

*Review*

# The dilemma of teacher professionalism and commitment in Roman Catholic founded secondary schools in Uganda

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**This article examines the issue of teacher professionalism and teacher commitment in Catholic founded secondary schools in Uganda. Using 15 “Elite” Roman Catholic Secondary Schools, the study tries to establish the mortifiers of professionalism and commitment in catholic secondary schools in Kampala Arch-Diocese, Uganda. The paper concludes that there are factors outside the Catholic school set up such as the socio and economic constraints and intrinsic factors within the Roman Catholic school system which create challenges to teacher professionalism and commitment such as lack of orientation of teachers and school administrators into Roman Catholic philosophy of education.**

**Keywords:** Professionalism, Commitment, Catholic and Catholic philosophy of education

## INTRODUCTION

Among the Ugandan educated class and education in general, Catholic schools and the teachers therein are becoming a major subject for discussion. In Catholic circle, the major debate centers around the issue of values, discipline of teachers and students and the implied survival of the catholic tradition in these schools. The supposed prime movers of this tradition seem to have drifted (Kafuuma Report, 2005), and salient among the reasons for this drift is the commercialization of education by the teachers and head teachers in Catholic Church schools. The issue of professionalism and commitment in most sub Saharan African (SSA) was not challenging during the colonial and in the immediate post independence years 1960-1971 (Ssekamwa, 1997). The advent of political turmoil in most African countries in the mid 1960s, greatly impacted professionalism and commitment in almost all spheres of life in SSA. In the case of Uganda for example, all categories of professional and non-professionals, they begun taking a more liberal and materialistic stance towards private and

public morality. The Teachers, medical doctors, engineers and others were either forced to abandon their work and free into exile or do other work not related to their professions. (Nsereko-Munakukaama, 1997; Akankwasa, 1997). The teaching profession was the most impacted for example in all countries which experienced civil wars teachers were forcefully conscripted either in the rebel or government armies as instructors, translators or commanders. Examples are in Uganda, Mozambique, Sierra Leone Liberia, Congo and Angola. The economic and political crisis had both a direct and indirect impact on almost all countries in SSA. In Kenya, which did not directly experience war, war and economic strife in neighboring countries greatly suffocated educational growth as many people especially those in boarder areas took to cross boarder trade. In other countries such as Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Congo and South Sudan many teachers and pupils were either conscripted into war or abandoned school completely. In the aftermath of the war most schools had traumatized teachers teaching traumatized learners in which case their commitment and professionalism was greatly constrained. ( Akumu, 2003; Ayot, 2004).

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During the years of turmoil, the Catholic Church was very pivotal in keeping formal education in existence. In spite of the many challenges created by the civil strife, most of SSA Roman Catholic secondary schools (RCSS) remained as salient custodians of professionalism and commitment by almost all the different education stakeholders. However, the liberalization of education in the 1990s created a new wave of a plethora of professional challenges for all education stakeholders those in catholic founded schools inclusive. The paper is centered on Schools in Kampala arch-diocese. Kampala archdiocese is comprised of five dioceses namely: Kampala Metropolitan, Kasana-Luwero, Kiyinda Mityana, Lugazi and Masaka Diocese. The Catholic Church in Kampala set up new schools many of which begun adopting the new neo-liberal for profit model. In the Catholic context this model implied:

- Employing teachers of all religious denominations with no orientation into catholic philosophy of education
- Catholic Church began employing head teachers with no background knowledge or orientation into Catholic educational doctrine.
- The Church began operating schools with no acceptable and adequate pedagogical and non pedagogical infrastructures this is mostly in war ravaged parts of Northern Uganda.
- In some instances, some catholic board members were not Roman Catholics. These on many occasions begun pursuing interests which are not aligned to the Catholic Church's philosophy of education.
- Secretariats and fathers in-charge of schools taking interest in only those schools that are well-off both financially and academically
- Tolerating errant heads of schools, as long as they paid diocesan funds to the education secretariat.

In the long run, there developed two categories of Roman Catholic secondary schools in Uganda. These include:

- The Government aided RCSS. These are schools originally founded by the missionaries in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, but were taken over by government immediately after Uganda gaining political independence, they are located on church land and the church has some little say in them. These were taken over by Government under the 1964 Education Act (Ssekamwa, 1997) NB: Some of these schools were just founded by the dioceses recently (in the 2000s) and given to government for aid.
  - The Roman Catholic private secondary schools, these are located on church land and are under the direct control of the diocese in which they are housed.
- These two school categories create two teacher professionalism/commitment challenges/dilemmas prevalent in the two different RCSS contexts.

