The Definition of a Catholic School: A Catholic Educational Policy Perspective

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Abstract

The motivation for this article is drawn from the current status quo regarding some key stakeholders of Catholic education who lack sufficient understanding of ‘the definition of a Catholic school’ or exactly what the term ‘Catholic School’ entails. This is because they mostly define a ‘Catholic School’ in limited or restricted terms or just as ‘one run by the Catholic Church’. In as much as such a definition is somewhat correct regarding that which a ‘Catholic school’ is, it does not give a holistic or adequate meaning of a ‘Catholic School’. Further, such a definition is limited and lacks a holistic definition of such schools because they are complexities involving various key features which combining to form the true identity of ‘Catholic Schools’ worldwide. Due to the current status quo regarding the insufficient understanding of what is meant by the term ‘Catholic School’ by some key stakeholders of Catholic education in Zambia, a desk review was conducted to investigate exactly what is meant by the term ‘Catholic School’ in order to promote a holistic or sufficient understanding of this aspect among key stakeholders of Catholic education at all educational levels as well as others interested in the welfare of such education institutions in Zambia. The study was a qualitative descriptive survey design and was grounded in document analysis of Catholic educational policies, key books and other documents providing commentaries on Catholic education in Zambia and worldwide. The study revealed that the idiosyncratic features of Catholic Schools provide the basis for their unique identity globally and it is such features which combine to provide a basis for the sufficient understanding of the meaning of the term ‘Catholic School’. The study also revealed that it is the various features of Catholic education which combine to enhance a holistic understanding of the actual meaning of the term ‘Catholic School’.

Key words: Catholic; Definition; Features; Education; Policy.
1.0 Introduction

This article engages with the concept of the ‘Catholic School’. This is a common term in people’s daily conversations in Zambia owing to the fact that Catholic education has been part of the Zambian society since the beginning of colonialism in 1891 (Carmody, 2004; Snelson, 1974; O’Brien, 2006). The reason for the common usage of the term ‘Catholic School’ in the Zambian setting is partly because of the good reputation earned by such schools among the people owing to their provision of quality education since their inception (Chisempere, 1993; Kabwe, 2010; Hambulo, 2016). However, despite common usage of the term ‘Catholic School’ by the people in the Zambian setting, generally there seems to be insufficient understanding of the exact meaning of the term even among key stakeholders of Catholic educational provision in Zambia (Hambulo, 2016). As indicated already above, in the Zambian setting some key stakeholders of Catholic educational provision portray insufficient understanding of the meaning of the term ‘Catholic School’. This is owing to their limited understanding of the term, linking it only to the restricted notion of schools run by the Catholics. This understanding of the term ‘Catholic School’ by the stakeholders of Catholic education in Zambia is somewhat correct but the broad nature of the concept when perceived from a Catholic education policy perspective renders such a perspective insufficient and inadequate to enhance a holistic understanding of the concept at hand.

Keeping the aforementioned in view, specifically in relation to the insufficient understanding of the term ‘Catholic School’ shown by key stakeholders of Catholic education in Zambia, it became necessary to illuminate the term, through a follow-up study meant to enhance a holistic
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or sufficient understanding of it, not only by stakeholders of Catholic educational provision but the general populace in Zambia. However, it is important to pointed out right from the onset of this article that an account provided in the paper on what the term ‘Catholic School’ entails, will not include every feature of Catholic education but only a few selected features deemed fundamental by the authors of this paper. All the information on some selected key features of Catholic schooling are drawn from the various major Catholic education policies released, at global level, by the institutional Catholic Church since 1965 when the first of such policies was released. The paper also utilizes important information on Catholic schooling from various documents providing critical reflections and commentaries on Catholic educational policy issues such as; books, journals, letters on Catholic education and others.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Catholic Education and the Historical Background of Educational Provision in Zambia

