

# 125 Years of Catholicism in Zambia: The History and Mission of the Church in the Provision of University Education

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## Abstract

This article is based on an inquiry of the 125 years of Catholicism in Zambia, with reference to the history and mission of the Roman Catholic Church in providing university education. The observable expansion of the church's involvement in university education has not received attention in academia and therefore needed analysis; as religion and scholarship have been devoid of the Christian university movement discourse in the country. Informed by interpretivism, the study followed an interpretative case study approach. Data were collected through document reviews and recorded interviews and were inductively analysed. The findings of the study revealed that the church has expanded its presence in the provision of university education, through the establishment of the Zambia Catholic University. The article contends that contrary to how the Catholic Church's involvement in education was portrayed, which was seen to be only centred on the church's involvement in primary and secondary education, the contemporary history of the church has transformed through the expansion of its mission to provide university education. The church has used religion as a resource to not only respond to societal needs but is now also using the university as a vehicle to promote the church and for integral development.

**Keywords:** Catholicism; history; mission; religious resource; university education

## Introduction

As the Catholic Church in Zambia concluded a year of celebration marking 125 years since the Church was established in the country, its bishops have said that while it was once a missionary Church, it is now a Church on mission (Catholic World Report 2017).



August 2016 marked 125 years of the Catholic Church's existence in Zambia, since its inception, when the first Catholic Missionaries (White Fathers) arrived in 1891 at Senga Hill at Mambwe-Mwela outstation of Mambwe Mission in the Archdiocese of Kasama. This historic event was marked by the launch of a year-long celebration of 125 years of Catholic faith in the country on 6 August 2016, with the final celebration held on 15 July 2017 in Lusaka.

Since its establishment, the history of the Catholic Church has received considerable attention in academia, with some scholars providing a general history of the church and others tracing histories of specific congregations and orders. For example, Hinfelaar (2004) traces the history of the Catholic Church in Zambia from 1895 to 1995, while Murphy (2003) focuses on the history of the Jesuits in the country. Other scholars have focused on the work of the church in the history of the country in other spheres, such as the provision of education (Carmody 2004), development (Mwale 2013), and politics (Hinfelaar 2009; Phiri 1992), among others.

While acknowledging the Catholic Church's renowned contribution to promoting health care through its numerous hospitals, clinics, health centres and hospices, and raising social consciousness among citizens through its social programmes, such as the promotion of justice and peace in the past 125 years<sup>1</sup>, this article delves into the history of the Catholic Church as a role player in the country's education sector. This inquiry arises from the observable reality of the church's new involvement in the provision of university education and the gaps in existing literature in church history because scholarship on the history of the church's involvement in education has been focusing on the lower forms and levels of education. For example, scholars such as Snelson (1974) have acknowledged that since the beginning of evangelisation in Zambia, the Catholic Church has always paid great attention to education. Carmody (2011) notes that for over a 100 years the Catholic Church in Zambia has endeavoured to offer a value-based education through engagement in formal education. Zulu (2014) also observes that after independence, when most of the schools were taken over by the government a few that remained under the control of the Catholic Church continued to produce excellent examination results at provincial and national levels.

In addition, Carmody (2000) explores the origins and development of the Catholic Church's involvement in Zambia's secular schooling system, using a secularisation lens and demonstrating that at primary level, the government's secularisation process resulted in the hand-over of the schools, while at secondary level, the process contributed to moulding a more ecumenical type of Catholic school. Other studies

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<sup>1</sup> The church's contribution in the provision of education and health care has left a reputation on the church to an extent that the majority of Zambians, when in need of good education and health care, go to Catholic schools and hospitals respectively (Impact Correspondent 2016).

(Carmody 2001; 2004; 2007; 2015; 2016) have analysed the roles, contributions, and dilemmas for Catholic education at primary and secondary school levels in the history of Zambia. Hambulo's study in 2016 on Catholic secondary education and identity reformation with reference to Zambia's Southern Province also followed Carmody's study, which focused on Catholic education.

