of the enquiry, through a process of Thematic Analysis (Clarke and Braun 2017), I identified prevalent themes—or, what Grace (2002, p. 120–121) calls, ‘categories of discourse’. With this valuable information to hand, I decided to embark on a second phase, which would involve interviewing a selection of the headteachers who had participated in the first phase. The aim was to explore underlying reasons that lay behind the responses from the first phase of the enquiry and to engage in a greater in-depth examination of the discourse.

In advance of the interviews with headteachers, in which I wished to gain an insight into the pressures and tensions they were experiencing, and making a judgement from the evidence of the first phase of the enquiry, I chose headteachers in a purposive sample (Cohen et al. 2007: p. 156–157) from five primary and four secondary Catholic schools, who had responded to the question in the first phase of the enquiry. Whilst the sample was small, my hope was that the findings of the research would encourage more headteachers and leaders in Catholic schools to join the debate.

Five major themes were identified from the process of Thematic Analysis, but it is proposed here to select and to reflect upon one of the categories of discourse in particular that was identified in the interviews, i.e., the discourse of ‘spiritual capital’.<sup>1</sup> Grace first proposed this concept of spiritual capital—which is derived from the extensive work of Bourdieu<sup>2</sup>—in his book *Catholic schools : Mission, markets and morality* (Grace 2002). Subsequently, he elaborates a theoretical interpretation of spiritual capital (Grace 2010), which provided a line of enquiry that I proposed to explore further for the purpose of my research.

## Thematic Analysis

As indicated above, following the conduct of the first phase of the enquiry, it had been possible to examine the responses of participants to the question: *what are the contemporary challenges and opportunities for Catholic headteachers?* In order to achieve an understanding of the responses elicited from the question that was posed, a phenomenological approach was adopted.<sup>3</sup> Thus, various strategies for analysing the data were considered, including Discourse Analysis (DA).

However, I subsequently decided to subject the responses to close and careful scrutiny through a process of Thematic Analysis (TA). Clarke and Braun (2017)

define TA as ‘a method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (“themes”) within qualitative data.’ TA would, therefore, provide a method through which patterns within and across the data could be discerned. I had the opportunity, too, to share results in confidence with the Qualitative Research Forum at St Mary’s University, which was made up of a group of colleague researchers and academics from various disciplines. The discussion helped me to identify several prevalent themes that arose from the headteachers’ responses to the open question.

As a result of a close examination of the responses through the process of Thematic Analysis (TA), therefore, it was possible to discern significant and prominent themes. In the course of this process, it became evident that five themes in particular were dominant. Following Grace (2002, p. 120–121), I refer to these salient themes that were discerned from the written responses of the headteachers who had responded to the question as ‘categories of discourse’. One of the categories of discourse that was identified was that of the need to develop and renew spiritual capital in Catholic schools.

## Method

The research was located within an ethnographic framework, which, within a constructivist paradigm, by definition, is an interpretation of reality (Hammersley 1992, p. 49). In order to enable the reader to be aware of any bias, it would be appropriate first to clarify my ontological perspective. I would define myself as a practising Catholic in full communion with the Church. I have had experience of working in Catholic education since 1975, initially as an English teacher in a Catholic secondary school and subsequently as Head of Year, Head of House, First Deputy and Acting Headteacher. Currently, I am employed as part of the MA in Catholic School Leadership team at St Mary’s University, having been the Programme Director from 2009 to 2014. Whilst participants would have regarded me as a colleague and fellow professional, I aimed, as a researcher, to adopt the stance of an observer who would examine data in a disinterested way.

As far as semi-structured interviews are concerned, Kvale states that ‘...if you want to know how people understand their world and their life, why not talk to them...’ (1996, p. 1). This highlights the benefit of conducting semi-structured interviews as part of an investigation that sets out to articulate the lived experiences of respondents. The aim was that the interviews would last about an hour and, with the permission of interviewees, would be audio-recorded and transcribed.

The purpose of the investigation was explicitly to give voice to the personal experiences of headteachers working in Catholic schools. Intrinsicly, ethical implications were involved in presenting individual perspectives publicly and, therefore, it was important that their views would be recorded with discretion. It was paramount to protect the privacy of the people who volunteered to share their experiences and opinions and to ensure that the identification of participants remained anonymous. It was, therefore, essential that issues surrounding confidentiality and anonymity were secure.