## **History and Development of Catholic Education in Sub Saharan Africa, Uganda in particular**

A catholic school is any School established by the Catholic Church leadership, at any level, on Catholic land, with approval of the Diocesan Bishop. A Catholic founded secondary school is one canonically set up, authorized and recognized as such by the local ordinary of a given area of ecclesiastical jurisdiction (John Paul II, 1983: 145). It is characterized by a holistic concern to develop the whole person, its attention to religious and moral education of learners through prayer, the Eucharist and other sacraments along with devotions (McCluskey, 1962: 73-75, 80), and teaching by example, especially the behavioural example of staff, and cooperation with the local Ordinary through the Education Secretary (Peticlerc, 2002: 13-14). A Bishop according to the Decree on the Pastoral office of Bishops in the Church Vatican II, *Christus Dominus*, 28<sup>th</sup> October 1965 has a number of obligations which they fulfill through the different Diocesan organs such as the education secretariat, which in turn appoints and recruits teachers in its different educational institutions.

Catholic education in Sub Saharan Africa owes its origin to the early Catholic Missionaries namely; Fr. Simeon Lourdel and Brother Amans in 1879, who were French White Fathers (Ssekamwa, 1997). These were later on followed by the Mill –Hill Missionaries in 1895 who in 1902 founded the first Catholic high School in Uganda. This was followed by the White fathers Congregation founding another Catholic high School in 1906. Initial Catholic education aimed at teaching the African how to talk to his/her God, through prayer, recite the rosary, read some and very few selected Biblical texts and simple spiritual Literature such as Litany of the Virgin Mary. In academic and political circles, initial Catholic education is heavily criticized for producing docile, humble and politically lukewarm citizens for most of East Africa. (Ssekamwa, 1997). Currently the Catholic Church in Uganda runs 512 Kindergartens for 44807 Infants 3, 3850 [how many is this?] primary schools for 2,249801 pupils 559 secondary schools for 208,540 pupils 2 and Universities and 20 Seminaries and formation houses. (Catholic Church book of statistic 2006 L.M Agenzia Fides 24/4/2006 righe 26 parole 212)

The strength of Catholic education lies in the explicit academic performance of most of its salient Schools in Uganda. Catholic Secondary schools are ranked as top Ordinary and Advanced level schools. For example Namilyango College one of the First Mill –Hill founded schools for the last 5 years has been producing the best University entry candidates for Architecture, Uganda Martyrs Namugongo produces the best candidates for Human medicine, surgery and pharmacy, Mt St Mary's

Namagunga a Franciscan sisters founded girls school and St Mary's Kisubi a White Fathers and Brothers of Christian Instruction founded school produce the best candidates for electrical engineering. (MOEs Ug 2005-2010 )

The advent of formal schooling in Sub Saharan Africa in 1877 introduced a new dimension to education in this region. Prior to 1877 Uganda's education pivoted on three salient factors namely: the family, tribe and clan. Each tribe, clan and family determined the nature of knowledge, values and beliefs transmitted to the children and their respective age. Commitment and professionalism were explicitly and implicitly shown/manifested by the character, knowlegeability of people especially the adults of that society for example in almost all African societies immoral and seemingly unbecoming character was seen as failed education. With the introduction of formal education and the implied formal pedagogy trained or specialized teachers, formal or gazette educational institutions with well laid out structures such as head teachers, deputy head teachers and teachers were set up for most of SSA.

During the colonial era, professionalism and commitment in education institutions was not debatable. However, challenges begun appearing in Uganda's education system in 1971 during Amin's regime (Hansen and Twaddle, 1992). During this period, Asian, European and Some missionary teachers were expelled from Uganda creating a vacuum in all specialized professions teaching inclusive. The teaching profession in the entire education system Roman Catholic schools inclusive was invaded by government operatives, non qualified school dropouts or university graduates who had failed to get a more paying job else where. Teaching became a ladder to other jobs or professions (Mamdani, 1990; Kyemba, 1997; Karugire, 2003 )

### **Roman Catholic philosophy of education**

The current Catholic education in Uganda operates within the Catholic school mission character and identity, which accordingly continues to emanates from Jesus Christ's command to his Apostles and the Church "go, teach, make disciples" (Mt 28: 18-26). Therefore, the fundamental purpose of Catholic education is to articulate the Christian message and its inherent values, to cherish, keep and transmit the "culture of the sacred in the secular world" Vat II (Decree on Christian education Vatican II Gravissimum Educationis) Teachers in Roman Catholic schools though trained in the same teacher training institutions with other teachers, "*constitute an active apostolate* " Their professionalism and commitment are linked to their dual role; namely, transmitters of the worldly and divine knowledge and truth.