All these studies, conducted on the history of the Catholic Church in education are devoid of its involvement in the provision of university education, thereby giving an incomplete picture of the discourse on religion and education in Zambia, especially that the Catholic Church has not only established universities in Zambia, but in other countries in the region as well, such as Malawi and Tanzania. It is for this reason that this article seeks to fill this gap in literature in the history of the church in the country's education by revisiting its history in education on the occasion of the church's celebration of 125 years of Catholicism in Zambia. By focusing on the Catholic Church, we acknowledge that the Christian university movement in Zambia is also driven by other Christian churches (mainline Protestant and Pentecostal churches), which have also contributed to the provision of university education. Therefore, the Catholic Church's involvement was the focus of this study, not only because the Church was among the earliest to expand its sphere in education, but also because of the celebrations to mark its 125 years of existence in Zambia, which provided us an opportunity to reflect what the church has done for the country.

The expansion of the church's mission is seen through the prism of religion as a resource for development, through the provision of university education. Hence, this article largely responds to Ter Haar and Ellis (2006), who point to religious resources that produce knowledge that could be beneficial to a community for development purposes. These include religious ideas (what people actually believe), religious practices (ritualistic behaviour), religious organisation (how religious communities are formed and how they function), as well as religious or spiritual experiences (such as the subjective experience of inner change or transformation) (Ter Haar 2005a, 22–27). Therefore, this article seeks to show how religion has been a resource in the expansion of the church's mission in the provision of education, particularly university education in the 125 years of its existence in Zambia.

The article argues that contrary to how the Catholic Church was being portrayed, in terms of providing education, which has focused on the lower levels of education, the 125 years of the existence of the Catholic Church in Zambia reflect a transformed focus of the church through the widening of its sphere to university education. As such, the history of the Catholic Church in Zambia is continuously being remodeled, as is evidenced by its new mission in the provision of university education. The findings of this study may therefore, be significant, not only to scholars and students of church history, but also to the church by way of filling the void in the history of the church in Zambia, documenting the history of the church in university education for posterity and

in turn, contributing to the existing body of knowledge and drawing lessons on the mission of the church in education since its inception.

## **Methodology**

The study is an interpretive case study and thus informed by interpretivism. This is because the study sought to understand and investigate how the mission of the Catholic Church had been extended to the provision of university education over the 125 years of its existence in Zambia (Ponelis 2015). The involvement of the Catholic Church in providing university education is reflected through two universities with a Catholic identity, the DMI-St. Eugene<sup>2</sup> and the Zambia Catholic University, including the Catholic religious men and women offering their services in public universities. While acknowledging this representation, the focus was on Zambia Catholic University as a part of the history of the church for purposes of depth and most importantly, because the university was born out of the efforts of the local bishops as a Zambian project.

The Catholic Church was consequently, purposively selected as an institution because of its typicality or possession of particular characteristics being sought (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2007)—in this case, as provider of Catholic university education. According to Merriam (1998) and Yin (2003), case studies present numerous evidentiary sources such as documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observation and physical artifacts. In this regard, document analysis and recorded interviews were the main methods of collecting data, which were thematically analysed. The guidelines by Scott (1990) on quality control, formulated for handling documentary sources (authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning) were adhered to.

Data were inductively analysed through the description of the case and themes of the case (Creswell 2007). As such, the analysis of the data was conducted by following the process of thematic analysis described by Braun and Clarke (2006, 77–101), which can be used across different methods (Boyatzis 1998, 78). The process involves the generation and application of codes to the data and the identification, analysis, and report of patterns (themes). Consistent with the interpretivist tradition, the insights gained and highlighted in the study were not for purposes of generality, but rather the concern was to acquire in-depth information on how the church has become involved in the provision of university education in her history in Zambia.

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<sup>2</sup> DMI-St Eugene was established in Zambia in 2007 and named after Saint Eugene De Mazenod, the founder of Oblates of Mary Immaculate. DMI has a presence in Tanzania, Malawi, South Sudan, Ethiopia and Brazil as well. The DMI Group of Institutions in India (with 17 campuses) is a pull from which financial assistance is collected for opening new campuses in Africa.

## Defining Catholic University Education and Mission

For an institution to operate as a university in Zambia, it has to be registered in terms of the Higher Education Act (Act No. 4 of 2013). In this article, university education is defined through Catholic university education that broadly falls under Christian universities as a typology. When adopting Levy's categorisation of private higher education, institutions identified as religious, elite and demand absorbing (Levy 2009), Christian universities fall in the religious bracket.

