

INTERVIEW WITH SR. JACINTA MARY ADHIAMBO, MISSIONARY CONGREGATION OF THE EVANGELIZING SISTERS OF MARY



*Interview conducted by Quentin Wodon
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EXCERPTS:

- “[Prof. Grace] has greatly contributed to practice and research in Catholic Education... [e.g.] spiritual capital and the option for the poor in Catholic schools, the contributions of religious congregation in Catholic education and the challenge of secularization that face Catholic schools in the 21st century.”
- “Catholic education scholars should ensure that ... their research is useful to the practitioners... They should also have meetings with the education stakeholders and share with them research briefs.”

Could you briefly introduce yourself and explain what your work on Catholic education entails?

I am Sr. Prof. Jacinta Mary Adhiambo from the Missionary Congregation of the Evangelizing Sisters of Mary founded by Very Reverend Fr. John Marengoni and Rt. Rev. Sisto Mazzoldi both of happy memory.

My current apostolate entails teaching, mentoring, and carrying out community service at the Catholic university of Eastern Africa in Kenya. With my teaching role, I spread the good news of Jesus Christ by ensuring that my students experience the compassion and love of Christ through the way I carry out my duties as a professor, administrator, researcher and mentor of post graduate students. At the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, I encourage students and staff to appreciate Catholic identity expressed in the core values: Prayer, witness of life, truth/ honesty, excellence, competence and decency, and commitment. As I develop the intellectual aspect of the students, it has always been my joy to inculcate the gospel values in them. My classroom is the context of challenging students to develop holistically so that two do end up with intellectual giants who are moral dwarfs. In the process of research mentorship, the values of integrity and truthfulness are emphasized so that the outputs in terms of a thesis or dissertation are original.

Box 1: Interview Series

What is the mission of the Global Catholic Education website? The site informs and connects Catholic educators globally. It provides them with data, analysis, opportunities to learn, and other resources to help them fulfill their mission with a focus on the preferential option for the poor.

Why a series of interviews? Interviews are a great way to share experiences in an accessible and personal way. This series will feature interviews with practitioners as well as researchers working in Catholic education, whether in a classroom, at a university, or with other organizations aiming to strengthen Catholic schools and universities.

What is the focus of this interview? This interview is with Sr. Jacinta Mary Adhiambo from the Missionary Congregation of the Evangelizing Sisters of Mary. The interview is part of a series in honor of Professor Gerald Grace's retirement from St Mary's University.

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I have passion for research in Catholic Education and have published articles in the same area. I have had opportunity to mentor three young authors to contribute articles on Catholic education.

How and when did you first meet with Prof. Grace and how did you interact with him over the years?

A conference on Global Catholic Education organized Kellogg Institute for International Studies University of Notre Dame that took place in Rome on 25th to 27th April 2018 was a blessing to me from God. I first met Prof. Grace was during the conference where he presented a paper on Catholic Education. During the introduction of participants, I learnt that he was the Editor of International Studies in Catholic Education. In the same conference, I also presented a paper on Catholic Education in Kenya: Scope and challenges. After my presentation, Prof. Grace invited me to do a paper to be included in the 2019 volume of International Studies in Catholic Education.

The meeting in Rome was the beginning of my interaction with Prof. Grace. He sent me the author guidelines and I embarked on the paper was finally published in October 2019. The publication of the said article bore other fruits in that, Prof. Grace requested me to mentor a few religious sisters who would be interested in writing on their involvement in Catholic Education in Kenya. I identified three sisters: An Assumption Sister of Eldoret, Franciscan Sister of St. Ann and an Evangelizing Sister of Mary to write case studies on Catholic Schools run by their respective congregations. These articles are likely to be published before the end of 2021. At Prof. Grace's proposal, I was nominated as an editorial board member of the International Studies of Catholic Education from January 2021. My interaction with Prof. Grace within the three years has been of quality. This is why, when I was approached to write a chapter in the book to celebrate his legacy in the contribution to Catholic Education, I did so without hesitation. I greatly value our interaction in the last three years and I am sure the networking will continue to research on Catholic education.

How do you see Prof. Grace's main contributions to practice or research in Catholic education?

Having gone through some of his writings, he has greatly contributed to practice and research in Catholic Education. Some of the themes that caught my attention are: the notion of spiritual capital and the option for the poor in Catholic schools, the contributions of religious congregation in Catholic education and the challenge of secularization that face Catholic schools in the 21st century.

In addition, as the Editor of the International Studies in Catholic Education, he looked for article contributors from different parts of the world and wished that Catholic universities had access to International Studies in Catholic Education by subscribing to the journal.

In what way did Prof. Grace influence your own practice or research in Catholic education?

As said earlier, Prof. Grace strengthened my interest in research in Catholic Education. I have publications in Catholic education and will continue to engage in research in the same area.

How can Catholic education scholars make sure that their research is useful to practitioners?

Catholic education scholars should ensure that the outcome of their research is useful to the practitioners by publishing their findings in the international journals on Catholic education or studies, so that they reach many practitioners. They should also have meetings with the education stakeholders and share with them research briefs considered important for practice in the field of education.

What are for you the most critical areas of future research in Catholic education, and why is that?

This interview is timely in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic that has greatly affected education sector. Catholic schools have been greatly hit in Africa especially in those areas where education is inaccessible to the poor who are disadvantaged and do not have access to online learning. With the Covid-19 pandemic era, when there is a paradigm shift from face to face to online learning. What happens with those who cannot afford gadgets needed for online learning? It is in view of this that I present critical areas of research that could include: Equity in Catholic education in the post Covid-19 era; Management of Covid-19 protocols; Spread and containment in Catholic schools.

Other areas may also deal with the sustainability of Catholic education amidst secularization in the 21st century and parental engagement in Catholic education. This is because often times parents especially in some parts of Africa tend to transfer their parental roles to the teachers. The spiritual aspect that is emphasized in Catholic schools may not be welcomed by all parents especially those who believe that what matters is academic performance for transition to other levels of education.

What is your advice for graduate students who may be interested in conducting research in Catholic education?

For graduate students who may be interested in conducting research in Catholic education, I would advise them to review the research done and books written by Prof. Grace. I would also challenge them to subscribe to International Studies in Catholic Education so that they are exposed to the research done in different parts of the world to enable them to identify research gaps. It would also be advisable that they read the International Handbook for Catholic Education in addition to other

documents by the Catholic Church related to Catholic education.

Is there a personal anecdote of your interactions with Prof. Grace that you would like to share?

My interaction with Prof. Grace has taught me a great deal that one's passion for a given area in research energizes her/him to explore more to make the field understood. Prof. Grace's search for information on Catholic education makes him very instrumental in the practice and research in Catholic education. He is a blessing and a mentor in my scholarship and publication.