### **Professionalism and Commitment in Kampala Arch-diocesan Secondary Schools**

Talbert and McLaughlin (1996) define professionalism as "the internalized beliefs regarding professional obligations, attributes, interactions, attitudes, values, and role behaviors." Professionalism means that teachers fully accept the challenges of teaching which are reflected in the three primary indicators of professionalism namely; responsibility, respect and risk taking.

In an exclusive/strict sense, the term "profession" refers to a complex social phenomenon "that provides a special service to the community based on accumulated knowledge, skill and wisdom. It also controls the entry qualifications and work standards of its members (Farrant, 1999: 224). In a liberal/inclusive sense, however, the term "profession" simply denotes one's line of work, career or occupation (Arends et al., 1998). Arends et al. (1998) have therefore defined teaching descriptively as a "professional career".

The most important aspect of a profession/career is its purpose; for the teaching profession, the purpose is "to educate" (Langford, 1978; Arends et al., 1998). Nkata (2005) and Akankwasa (1997) therefore contend that teachers are the primary agents of the education system. Every profession has also its distinctive identity; that is, the ideals according to which it's functioning can be measured. For teaching, these ideals are said to be both technical (teaching-learning chores) and philosophical (values) (Farrant, 1999). Teachers therefore specialize in academic/subject matter, learners, pedagogy, classroom management, curriculum, assessment, and related routines (Tickle, 2000). As such, teacher practices should also go beyond classroom instruction to include such aspects as student guidance and counseling (Bukenyu, 2007). A professional acts "in a spirit of vocation, being convinced that what one is doing is what one is called to do" (Tournier, 1957: 208). Langford (1978) and Datta (1984) indeed argue that "professional" is often used in contrast with "amateur" or "layman"; professionals are expected to be better at what they do than amateurs.

True professionalism in a Catholic environment entails a number of things namely;

- Making a school a place of Godliness and good up bringing of the learners
- Giving knowledge and skill that will enable the learners to live useful lives in life
- Fostering the learners awareness of their responsibility to God and their neighbor
- Forming persons with a right conscience (this is very vital given the nature of society today; where many individuals are thieves, corrupt and morally deficient in matters of sex, money and their general spirituality).
- Forming the Character of the learners so that

society can be proud of them later in life.

- Administrators who are a reflection of the Catholic Church and not day time Catholics and night time wizards.

The above issues are not to be in isolation of the Church's mission. The Church is pastoral and missionary in nature. It keeps and guides the deposit of faith as a mission given to all the baptized by the divine master. This mission is the duty of all who are directly or indirectly involved in the church's projects be they secular or spiritual because at the end of the day their goal and end is one; which is the realization of the Ultimate or the Summum bonum. This is clearly shown in the Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the modern world (*Vatican II Gaudium et Spes, 7<sup>th</sup> December 1965*), *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity (Vatican II Ad Gentes Divinitus, 7<sup>th</sup> December, 1965)* and *The Catechism of the Catholic Church 2003*.

Professionalism in this paper also implies teachers' adherence to the code of conduct, which pivots on the virtues of respect, honesty, integrity, trust, equality, service, fairness, and tolerance. On the other hand, in this article teachers' commitment implies dedication, voluntarism, development of learners not only their minds but also their hearts and spirits. Keeping the catholic values and beliefs has become challenging because of the moral, economic, social and even political crisis for most of Africa. Africa, though rich in human and natural resources, many are still left to wallow in poverty and misery, war and conflict, crisis and chaos. Many of these are caused by the conspiracy of the local and foreign leaders (Trabbic, 2009: 11). This crisis has also been extended to the teaching profession especially teachers in catholic schools. On average a teacher in a government secondary school earns twice that in a catholic founded private school. For example teachers in government schools earn approximately 600,000 Ug. Shillings (300 US dollars) while their counter parts in Roman Catholic founded private schools earn 300000 Uganda shillings (150 US dollars) (Ministry of Education and sports Uganda records 2000-2010 financial years.) While Catholic secondary schools in Uganda are financed from the students' tuition, public schools are financed by the government.