Our understanding of a Christian university is informed by Benne's (2001) typologies of a range of church-related colleges and universities. Benne (2001) notes that the category of an institution can be determined by examining eight aspects of an institution's life (the public relevance of its Christian vision, public rhetoric, membership requirements, the role of the religion or theology department, and whether any such courses are required, the nature and frequency of chapel, the overall ethos, the degree of support by the sponsoring church, as well as the role of the associated church in matters of governance). Therefore, we speak of a Christian university as one that acknowledges and embraces a Christian or denominational confessional identity in the mission statements and alters aspects of its policies, governance, curriculum and ethos in the light of its Christian identity (Schroeder 2002, 9). These attributes in turn shape and inform the identity of the institution as Christian.

University education is not only tied to the concept of a Christian university, but to Catholic university education too. Thus, by referring to Catholic university education, we refer to university education offered by the Catholic Church in Zambia. The encyclical on Catholic Universities, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (1990), which gives an overview of the role of a Catholic university, such as promoting research that searches for an integration of knowledge, dialogue between faith and reason, an ethical concern, and a theological perspective, was also used to understand what constitutes a Catholic university. In addition, the markers of Catholic university education in the third millennium as advanced by Smith (2002) were also kept in check. These are centred on informed conservatism, the Catholicity of education, servant posture and sacramental vision. By informed conservatism, Smith opines that the Catholic university ought to be informed by a deep, critical searching conservatism that seeks unrelentingly for the inner dynamism that motivates the search for truth.

Smith's (2002) Catholicity of education calls for a shift from sectarian definitions of Catholic to the Greek meaning of universality, because perspectives on Catholic higher education have been preoccupied with a concern about the distinctive identity of Catholic colleges and universities—hence narrowing down “Catholic” to a denomination or sect, one that must at all costs be demarcated from others. Smith (2002) suggests that the Jesuit motto or catchword *magis* (more), ought to be employed in the discourse on universities (*more* of the truth, *more* of biblical criticism, *more* dialogue

with various spiritual and intellectual paths) so that Catholic universities can be places to realise true academic freedom.

A Catholic university should also be marked by a servant posture, informed by the Second Vatican Council document, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, the *Gaudium et Spes*, Joy and Hope (Smith 2002). This means that Catholic identity should be about educating students from a place consciously in solidarity with, and in the service of the entire human family and the whole human person, through engaging in a *kenosis*, a self-emptying servanthood in relation to humanity, and translate scholarship into service. A Catholic university should further be informed by a sacramental vision—that “the world even in its brokenness, is a visible sign of the presence and creative activity of God”—based on a tradition that sees the world in reverent terms as a created vehicle of grace, not as a set of commodities. Above all, a critical study of religion and philosophy ought to always remain central to the curriculum, so that the university can serve the church in a critical manner, in which all religious claims (Christian and otherwise) are subjected to critical scrutiny in the crucible of the most rigorous scholarly methods. This means that learning is not confined to the classroom, but is a community of *kenosis*, of self-emptying—learning is regarded as a tool for service to humankind, making Catholic colleges and universities models of “service-learning”, wherein academic learning takes place in conjunction with serving the larger community and promoting the common good (Smith 2002). These insights help us in understanding and making meaning of the strides the Catholic Church has made in the provision of university education in her 125 years of Catholicism in Zambia. The next section briefly highlights the history of the Roman Catholic Church in Zambia.

## **A Brief History of the Catholic Church in Zambia**

As indicated earlier, the history of the Catholic Church in Zambia has been comprehensively covered in scholarship (Hinfelaar 2004). Suffice to note here is that Catholicism was first introduced by the White Fathers (WF) in the north and east, and by the Jesuits (SJ) in the south and central Zambia (Coyne 1974). In this regard, the White Fathers<sup>3</sup> (Missionaries of Africa) were the first Catholic congregation to arrive in Zambia in 1891, followed by the Jesuits in 1905 in the southern part of Zambia (Carmody 2004; O’Brien 2006; Snelson 1974). Other missionary congregations such as the Franciscan Friars, Minor Conventuals, and Minor Capuchins came to Zambia in 1931. Hinfelaar (2004) notes that the missionary congregations of the Sisters who came to Zambia before 1940 were the White Sisters (1902), Dominican Sisters (1925), Holy

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<sup>3</sup> The French Cardinal, Charles Martila Lavigerie, founded it. In July 1868 he founded a society which he called “Missionaries of Our Lady of Africa”, which recruited secular priests and lay brothers so as to open schools, model farms, orphanages, medical centres and homes for the elderly in Africa.