In presenting transcriptions of their responses, therefore, the participants in this study have all been anonymised and pseudonyms have been used for ethical reasons. With ethical considerations in mind, too, each of the headteachers was invited to sign a consent form before the interviews took place. My main concern in the second phase was that, in making arrangements to meet headteachers in order to conduct face-to-face interviews, I was not imposing on their valuable time.<sup>4</sup>

## Spiritual Capital

It is relevant, in this context, to explain the concept of ‘spiritual capital’. Professor Gerald Grace defines spiritual capital as ‘... resources of faith and values derived from a commitment to a religious tradition’ (2002, p. 236).

The implication is that, in previous generations, Catholic schools were run by clergy and members of religious orders, who, by their vows, conduct and commitment to a way of life, dedicated themselves to following their faith in imitation of Christ. However, Grace argues that one of the most critical questions facing Catholic schools today is the decline in resources of spiritual capital ‘The renewal of its spiritual capital thus becomes the crucial question for the continuance of its *distinctive* mission in the future’ (2002, p. 236–240).

Grace (2002) argues that down the generations Catholic schools have been led by priests and members of religious orders who handed on resources of faith and values derived from a commitment to a religious tradition. With the decline in the number of religious working in Catholic schools, however, it becomes more difficult to transmit this tradition (or ethos) in this way. So nowadays for laypeople working in Catholic schools the sustaining of spiritual capital is of much greater significance than it was previously.

It should be added, incidentally, that, compared with twenty per cent of the school leaders in Grace’s (ibid) study who acknowledged that they were vowed religious; there were none in this current study. This is noteworthy. When I first started teaching in the 1970s, there were two priests and two nuns on the teaching staff. They were, as it were, religious role models. In their outward appearance and behaviour; they were living witnesses to the faith, emulating Christ’s ministry and mission. Modelled on Jesus the Good Shepherd, they were visible signs of the presence of Christ.

As long ago as (1982), the Congregation for Catholic Education, in *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith*, recognised the potential challenges posed by declining numbers of priests and religious teaching in Catholic schools. It was acknowledged that lay teachers would need to take a greater responsibility in the leadership of those schools. Concomitantly, there is an onus on laypeople currently teaching in Catholic schools to develop not only their professional formation but also their faith formation, whereby they are enabled to serve their communities both as professionals and as witnesses.

Phase	Number of Teachers	% Catholic teachers	Number of staff with CCRS	% with CCRS
Primary	23,370 (20,699)	60.6 (68.6)	5,301 (5,970)	22.7 (28.8)
Secondary	23,146 (22,503)	40.7 (44.9)	1,160 (1,610)	5.0 (7.2)
Tertiary	1,553 (1,489)	33.9 (38.2)	56 (54)	3.6 (3.6)
Independent	5,169 (4,815)	32.1 (37.5)	196 (307)	3.8 (6.4)
<b>Total</b>	<b>53,241 (49,506)</b>	<b>48.4 (47.3)</b>	<b>6,713 (7,941)</b>	<b>12.6 (11.5)</b>

**Fig. 12.1** From the Catholic Education Service Annual Census 2018

A key concern identified by commentators on Catholic school education today, then, which is also reflected by practitioners, is whether or not reserves of spiritual capital can be sustained, renewed and deepened. According to the most recent statistics provided by the Catholic Education Service (2018, p. 30), fewer than half (48.4%) of the teachers teaching in Catholic schools in England identify themselves as Catholic (Fig. 12.1).

Comparative figures for 2011 are shown in brackets. The figures show that, currently, whilst there are more teachers working in Catholic schools since 2011, there has been a decline in all sectors in the proportion of teachers who are Catholic. Added to this there is evidently a decline in the numbers of teachers holding a Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies (CCRS).

Given that its distinctive ethos is an essential element of the Catholic school, it is important that staff receive consistent and ongoing input and nourishment regarding the Catholic ethos, the Catholic faith and the teachings of the Catholic Church. In this way, all teachers in Catholic schools can be helped to understand their role as educators in a Catholic school. Furthermore, Weeks and Grace (2007, p. 1) advocate that teachers acquire ‘the faith-based knowledge and skills needed to maintain and develop the Catholic identity of the school’, which they characterise as ‘theological literacy’.<sup>5</sup>

Significantly, St Mary’s University provides a programme, *Master of Arts in Catholic School Leadership*, which offers opportunities for teachers and others who work—or aspire to work—in Catholic schools, not only to familiarise themselves with the principles of Catholic education, but also to conduct research in Catholic school leadership (see also Gallagher 2007, p. 264). For the last five years, a centre based in the north of Ireland in the Catholic diocese of Derry has been established, in which ten students, having completed the MA programme, graduated in 2019.