An assessment of the historical context of Western education in Zambia indicates that the provision of education in general and Catholic education in particular had passed through three major stages namely; education under the British South Africa Company (B.S.A.C) (1890-1924), education under the British colonial government (1925-1963) and education after independence (1964 to date) when missionary groups in general and the Catholics in particular, strived to regain control of education from the newly formed Zambian state at independence (Carmody, 2002).
The Catholic church contributed greatly to providing education to the masses in all the three major stages of educational indicated above. This is because, in the first stage, it is evident that the Catholic church was responsible for pioneering Western education in what was then known as Northern Rhodesia (Snelson, 1974; Kelly, 1999; Carmody, 2004; O’Brien, 2006). This was done by the White Fathers in Northern Zambia and the Jesuits in the Southern part of Zambia. The primary aim of this form of education was to enhance the conversion of the indigenous people to Catholic Christianity (Guillon, 1975).

In the second stage, the British colonial government was not very keen to provide higher education to the indigenous people for fear of enhancing revolts against the colonial administration hence its antagonism to the provision of this form of education to the indigenous people (Snelson, 1974). However, contrary to the prevailing situation at the time, Catholic education had no restrictions to the type of education offered to the indigenous people as the education it offered ranged from low to high levels and was mostly of moderate to high quality, as long as the indigenous people showed willingness to convert to Catholic Christianity (Snelson, 1974). This is because the Catholic church viewed the schools as an important means of conversion and church growth. It is for this reason that Henkel (1989) argues that in the early years of Catholicism in Northern Rhodesia, the schools were means to an end, that they were means of disseminating the Catholic faith to all.
The third stage is characterised by a major setback in terms of control of education. This was after the formation of the new nation state of Zambia in 1964. This was enhanced by the extreme inevitable spirit of nationalism enabled by the newly formed nation state of Zambia which took over control or administration of most schools formerly administered by missionaries and Catholic schools were not an exception (Carmody, 2002). The Zambian government administered most schools through the Ministry of Education but a few were still under missionaries especially the Catholic church (Carmody, 2002). In order to work well with the missionaries in terms of the provision of education to the people, the Zambian government went into an educational partnership with all the Christian missionary groups in the country after 1964 and this was the beginning of the period of a long educational partnership particularly between successive Zambian governments and the Catholic church. In the years following 1964, the Catholic Church was determined to retain control of the schools lost to the government at independence and to achieve this, Catholic authorities ensured that Catholic schools gave special attention to maintenance of high educational standards in the schools (Mwanakatwe, 1968). This partly meant ensuring their Catholicity by promoting the ‘religious mission’ and ‘academic mission’ alongside other key issues forming the ethos of a Catholic school. This also meant expanding Catholic educational provision in Zambia such that by 1967, there were nineteen Catholic secondary schools, nine of which were for boys and ten for girls. In the same year, the Catholic agency provided roughly 21 percent of all secondary school places, 16 per cent for boys and 31
per cent for girls in grant-aided schools (Carmody, 2002). The numbers of Catholic educational institutions has continued to rise such that currently in Zambia the church owns and manages many grant-aided primary and secondary schools, grant-aided Teacher’s Colleges of Education and grant-aided institutions under Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training Authority (TEVETA) (Pastoral Letter from Catholic Bishops of Zambia on Education, 2013). The Catholic church is also involved in community schools, skills training centers, orphanages and Cheshire Homes nationwide. This confirms the Catholic church’s undisputed contribution to educational provision at different levels in Zambia since the 1890s (O’Brien, 2006).