Cross Sisters (1936) and between 1945 and 1959, eight other congregations of Sisters came to Zambia, with seven arriving after 1960.

The primary purpose for the establishment of the church in Zambia was to convert indigenous people to Catholicism. Thus, since its inception, the church has been at the centre of the developmental agenda in the country. This explains the reflections on the church at the turn of the 100 years of Catholicism in Zambia, through the bishops who observe that the Catholic Church has achieved a lot in providing education, medical care, and other development services. The church has also exercised its prophetic ministry in pastoral statements, establishing a dynamic and healthy Church-State relationship, as well as good ecumenical co-operation (Komakoma 2003). These achievements might also explain the expansion of the mission of the church in education to university education.

## **Origins of Catholic Higher Education in Zambia**

While the church has been involved in education since its inception, the provision of university education is a new platform. This involvement in higher education is closely tied to the policies and challenges in the education sector, to which the church has responded. Kelly (1991) notes that after the 1930s the introduction of government support for improved academic standards and exposure of African children to a common curriculum, including grants to Christian missionary schools (which adopted a common curriculum and engaged trained teachers) created a need for trained teachers in mission schools. As a result, the demand for trained teachers prompted the much smaller Protestant Christian missions to begin cooperating with one another rather than competing, particularly with the aim of training teachers for their schools.

To that end, the Protestant Christian missionaries under the Christian Council of Zambia established the David Livingstone and Malcolm Moffat Teacher Training Colleges in Livingstone and Serenje respectively, while the Roman Catholic Church established its own Charles Lwanga Teacher Training College in Monze to train teachers for its schools (Lane 1991). This marked the beginning of the church's involvement in tertiary education, which has transformed and expanded over time, to include university education since the 1990s. Thus, although Catholic higher education in Zambia only became vivid with the establishment of the Zambia Catholic University in 2008, the origins can be traced to the colonial period when missionaries established schools and colleges for purposes of evangelisation (Carmody 2000; Kelly 2006; Mwanakatwe 1968; Simuchimba 2005; Snelson 1974).

The involvement of the church in the provision of university education after the 1990s in Zambia lies in the historical explanation, where after independence through to the 1990s the state was the sole provider of university education. Thus, at independence, Zambia had few university graduates and no university until the establishment of the

country's public universities—the University of Zambia in 1966 and the Copperbelt University in 1987 (Kelly 1996). This scenario only changed with the changes in legislation in the 1990s, where universities as private providers of education were encouraged to come on board (Ministry of Education 1996). Kelly (1996) notes that the increased demand for university education, among other factors, led the government to encourage the establishment and accreditation of private universities. Under a liberalised educational system, the right of private organisations, individuals, religious bodies, and local communities to establish and control their own educational institutions was recognised and welcomed (Ministry of Education 1996). This resulted in the birth and recognition of many private higher education institutions. According to the Higher Education Authority (Gazette Notice No. 232 and 561 of 2017), there were 55 private universities registered with the Higher Education Authority (HEA) in Zambia. The Catholic Church was among the earliest churches to respond to the call, although it is probable that even in the absence of the policy to liberalise the provision of education, the state could not possibly stop churches to run universities; given the track record they have built in the history of the country.

## **The Expansion of the Mission of the Church in University Education**

In the 125 years of the Catholic Church's existence in Zambia, the church has expanded its mission in education from the lower levels to the provision of university education. The Catholic Bishops' resolution to establish the university came into fruition after many years of consultation (Carmody 2007). The signing of the lease agreement between the Chamber of Mines and Zambia Episcopal Conference (ZEC) took place on 11 March 2005<sup>4</sup> (Catholic Information Service for Africa 2005) and the university was established in 2008. This marked the Church's involvement in the provision of university education well beyond its active participation in the provision of formal education at primary, secondary and college levels, as well as individual contributions of Catholic women and men in higher education (Zulu 2014):

The establishment of the Zambia Catholic University, though a bit belated and still in its infancy has accorded the Catholic Church in Zambia to offer quality tertiary education in a truly Christian environment. It is beginning to give new opportunities for the formation of the young Zambians, providing skills, research, reflection and formation needed for the great demand of a growing nation.