It should also be noted that there have been two further initiatives, specifically for the formation of headteachers in England and Wales, namely the *National Retreat for Catholic Headteachers* and the *National School of Formation*. Raymond Friel (2018) has presented the findings of research into the impact of these initiatives, which was conducted with the headteachers who participated.

## Results

Within the interviews that I conducted with headteachers in Catholic schools in the context of contemporary challenges that they face, I explored, amongst other things, what they thought about the concept of ‘renewing spiritual capital’ (Grace p. 2010). This proved to be a fruitful line of enquiry within the study. As one headteacher acknowledged ‘I think it’s vital ... spiritually, headteachers and ... school staff generally need to renew their mission, their spiritual development...’ (Primary Head 1). Another headteacher stated that there has to be a commitment to ‘making sure that staff who teach in Catholic schools really understand what Christ at the centre means, ... I explain [this] to parents when I show them round ... obviously we address it in our interviews and things [like that], so we’re very clear that being a Catholic you have to be 100% willing and [to] work at contributing to the faith life of the school’ (Primary Head 3).

It was evident from the results of the investigation that headteachers working in Catholic schools acknowledged that the renewal of spiritual capital in Catholic schools is a significant challenge. However, whilst they identified a need to take up opportunities for themselves and for their staff to deepen their personal faith, they admitted that it was not given sufficient priority. As one headteacher pointed out, there is a concern about the priority given to promoting the faith and values that are associated with a commitment to a religious tradition ‘

... spiritual capital, yeah, I think hand on heart, I don’t think we give ourselves enough time for that’ (Secondary Head 4).

There was a general feeling that more opportunities needed to be provided for headteachers to sustain and enhance the development of spiritual capital ‘I think [headteachers] would be happy to absorb more and to build more and to develop their own capital and to have their spiritual capital developed’ (Secondary Head 6). The same headteacher reflected that, historically, headteachers had benefited from a relationship with spiritual advisors and with former headteachers, who would provide guidance and direction ‘... heads who are given spiritual advisors ... or ... they’re given heads as guides—former heads, former leadership team—as guides to help them in the spiritual [aspects of their role] ... and they look for the points of consolation in their career...’ (Secondary Head 6).

A critical contemporary challenge for Catholic schools is the recruitment, retention and formation of future leaders. In this context, Fr. Jim Gallagher has asserted that in England ‘The recruitment of suitable candidates for ... leadership posts is major concern at national and diocesan levels’ (2007, p. 264). This view was supported by a comment by one of the headteachers in this enquiry, who, reflecting on a recent experience during an interview with a candidate for a senior leadership post in the school, indicated that they were perplexed at the lack of appreciation of the distinctive nature of Catholic education that was displayed ‘We had a senior leadership post come up recently and one of the candidates was asked to say why is a Catholic school different to a school down the road and they couldn’t answer it, and I thought that

was extraordinary for someone to turn up to a senior leadership role and not be able to nail that question...' (Secondary Head 6).

It should be observed, too, that, as faith leaders, headteachers in Catholic schools have a responsibility to encourage staff to take up opportunities to develop their professional formation. As one headteacher intimated 'I am trying to encourage people, that they need that—spiritual renewal doesn't have to be sitting in a prayer garden or something, it can be academic ... something different to make you think differently' (Primary Head 1). This was reinforced by another headteacher who asserted 'An opportunity yeah for some sort of intellectual nourishment as well as spiritual—something that just reminds you why you're doing it, but isn't kind of a fluffy ... you need something with a bit of depth, a bit of meat. You want meat not candy' (Secondary Head 9).

Other headteachers indicated that they had taken the initiative in developing their own theological formation within their role. Evidence of this was presented in the interviews. For example, headteachers informed me 'I've done the CCRS and I've done the MA; now I've just signed up for the National School of Formation' (Primary Head 1). Another observed '... my governors paid for me to do the MA in Catholic School Leadership ... we can identify [potential leaders] and put them in the right places at the right time, give them the right CPD so that they are ready when the time comes...' (Primary Head 2).