2.2 Catholic ‘Declaration on Christian Education’: Global Implications for Catholic Schools

Before the Second Vatican Council of 1965, Catholicism had a rather negative approach to modernity. Catholic educational history reveals that Catholic schools were originally constructed and constituted as citadels or fortresses for the preservation of faith (Catholicism) in a hostile external environment. This was characterised by a dominant Protestant order, continuing anti-Catholic prejudice and more recently a growing influence of secularism (Grace, 2002: 7). The dialectic of retreat from what the church believed to be a very hostile world characterized its policy on external relations. The Second Vatican Council was therefore the most significant event in the modern era of the Catholic church because it enabled the church a chance to redefine its position vis-à-vis its relations to the world.
The Second Vatican Council was instrumental in the renewal of the church especially its inner life, educational provision and relationship with other Christian traditions, religions and the world at large (Maureen, 2002:17). After this council the church had embraced a spirit of ecumenism at almost all levels of cultural and social life hence the more favorable relations it has gained over the years at a global level.

Since its inception in Zambia in the 1890s, the Catholic church adopted ‘the school’ as its main tool for evangelisation of its Catholic faith. From a Catholic perspective, this was and is still a very important vocation ascribed to Catholic schools today not only in Zambia but globally because it hinges on one of the main Catholic missions grounded in spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ to all everyone in the world (Miller, 2006:16). This is partly the reason why the Catholic church is also known as ‘the universal church’ as implied by the name ‘Catholic church’.

In order to ensure that schools worldwide and those in Zambia in particular adhere to the important vocation outlined above, in 1965 at the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic church unanimously published ‘Catholic education policy’ in order to guide Catholic educational provision worldwide (Schmiesing, 2004: 1). Catholic education policy is contained in an important Catholic educational document known as the ‘Declaration on Christian Education’ (Schmiesing, 2004: 1). This declaration has been a key document concerning Catholic education for Catholics and others interested in the welfare of Catholic education for more than forty years now and is continuously adapted to contemporary educational concerns by the educational wings of the Catholic Church.
Catholic education policy provides everything there is to know concerning Catholic education. The Catholic declaration on Christian education contains all Catholic ideas, attitudes and most importantly, Catholic educational values adhered to in Catholic institutions globally (Schmiesing, 2004: 1). Hence, all Catholic education institutions are obliged to operate in accordance with the educational directives provided in this document because it represents an official Catholic Church stance on all matters of education. Some important educational directives given in this Catholic education policy includes the need for:

all Catholic schools to ensure the centrality of Christ in the school ideology, inculcating a supernatural vision in Catholic schools, total-formation of the human person, inculcation of a sense of responsibility in the learners, mutual respect as a Catholic school ideology, open-admission policy for Catholic and non-Catholics, respect for culture, inclusion of parents in all school related matters, the Catholic school mission statement, prioritizing the poor and marginalized in educational provision, link with the local church, Catholic schools as epitomes of communion and community, teamwork in Catholic schools, student-teacher interactions in Catholic schools, the Catholic schools as places of high academic achievement, good educational leadership and a good schwool curriculum which includes Religious Education (RE) (Miller, 2006: 19; Schmiesing, 2004: 4).

It is only through adhering to the directives highlighted above that Catholic schools assume their genuine Catholic identity as failure to do so entails the undesired deviation from the desired identity based on Catholic educational values and principles. The achievement of genuine Catholic educational identity in all Catholic education
institutions globally would be an important contribution by such educational institutions to the Catholic church’s ‘religious mission’ as such a mission is definitely a plus to the church’s goal of disseminating the gospel of Jesus Christ to all people worldwide.

It is evident from the 1965 Catholic ‘Declaration on Christian Education’ that forming part of the features that give a school a Catholic identity are various aspects such as:

- inspired by a supernatural vision, founded on a Christian anthropology, animated by communion and community, spirit of teamwork, cooperation between educators and bishops, interaction of students and teachers, a good physical environment, imbued with a Catholic worldview throughout the curriculum, love for wisdom and passion for truth, faith culture and life, sustained by gospel witness, hiring committed Catholics and transparent witness of life (Miller, 2006: 19).