The university patron saint is St. Thomas More and its motto is *Veritas Vos Liberabit* ("The Truth Shall set you Free"). As Benne (2001) notes, the identity of the university is in this case tied to its Christian vision. Since its establishment, the university character of the institution has grown. For example, the university had three faculties (Business

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<sup>4</sup> The university was built on land owned by the Chamber of Mines.



Management, Education, and Social Sciences). The university also recorded innovations in the programmes offered by introducing new programmes on the university landscape in Zambia, tailored to meet the needs of local students. Programmes that had never been offered before in Zambia, such as the Bachelor's degree in Film and Fine Arts were introduced. In addition, the university launched another programme, the Accelerated Agriculture Initiative Programme (AIP) Certificate course in Sustainable Agri-prenuership with the support from Missio-USA in 2017. ZCCB Bishop Director for Education, Rt. Rev. Charles Kasonde describes the development as a huge milestone in the history of Zambia Catholic University (*Lusaka Times* 2017).

As emphasised by Smith (2002), the curriculum driven through these programmes manifested the curricular and sacramental vision of the church. For example, Fr. Chilambwe<sup>5</sup> notes that the institution did not only focus on training would-be professionals, but also on imparting the social teachings of the church so that Christ is preached to change the world for the better.

From an initial 49 students in 2008 to a staggering 386 in 2011, the programmes offered under these faculties have to date, attracted over 1000 students since inception. The addition of the Journalism and Media Studies department (at the Lusaka campus) under the Faculty of Social Sciences has also led to an increase in the number of students at the university (Mwansa 2017).

## **Accounting for the Expansion of Mission in University Education**

The expansion of the mission has been shaped by numerous insights that demonstrate how the Catholic Church has used religion as a resource in her 125 years of existence in Zambia. For example, the religious ideas manifested in the teachings of the Church on education explain the expansion of the mission in the provision of university education. The teachings of the Church on education are enshrined in the Church policy documents such as the 1965 Declaration on Christian Education that spells out Catholic principles on education and the *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (1990), which provides an overview for Catholic universities. The Church teaches that education is a universal human right and as such, true education aims at the formation of the human person in the pursuit of his or her ultimate end and of the good of the society of which he or she is a member, and in whose obligations, as an adult, he or she will share what has been imparted in him/her (Declaration on Christian Education 1965). Education prepares the students for professional life and true development of their country. It is for this reason that the declaration on Christian education emphasises that the Church is concerned with schools on a higher level, especially colleges and universities, because these are

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<sup>5</sup> Zambia Catholic University Vice Chancellor.

avenues, which not merely advance the internal renewal of the Church, but also preserve and enhance its beneficent influence upon today's world, especially the intellectual world (Declaration on Christian Education 1965).

Education is also linked to the integral development of the people: social, economic, cultural, spiritual, political and religious spheres, wherein university education needs to prepare students for professional life and true development of their country. This is in line with the universal virtues of Catholic university education (Lemmons 2008). The teachings of the church on education are therefore, mirrored in Zambia Catholic University, not only in its motto, vision, and programmes, but through the institution as a whole.

The Church's expansion of the mission in university education is also not detached from the promotion of wellbeing through evangelisation (Chilambwe 2016):

Catholic Universities are critical tools in evangelisation...we do not only focus on training would be professionals but we also teach social teachings of the church so that Christ is communicated to change the world for better. We also focus on the spiritual growth of our students so that they are helpful in future in fighting vices in society...People do not only need knowledge but God's wisdom in developing the nations.

This involvement of the church in the provision of university education for purposes of evangelisation is not new, as education has been widely acknowledged as a tool for the promotion of the Catholic Church in Zambia (Carmody 1992).