Another headteacher, though, disclosed that, with all the other, more pragmatic, demands made on teachers in schools, there were often few opportunities to place an emphasis on renewing spiritual capital '... hand on heart, I don't think we give ourselves enough time for that' (Primary Head 4). It has to be admitted, of course, that headteachers are very busy people, who are facing increasing demands on their time '...my concern about formation is [that] this Catholic teacher who's the head of school isn't seeing anything beyond the day-to-day running of the school so you can't see beyond that' (Primary Head 4).

Another headteacher concurred with this perspective, articulating concerns about workload and day-to-day pressures experienced by headteachers '... things are just so busy, the whole landscape has become a lot more focussed on you know performance and recruitment and all that kind of mundane stuff...' (Secondary Head 6). However, though drawing attention to difficulties that teachers and headteachers experience in finding opportunities, all respondents emphasised their commitment to encourage formation amongst their staff.

Notwithstanding these evident pressures on headteachers and staff, it should be emphasised that, without the renewal of spiritual capital, there will, potentially, be an existential threat to the continuation of the distinctive mission of Catholic schools. Indeed, whilst it is appreciated that there are time constraints in providing opportunities to sustain spiritual capital, in examining the responses of headteachers who participated in the research, it seemed that there is still a long way to go for headteachers and staff in nurturing spiritual and religious formation in Catholic schools and for the building up of spiritual capital.

If spiritual capital can be defined as 'resources of faith and values derived from a commitment to a religious tradition' (Grace 2002, p. 236), then Catholic schools have

an obligation to renew their commitment to the values of the common good and to the preferential option for the poor. It was evident from the interviews that headteachers recognised these fundamental principles of the Catholic faith and sought to sustain the moral values of Catholic education. In this respect, one headteacher confided that one student had been ‘... involved in this County Lines thing, [a student] has been sucked into a gang who he’s been used to take class A drugs around the area, absolutely horrendous situation. We’ve slowly ... we’ve been working with mum and social care and we’ve got him to come into school for the first time today and we talked about how much we wanted him to make a success, and all the rest of it’ (Secondary Head 9).

Equally, the Catholic school can play a distinctive role of support when members of the school community face a crisis ‘Lots of things have happened in the life of the school that every now and again remind you of how important it is that we’re a Catholic school. So the summer before last one of our teachers died of cancer ... it was very sudden, mid 40 s, had a young family ...’ (Secondary Head 9). In these circumstances, students can observe Christian attitudes and behaviours in their headteachers and teachers that may not be evident in a secular environment.

It was evident, too, that, whilst traditional resources of spiritual capital are in decline, the contribution made by parish priests and the bishop in sustaining these assets, not only for headteachers themselves, but also throughout the school community, continues to have an important impact ‘Personally, I’m very lucky that my parish priest who’s not local to here is very very good at making sure that spiritually I’m renewed...’ (Primary Head 1). ‘And really I think it comes down to the spirituality of the bishop’ (Secondary Head 6). One headteacher, moreover, commended the leadership of the diocese in providing opportunities for headteachers to renew their spiritual commitment ‘I think that’s one of the things that our diocese does quite well is that they do put on sort of conferences which always have a spiritual basis, so I think they do that quite well really, so at least once a year we have something that’s at our own level’ (Primary Head 5).

The results clearly present a complex situation. Whilst headteachers in Catholic schools appear to be committed to the principle of renewing reserves of spiritual capital and strive to sustain their Catholic ethos, the limited take up of opportunities that would enhance the spiritual formation of themselves and their staff would indicate that they are currently surviving on a declining asset. Attention will now turn to addressing this question.

## **Discussion: Renewing Spiritual Capital**

Pope Paul VI wrote that young people nowadays do not listen to teachers because they are teachers; they listen to them because they are witnesses (1975 par. 464). It is not what you teach but whether you practise what you teach that matters. The question of integrity is determined by the relationship between what is taught and what is practised. It is our relationships with our colleagues and with the students



that are crucial and relationships need to be nourished and developed over time. This can be characterised as mission integrity.

This idea is elaborated well by Andrew Morris who explains that ‘... the more completely the Catholic teacher gives concrete witness to Christ, the more this ideal will be accepted as an appropriate model and imitated by children because they will see the ... precepts of Christian life ... acted out in the school’s normal daily routines’ (2008, p. 4). It is our personal witness to faith in practice, in action and in relationships in the day-to-day life of the school that is the sustaining resource for Christian living and working.