The characteristics portrayed above are significant and together they give a school a genuine Catholic identity. It is also important to emphasise that at the core of the characteristics is the issue of evangelising non-Catholics in conjunction with the task of the total formation of the human person. This is in accordance with Catholic education policy which stresses that, true education aims at the formation of the human person with respect to his ultimate goal, and simultaneously with respect to the good of those societies of which, as man, he is a member, and in whose responsibilities, as an adult, he or she will share (Abbott, 1966: 639). It is clear from Catholic education policy that all Catholic schools are challenged to shape their educational philosophy into a practical theology that would direct the ethos of a Catholic school (Welbank, 2011: 172).
2.3 The Catholic Church and Provision of Quality Education in Zambia

In Zambia almost everyone associates high standard and quality education to Catholic education because of aspects such as; high teacher motivation, good leadership, high quality students, high learning achievement, desired curriculum, good infrastructure, total development of the learners (intellectual and spiritual), good learning environment and others evident in Catholic schools. This is the good reputation Catholic education has earned over the years among the people in Zambia (Kabwe, 2010; Chisempere, 1993). One can confidently state that this is a positive educational trend that has been experienced in Catholic schools for many years since their inception in the early 1890s.

The introduction of Catholic education policy in 1965 known as the ‘Declaration on Christian Education’, strengthened desirable educational characteristics in Catholic schools because unlike never before, the Catholic Church began to provide guidance through this educational philosophy to its schools regarding how they were to go about maintaining a distinctly Catholic ethos or identity that people were so content with and desired so much. Because of what might be perceived as quality education provided in Zambian Catholic educational institutions, the majority of Zambian parents, including government officials choose Catholic schools over other schools for their children’s schooling (The Post, 2011). The Catholic church is a dependable and reliable partner of the Zambian government vis-à-vis the provision of quality education in the country as evidenced by the Zambian bishops’ statement of 2004 which noted that education in a very special way, is a concern of the Catholic church and that the church looked forward to its continued partnership with government in the provision of quality education (Empowerment Through Education, 2004: 12).
2.4 The Nature of the Educational Partnership between the Catholic Church and Government

The outcome of the educational partnership between the Catholic church and government has not greatly favoured the Catholic institutions. This is because years of reflection especially at the level of Zambia’s changing educational policies since 1964 have not made the Catholic character of Catholic institutions self-evident. The process of this partnership in the provision of quality education to the Zambian people is further complicated by its own nature. Concerning the nature of this partnership, it can be stated that Catholic institutions are operating in light of directives both from the Catholic church and the Zambian Ministry of Education (Carmody, 2007). Moreover, elaborating on the nature of this educational partnership, Carmody further contends that, in this partnership, usually government somewhat imposes its policy decisions on all educational institutions in the country including Catholic schools. This confirms an educational agenda of a partnership that was and is still ever becoming more one-sided in the Zambian setting (Carmody, 1999; Carmody, 2007). A confirmation of a one-sided partnership is evidenced by the aspect that, since its inception, the educational values from the Zambian national education policies mostly have an upper hand over those from Catholic education policies. This has led to the undesired identity change experienced by Catholic education institutions over the years in Zambia (Kabwe, 2010; Chisempere, 1993). The institutional identity change experienced by Catholic education institutions resulting from imbalanced educational partnership between the two parties above is considered unfortunate or disappointing by the Catholic church and those concerned with the welfare of these educational institutions (Kabwe, 2010).
2.5 Review of Related Studies in Catholic Schooling

From the United States of America (USA), consideration is given to the work by Greeley and Rossi (1966) entitled ‘The Education of Catholic Americans’. It investigated the complex question of ‘the extent to which Catholic education impacted on the religious beliefs and practices of adolescents and adults’. Study findings revealed that for all practical purposes, the religious impact of Catholic education is limited to those who come from highly religious families. Also revealed by the study is the aspect that Catholic education is virtually wasted on the three-fourths of those in Catholic schools because of the absence of sufficiently religious family milieu.