In examining and discussing the dilemma of teacher professionalism and commitment in a Roman Catholic school paradigm, it was imperative to examine the nature of teachers and head teachers of Catholic founded Secondary schools. The following are their salient features. Majority of the head teachers are practicing Roman Catholics; that is, they are married in church, receive sacraments and regularly attend Mass. From the interviews, it was revealed by 90% of the teachers that they are baptized Roman Catholic but it was also noted that not all of them are practicing Roman Catholics; 40% of them confessed that they are nominal Roman Catholics. Many go to Church, attend Mass and even

pretend to receive Sacraments because they have to safe-guard their jobs. It was further revealed that 20% of the head teachers are either men or women religious or Roman Catholic priests. On the other hand, it was also revealed that 80% of the lay head teachers 5% are ex-nuns and 2 ex- religious brothers. It was further revealed that 53% of the head teachers are ex-seminarians and 20 are laity with no prior religious formation. This has an implication for issues of professionalism and commitment in a Roman Catholic school paradigm. In some schools the level of professionalism and commitment is so high while in others it is quite low.

### **Enhancers or indicators of professionalism and commitment in a Roman Catholic school paradigm**

The different stakeholders, namely head teachers, teachers and school chaplains in fifteen Roman Catholic founded schools were asked to mention what they felt are the possible indicators of professionalism and commitment in their schools. The following were identified as the salient ones;

- Attending church prayers on very regular basis and encouraging students to do the same. This was revealed by 89% of the 15 interviewed head teachers.
- Putting on a rosary and encouraging students to do the same. This was revealed by 73% of the 30 interviewed teachers.
- Praying before and after the lesson out of personal convicting revealed by 100% of the interviewed 30 teachers.
- Purposefully transmitting the Roman Catholic values and beliefs, such as love for the Virgin Mary and the saints. Noted by 98% of the interviewed 10 school chaplains
- Agreeing to do extra work without pay 90% of the interviewed head teachers
- Appropriate dress code ( in the case of female teachers the dress or skirt should be prudently long) 54% of the interviewed head teachers
- Teaching full time in one school.
- Encouraging students to pray regularly ( personal and communal prayers )
- The teacher and school administrators acting as imitators of Christ or the saints

### **Indicators of non professionalism or commitment in a catholic school**

- Superficial spirituality dictated by fear of loss of one's job. This was revealed by 100% of the interviewed teachers.
- Mechanical approach to work (doing almost all class and out of class work to please the superiors. This

was revealed by 80% of the teachers in Catholic founded schools.

- Head teachers complained that majority of the teachers in Catholic founded schools cannot work without supervision. For example one head teacher reported that, *“Teachers cannot take personal initiative to collect or encourage their students to collect liter from either the school compound or the classroom”*

- Being forced to attend prayers. This revelation was corroborated by the revelation about the nature of teachers and head-teachers, 40 % of whom had revealed that they are nominal Roman Catholics. Their pursuit of the corporeal end tended to annihilate professionalism and commitment in a Roman Catholic school paradigm

- Teacher neglect of attending church services together with students at school

### Reflection on professionalism and commitment in a Catholic founded school

If we consider the etymology of education which are *educare, educere and ducere* we note that education means leading, nurturing and bringing up children. In our case, the teachers commitment to this cause would help much in alleviating the many challenges Africa is facing many of which emanate from unprofessional conduct by those in authority. Many parent either because of the nature of work they do or out of sheer negligence have abrogated their duty. Parenting and child rearing in most cases is done by the teachers in “*loco parentis*” (Flannery, 1992; Farrant, 1999). This implies that teacher commitment and professionalism is crucial for the survival of the Ugandan catholic community, since it is they who are to nurture “*tomorrow’s Roman catholic Church*” into responsible disciples of the word both in the secular and religious arenas. Highly useful values such as respect for oneself and other, democracy, fidelity and peace have to be inculcated in the people early in life by the parents but where parents are not in position top do this, teachers come in handy.

Though Catholic Church school employees are expected to work in spiritual- theistic paradigm, they are impacted and in pragmatic terms operate and compete within the secular world with its many challenges, such as poverty and ethical relativism in all its forms. The educational task in Catholic schools needs men and women of a dual nature. That is stern to their goals; operate within the Catholic paradigm and at the same time ready to face the challenges of the secular world, which on many occasions create challenges of conflicting loyalties between service to the church and personal gain. There is a debate about the concept of servant leadership and service this means that teachers in the catholic paradigm have to offer themselves as servants like their master was. This calls for educative education, which implies an education in which the teacher, teaches

while learning and the learner learns not mere schooling. The teacher should live what he/she teaches.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, is it found that there are factors outside the Catholic school set up such as the socio and economic constraints and intrinsic factors within the Roman Catholic school system which create challenges to teacher professionalism and commitment such as lack of orientation of teachers and school administrators into Roman Catholic philosophy of education.

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