Jesus is the model for teachers working in Catholic schools. This idea is taken up by an American Quaker educationalist, Parker J. Palmer, who says ‘Teachers are, in effect, signs of the presence of Christ within their educational community. They ‘teach who they are’ (1998, p. 1). So the Christian story is about witness. If we are to renew our Catholic ethos, ultimately, we will be judged not only by our academic achievements but also by the kind of people we are. Relating this to mission leadership, my colleague at St Mary’s University, John Lydon says that ‘By engaging in the ministry of teaching, the individual Christian is responding to his or her primary call to be a disciple of Jesus in a distinctive manner’ (2010, p. 52).

Unlike their secular counterparts, headteachers in Catholic schools must also consider the faith dimension of their role and of the communities they serve. They are faith leaders who must model and nurture the distinctive values of Catholic education. In exploring implications for the recruitment, retention and formation of leaders, the issue of continuing professional formation<sup>6</sup> needs to be considered. At one time, there may have been confidence that all teachers who were appointed in Catholic schools had a Christian vocation and that a programme of formation would help them to deepen that vocation. The reality today is that there can no longer be certainty that all teachers in Catholic schools will be Catholics, let alone appreciate the implications of vocation. Young people from Catholic families, who may have been educated in a Catholic primary school, might not have attended a Catholic secondary school, or a Catholic university, before applying for a post as a teacher in a Catholic school. The likelihood is that, at the beginning of their professional career, their understanding of their faith will still be undeveloped.

Whether or not teachers in Catholic schools are practising Catholics, they all enjoy the opportunity to bring gifts from which the Catholic school can benefit. This applies to those who are members of other Christian traditions, as well as other faiths, who may not fully appreciate the distinctive mission of the Catholic school. A challenge—and an opportunity—for leadership in a Catholic school is how to empower all those who have committed themselves to its development and how to coordinate their gifts in contributing to the distinctive mission of the school. There are many teachers of other faiths and none who contribute to the success of Catholic schools. These teachers, too, would benefit from opportunities through which they would be able to appreciate more fully the distinctive Catholic ethos of the schools in which they work.<sup>7</sup>

In a rapidly changing world, teachers need to continue their spiritual and theological formation in order to develop their relationship with Jesus in the interests of the community as a whole. As the *Congregation for Catholic Education* explains

Apart from their theological formation, educators need also to cultivate their spiritual formation in order to develop their relationship with Jesus Christ and become a Master like Him. In this sense, the formational journey of both lay and consecrated educators must be combined with the moulding of the person towards greater conformity with Christ (cf. Romans 8: 29) and of the educational community around Christ the Master. (2007 par. 26)

Whilst a variety of implications arise from the findings of this enquiry, it was not possible to cover all within the parameters of this Chapter. However, the recruitment and retention of teachers who are committed to sustaining the distinctive nature of Catholic schools in England is seen as a major challenge for all the headteachers who were interviewed. A question of critical concern, therefore, is that of maintaining the mission integrity of Catholic schools by renewing their spiritual capital.

## Summary

It is the religious character of the Catholic school that distinguishes it from its secular counterpart. In order to secure its distinctive ethos, the Catholic school needs to ensure that it has a 'critical mass' of teachers who are committed to realising its religious purpose. If Catholic education in England is to be maintained into the future, there is a need to appoint teachers who not only have the appropriate teaching qualities but also appreciate the value of the religious life of the school. Where Catholic schools have Sixth Forms, for example, there might be opportunities to identify and, critically, to support students who show an inclination toward taking up a career in teaching.

For those teachers who have already been recruited, it would be appropriate to consider the provision of carefully planned and focused Continuing Professional Development (CPD) as part of their ongoing professional development. Catholic schools nowadays are diverse communities. Whilst this can be a strength, teachers who are not themselves practising Catholics, or Catholics who have drifted away from the practice of their faith, or who did not attend a Catholic school, or who did train as a teacher in a Catholic College of Education, would also benefit from formal opportunities to acquaint them with the distinctive mission of the Catholic school.