Also from the USA is a study by James Cibulka (1982) entitled ‘Inner City Private Elementary Schools’. The study examined the people that utilised private elementary schools (were Catholic schools belong) from inner city places in a number of American cities. The study revealed that “the families which used the schools were larger and poorer than the average American family and were more likely to be headed by a single parent and that more than half of the families were not Catholic” (Cibulka, 1982: 11). The study also revealed that in these schools, students generally performed at higher achievement levels than students in neighboring public schools”. The other revelation from the study was that “the inner-city elementary schools had highly motivated and dedicated teachers, about 30 percent of whom were members of religious orders” (Cibulka, 1982: 11).

This review of related studies also considers Arthur’s (1995) study. This study was conducted in England and it involved a sustained engagement with historical and contemporary documentation on Catholic education policy, small scale fieldwork enquiry and creation of
theoretical modeling of types of Catholic schools. The study revealed that despite the external academic indicators of success, Catholic schools were losing their distinctive sense of mission and that in the changed educational and policy contexts of the 1980s and 1990s in England. The study further revealed that Catholic bishops were failing to give clear leadership on the distinctive values of Catholic education. Furthermore, the study revealed that the Catholic community in England and Wales was no longer united on purposes and objectives and that in the face of growing state intervention in educational policy and practice, Catholic schools were becoming institutions practically indistinguishable from those under the Local Education Authority (LEA) control (Arthur, 1995: 253).

3.0 Methodology

This study was qualitative in terms of approach and was a descriptive survey design hence the study was a qualitative descriptive survey. It was justified to use qualitative research in this study because the overall intention of the study was the development of extensive narrative understanding of the main concern of the study (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983: 20). The study was grounded in document analysis of Catholic educational policies, books and other key documents on Catholic education in Zambia and worldwide. This was achieved through engagement with Catholic education policies, books and other key documents on Catholic education in Zambia and globally. The qualitative data obtained from the secondary sources indicated above in the study were analysed descriptively using qualitative thematic categorisation procedures (Mayring, 2000: 5). Of special concern to this study was data which provided answers to the question, ‘what is the definition of a Catholic school?’ or ‘what is meant by the term ‘Catholic school?’
4.0 Findings and Discussion

As indicated above, the intention of this study was to investigate ‘the definition of a Catholic school’ or ‘what is meant by the term ‘Catholic school’. In this regard, the study revealed the following as findings:

a) The idiosyncratic features or characteristics of Catholic schools provide the basis for their unique identity globally. Therefore, it is such features that combine together to form the definition of such education institutions as ‘Catholic schools’. In other words, it is such idiosyncratic features which combine together to act as a basis for the holistic meaning of the term ‘Catholic school’.

b) There are various features or characteristics which combine to enhance a holistic understanding of the definition of a Catholic school or which provide the actual meaning of the term ‘Catholic school’. The following are some of them:

1.1 The Evangelisation Mission of Catholic Schools

This is one of the main features of Catholic education worldwide and it concerns the ‘evangelisation mission’ of the schools. This is because the schools are perceived as extensions of the Catholic Church when it comes to this mission. The importance granted to the evangelisation mission of the schools entails that such schools share in the evangelising mission of the larger institutional Catholic church” (Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988: 76). Therefore, evangelism of the Catholic faith is at the core of Catholic education and is symbolised by the learners’ full initiation in
Catholic doctrine because it is only after such initiation that people are baptised as Catholic Christians. In line with the aforementioned, Haldane (1996: 133), opines that “the primary function of a Catholic school is to provide forms of education through which the essential doctrines and devotions of Catholicism are transmitted and the provision of this education is a non-negotiable duty”. Therefore, forming a major part of the meaning of the term ‘Catholic School’ points to the evangelisation mission of such schools.