The role of the church in university education has also been mirrored in religion as a resource through the church's practice of responding to the needs of society. Informed by her social teaching and the Declaration on Christian Education among other principles, the church has expanded this role to providing university education anchored on responding to the growing demand for university education. For example, more than 50 000 pupils complete secondary school education each year, while higher education institutions have a total intake of about 10 000, including some mature students (Mweemba and Hampwaye 2012). As such, only about a quarter of the applicants to higher institutions are admitted each year, leading to a growing demand for higher education.

The Church's resolve of being the voice of the voiceless or playing out its prophetic role also explains the expansion of its mission in university education. For example, Lemmons (2008) argues that Catholic university education is assigned a prophetic role on behalf of social justice, peace and the marginalised in society. This relates to Smith's insights that Catholic universities ought to be informed by conservatism and servant posture among other attributes in the third millennium (Smith 2002). By implication

Catholic universities are like nurseries for preparing responsible future leaders, give voice to the voiceless and are living institutional witnesses to Christ and His message (*Ecclesiae, Ex Corde* 1990); and this must be done in the context of the very real problems of our societies and economies. This explains the church's public voice on the need for a framework in order to uphold the quality of university education in a context of numerous universities. Phiri (2017) states that:

A Catholic priest has observed that the unprecedented number of mushrooming universities in Zambia is compromising the quality of tertiary education. Vice Chancellor of the Zambia Catholic University (ZCU) has observed that plurality of universities without a framework has continued to be a challenge on the quality of tertiary education in the country.... In the absence of a framework to deliver quality education, most higher learning institutions are falling short.

The expansion of the mission has also been made possible by the church's organisation or structure. The strength of the church in this regard was acknowledged. Luo (2016) notes that through the Zambia Catholic University (ZCU), the Catholic Church with their impeccable organisational skills has given visitors to the little town of Kalulushi something to marvel about. These sentiments ought to be understood in the context of the historical role and achievements the church has scored in Zambia.

In addition, the church has expanded its influence to university education, based on the experiences gained in the lower levels of education. The Catholic University Chancellor Archbishop Ignatius Chama said that (Muvi tv News, October 2015) "the church through the experience gained at providing education at primary and secondary level was responsible for the confidence it had to provide higher education".

The role of the church in the provision of education has been acknowledged and appreciated by different stakeholders, including the government. For instance, during the celebrations of the 125 years of the Catholic Church in Zambia, the Vice President of the country (Ms. Inonge Wina) observed that the Catholic Church had continued to be a strong and reliable partner of government in not only the delivery of social services but also in advocating for integral development (QFM News 2017). All these point to how the church's expansion of her mission in the provision of university education has been informed and shaped by her religious teachings, practices, and experiences in the 125 years of Catholicism in Zambia.

## **Conclusion**

The article has demonstrated that although scholarship on religion and education, and in particular the Catholic Church in the sphere of education was devoid of its involvement in the provision of university education, the 125 years of the church's existence in Zambia were characterised by the expansion of the Catholic Church's

mission in the sector over time. For the 125 years of its existence in Zambia, the Church had not only provided education at the lower levels but has also expanded its sphere to the provision of university education, through the establishment of the Zambia Catholic University. The mission of the church in the provision of university education centred on the quest to offer quality tertiary education as has been the case at primary and secondary levels, fostering integral development, responding to the demand for university education and promoting the wellbeing of the church through evangelisation. The church's involvement into the provision of university education was applauded by the government, who saw the Catholic Church as a strong and reliable partner in advocating for integral development and delivering social services.

The article has argued that although long overdue, the expansion of the church's mission to include the provision of university education is significant. When seen through the prism of religion as a resource, the expansion into the university education sector was driven by her religious ideas (the social teachings of the church, teaching of the church on education as enshrined in church documents), practices (responding to societal needs, being the voice of the poor and needy), and experiences gained over time. The insights from the study therefore, point to the need for students and scholars of church history and religion and education to rewrite the contemporary history of the Catholic Church in Zambia in order to capture this new involvement of the church into the university education sector. By showing how the Catholic Church has used religion as a resource in the provision of university education, the article introduces a field of church history and religion and education at university level, by documenting the Catholic Church's initiative in the provision of university education in her 125 years of existence in Zambia for posterity.

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