For lay Catholics working in Catholic schools, there should be opportunities for them to develop on their faith journey. It is recommended that provision for the formation for staff be considered with a view to developing their vocation to teach in a Catholic school. This could be addressed by providing Continuing Professional Formation (CPF) as well as CPD within Catholic schools. This would, moreover, apply to teachers in Catholic schools who are members of other Christian traditions or of other faiths or none. This could take the shape, for example, of offering formal courses provided by a diocese, or study at an institute of Higher Education.

Whilst, in many respects, Catholic schools in England have never been more successful, particularly with regard to the academic achievement of students, paradoxically, there emerged from the interviews implicit, and sometimes overt, questions about the continued survival of Catholic education within a publicly funded system. There has long been a tension between ‘rendering to Caesar’ and ‘rendering to God’. This tension would be exacerbated, too, by headteachers themselves, should they concede to the growing secular pressures they face.

There will be a problem in a school if colleagues do not understand the values of Catholic education or what these values mean in practice for them individually—whether as teacher, support colleague, curriculum or pastoral leader or caretaker or cleaners. If they are not clear as to what they need to do to sustain the mission, they are unlikely to be proactive in support of it.

A residual thought—and recommendation—is that there is a responsibility for headteachers themselves, as stewards of Catholic schools, to be vigilant in their commitment to the continued development and maintenance of Catholic education by encouraging and actively supporting the formation of the next generation of Catholic school leaders. From the interviews, it was evident that whilst the development of spiritual capital across the Catholic school community is not easy, it needs to be given serious priority, and not a matter to be paid lip service. In particular, there must be a greater practical emphasis on staff INSET, continuing professional development and formation and an active advocacy for staff to engage in courses such as the CCRS and Masters level courses such as the MA in Catholic School Leadership (Fincham 2010, p. 76). Too few staff working in Catholic schools—whether Catholic, of other faiths or of no faith—are availing themselves of these opportunities.

## Notes

1. Spiritual capital relates to ‘resources of faith and values derived from commitment to a religious tradition’ (Grace 2002, p. 236) and implies that Catholic school leaders need to experience opportunities for their own religious development, for example, by attendance at retreats and study courses.
2. Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) identifies three forms of capital—economic capital, social capital and cultural capital—as a means of interpreting any educational system. The concept of spiritual capital is derived from this framework.
3. The philosophy of phenomenology was developed by Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), who argued that conscious experience can be studied from a subjective or first-person point of view. Epistemologically, a phenomenological approach draws on a qualitative paradigm, which emphasises the significance of personal experiences. Interpretive researchers emphasise phenomenological perspectives. A phenomenological approach would offer insights into how individual headteachers interpreted their experiences of leading schools in a Catholic context. As a form of interpretive methodology, therefore, the experience of headteachers is central to the research, and their perceptions, though subjective, provide valid perspectives for critical consideration. The focus is on the experiences and observations of individual headteachers.

4. It was evident during the conduct of the research that headteachers are under considerable pressure to fulfil the responsibilities of their role. One school was organising Mission Week; in another, the headteacher was conducting appraisals; there were meetings with governors, classroom observations, meetings with parents. Headteachers in secondary schools invariably employ a PA (Personal Assistant), who acts as a 'gatekeeper', to shield and protect the headteacher by screening calls. The Personal Assistant of one head teacher in the study, for example, related that the headteacher was 'too busy with other commitments' to have the time to take part.
5. 'Theological literacy' is defined as 'the ability to communicate knowledgeably how the faith of the church relates to contemporary everyday experiences' (Weeks and Grace 2007, p. 8).
6. In the Catholic Church, the concept of formation is well known. It refers to an educational process that engages the whole person with God's intended purpose. Formation is characterised as the ongoing human development of people who have a specific mission, such as the priesthood or membership of a religious order. Such formation involves programmes for active life commitment in the service of the Church.
7. As stated by the Congregation for Catholic Education 'By its very nature, the Catholic school requires the presence and involvement of educators that are not only culturally and spiritually formed, but also intentionally directed at developing their community educational commitment in an authentic spirit of ecclesial communion. In the same way, too, Catholic schools can be instrumental in supporting spiritual transformation for individuals and for the community as a whole' (2007 par. 34).

**Acknowledgements** Headteachers are very busy people, and I take this opportunity to thank those who gave generously of their time to assist me in this enquiry. Whilst, admittedly, a value-judgement on the part of the researcher, it was evident that the faith leadership of each of the headteachers who participated in the interviews was informed by the values of their personal and spiritual vocation.

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