1.2 The Total-formation of People in Catholic Schools

The ‘total-formation’ of the human person is also a key feature of Catholic schooling. This involves recognition that human persons have different dimensions involving the physical, moral, intellectual and spiritual dimensions and also the enhancement of a balanced development in all these separate dimension. Therefore, Catholic education has a specific mission of enhancing the total-formation of the human person (Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988; Vatican Letter on Catholic Education, 2006; Konstant, 1996; Grace, 2002). In line with the aforementioned, Sullivan (2004: 14) argues that in Catholic educational contexts, the issue of total-formation of the human person is actually perceived as a sacred right which all Catholic youth should not be deprived of at all educational levels. This aspect is yet another important aspect forming part of what is meant by the term ‘Catholic School’.
1.3 Open-admission Policy in Catholic Schools

Forming one of the essential features of a Catholic school is its openness to all people. This implies that Catholic schools are ready to admit anyone in their system. In relation to this Helene (2005: 15), posits that “Catholic education is not confined to any one nation, race or class, nor is it the exclusive possession of highly gifted minds”. With such an admission policy in place these schools usually have a student populace involving learners that are not Catholic. This enables these schools to have a twofold task, that is, to ensure that they nurture whatever religious beliefs held by children within the school context as well as maintaining a distinctive Catholic focus by virtue of their being Catholic schools. Therefore, the term ‘Catholic school’ partly entails schools that have an open-admission policy.

1.4 Parental Participation in the Education of Children in Catholic Schools

Among the various important features of Catholic education is ‘parental participation in the education of their children’. This is because in these schools, parents are recognised as very important players in the education of children because among other things, they are the providers of life to the children, who are considered as the main clients in this form of education. According to the Vatican Congregation for Catholic education (1988: 37), parents are actually recognised as the first and principle educators of their children. Therefore,
the role played by parents in Catholic education is vital and almost impossible to replace. In order to enhance the involvement of parents in the education of their children, Catholic schools set up various structures within their systems such as PTA, Sports Days and others. As a way of recognising the importance of parents as primary educators of their children, “educators and policy makers in Catholic schools should always consult them on important educational policy matters” (Short, 2003: 231). Their role is exclusively reserved for them and nobody else within Catholic school contexts and hence the reason why this feature of such schools forms part of what is meant by a ‘Catholic School’.

1.5 Preferential Option for the Poor in Catholic Schools

Among the central features of Catholic education globally is ‘preferential option for the poor and marginalised’ in educational provision at all educational levels. This feature of Catholic education aims to provide educational services to those in need. This is because according to Catholic Education Service (1997: 25), “Catholic schools are particularly sensitive to the call for a more just society and they try to make their own contribution towards its realization through their concern for the poor and marginalised in society”. The sensitivity to the call for justice in Catholic schools involves educating the learners such that they become socially responsible and this partly includes developing their sense of solidarity with the
poor and marginalised in the school’s immediate environments. This aspect is echoed by Grace (2002: 180) when he argues that this aspect is more important in our contemporary world were in most societies, “education has become a commodity on the market accessed only by the rich to the detriment of the poor”. Therefore, through its schools, the Catholic church is obliged to serve the poor, marginalised and disadvantaged people in society. This sacred obligation for the Catholic Church is justified by the fact that “education is about the service of others rather than the service of self” (Grace, 2002: 183). This feature also forms part of what defines such schools as ‘Catholic Schools’.

1.6 The link between the Catholic School and the Local Catholic Church

Catholic schools across the world are supposed to be ‘linked to a local Catholic church’ because such schools are not supposed to function in isolation from the Catholic church. Therefore, cooperation between Catholic educators and bishops is also perceived as a feature of Catholic education. In relation to this important feature, it can be stated that, for Catholic education to function properly, there is need for the contribution of many agents of education. This is because according to Miller (2006: 6), the Catholicity of Catholic schools depends largely on the bonds of ecclesial communion between bishops and Catholic educators since these people are supposed to help one another in carrying out the task to which they are mutually
committed. The link between Catholic educators and bishops is so fundamental to the life of such schools that it forms part of implication of the term ‘Catholic School’.

1.7 Catholic Schools and Teamwork among Stakeholders

‘Teamwork’ among the stakeholders of Catholic education is a significant feature of Catholic schooling. This is meant to enable them develop a willingness to collaborate among themselves as people with common educational goals. Through collaboration such stakeholders of Catholic education are capable of functioning as a team. This is because, together as a team, they are much more likely to achieve more in terms of their Catholic educational goals. Therefore, all stakeholders of Catholic education need to work as a team for the achievement of Catholic educational goals (Miller, 2006; Arthur, 1994; Bryk et al., 1993). The communion of all stakeholders of Catholic educational provision is what fosters the creation of what is known as a genuine Catholic school community. This kind of also promotes scholastic solidarity (Arthur, 1994: 27). In Catholic schools, cooperation or team work among stakeholders is not a question of convenience but a partnership based on the Catholic faith itself. This aspect is yet another forming part of what is meant by the term ‘Catholic School’.
1.8 The Catholic-teacher as a Feature of Catholic Education

The issue of ‘the Catholic teacher’ can be considered as an outstanding feature of Catholic schools globally. This is because a Catholic teacher is not an ordinary person. In fact everything about a Catholic teacher should be extraordinary. Catholic teachers “are individuals that are baptised and through baptism have become sons and daughters of the Father, brothers/sisters of Jesus and friends of the Holy Spirit” (Pastoral Letter from Catholic Bishops of Zambia on Education, 2013: 7). As a consequence of their baptism, Catholic teachers are closely associated with ‘the mission’ of the Catholic Church which partly entails the important aspect of “bearing witness to the Christian faith in their words and deeds” the (Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988: 71). Also forming part of the outcomes of the baptism of Catholic teachers is their confirmation in the Catholic faith. This implies that through their confirmation Catholic teachers are obliged to take full responsibility of being disciples and witnesses to Christ within the community of the Catholic Church as well as in their ordinary lives which also includes their work as Catholic teachers (Pastoral Letter from Catholic Bishops of Zambia on Education, 2013: 7). Therefore, the aspect of the Catholic teacher forms part of what term ‘Catholic school’ implies.
1.9 Academic Excellence in Catholic Schools

‘Academic excellence’ is an important feature of Catholic education. In many societies in the world today, Catholic schools make a great effort to remain places of high academic achievement (Carmody, 1992; Grace, 2002). This has contributed to the high regard accorded to the participation of the Catholic church in educational provision by different governments worldwide. For instance, in Zambia the Catholic church is a dependable and reliable partner of the government in terms of educational provision at different educational levels and its educational contribution is highly regarded due to its association with high academic achievement on the part of the learners (Ministry of Education, 1997; Republic of Zambia, 2002; Carmody, 2003; Kabwe, 2010; Chisempere, 1993). In the same lines, Grace (2002: 181), states that for various reasons including the prospect of public recognition and achievement in the market curriculum, Catholic schools have over the years around the world gained and strived to sustain a reputation for excellence for good examination results. Therefore, academic excellence forms part of what the term ‘Catholic School’ entails.

1.10 Competent Educational Leadership in Catholic Schools

‘Competent educational leadership’ is also an important feature of Catholic schooling. This is because as Earl (2007: 2), observes, “there are a specific set of competences encompassing the knowledge and skills expected of a Catholic
school administrator who was well prepared”. It is a major requirement for Catholic school administrators to have competences related to educational leadership roles, managerial leadership roles and spiritual leadership roles respectively. According to Earl (2007: 2), a Catholic school administrator should build upon the solid foundation provided by educational and managerial expertise to also foster the spiritual and faith development of all members of the Catholic school community. This feature of Catholic education contributes to what the term ‘Catholic school’ means.

1.11 **High-level Discipline and Catholic Education**

The ‘exhibition of high levels of discipline’ by all within Catholic school settings is yet another important feature of such schools. The high levels of discipline exhibited by the learners, teachers and Catholic school administrators within the school settings forms an important part of the school ethos in these institutions. In order to ensure the maintenance of proper discipline in Catholic schools, there is close cooperation among the school administrators, teachers and the learners. Another dimension to the aspect of discipline in Catholic schools is that it is handled in the light of the Gospel message. This is because of “the tireless intention, within the schools, to perceive almost anything from a spiritual or religious perspective in order to enable growth of the spiritual aspect in the learners” (Flynn, 1993: 24). Moreover, regarding the high disciplinary levels evident
in Catholic schools, according to Flynn (1993: 24) “people that visit such schools comment on the courtesies extended to them by both students and staff”. Flynn (1993: 24), further contends that in Catholic schools, “students make eye contact and greet people in a gentle and respectful manner and without prompting the students, they hold doors open for guests, teachers and each other”. The aspect of the exhibition of discipline in such schools forms part of the definition of a ‘Catholic School’.

1.12 Consecrated Members of Catholic Religious Congregations in Catholic Schools

The use of consecrated members of Catholic religious congregations is also an important feature of Catholic schools. These people take on different roles as they may be teachers or administrators within Catholic schools. These are people such as; priests, Christian brothers, sisters or nuns and others. Catholic schools are under the direction of religious congregations and consecrated members from such congregations. According to the Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education (1988), these consecrated members of religious congregations “enrich the educational climate by bringing to it the values of their own religious communities”. Therefore, such people make a contribution to the ‘educational climate of the school’. Part of the recognition of a school as Catholic, is the inclusion of consecrated members of Catholic religious congregations.
1.13 Religious Education in Catholic Schools

R.E. is a central feature of Catholic schooling. It is a fundamental component of the school’s ethos. This is because religious instruction forms an important part of the school’s ethos in such schools. As pointed out earlier, at the core of a Catholic schools’ programme is an evangelism mission and the Catholic school is well placed for this task through religious instruction in the school curriculum. Therefore, just alongside the Catholic church and its entire membership, the Catholic school provides possibilities for catechesis through religious instruction. Without the creation of possibilities for catechesis, a school would not be fit to be called a Catholic school, no matter how good its teaching reputation may be in other subjects in the school curriculum. In line with this the Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education (1988: 47), posits this aspect is a special character of the Catholic school and there is need to ensure that the quality of the religious instruction integrated into the overall education of the learners is good. This feature of Catholic education forms part of what is meant by a Catholic school.

5.0 Conclusion

As indicated above, the concept of a ‘Catholic school’ is not a simplistic one but a highly complex or multi-faceted one. This is owing to the various features that combine to form a holistic identity of such educational institutions. A definition of a Catholic school which is grounded in only one or two aspects of Catholic schooling is insufficient to
provide a holistic understanding of that which constitutes Catholic education in its entirety. Such definitions are partial and lead to what may be known as partial-Catholic identity of Catholic schools. Therefore, an ideal or proper definition of a Catholic school needs to include most if not all the major features constituting the holistic identity of such schools. This is because the holistic identity of such schools is grounded in a combination of prototypical Catholic educational features or characteristics as provided in the various Catholic educational policy documents.

As portrayed in the paper, an insufficient definition of a Catholic school should be discouraged because such schools are complex incorporating various key features which combine to give the schools their genuine Catholic identity. Such features of Catholic schooling further combine to act as a basis for the definition of a ‘Catholic School’. Moreover, it is the same features of Catholic schooling that act a basis for their Catholic identity worldwide. Finally, a holistic-perspective rather than a partial-perspective is important in defining a Catholic school because such a perspective involves various Key Catholic educational features when defining the term ‘Catholic School’. A holistic perspective is the most sufficient perspective because the inclusion of various Catholic educational features in the definition of ‘a Catholic school’ is what guarantees a holistic understanding of the definition of a Catholic school or what the term ‘Catholic School’ entails.

References


