



Fr. Andrew Kaufa, SMM publishes *The Elephant in the House*

LILONGWE, Malawi – *The innovative ideas of the expatriate missionaries in Africa have helped the local Church to implement the resolutions of the Vatican II in different pastoral and entrepreneurial ways. However, let us acknowledge that there are some shortfalls in the way they conducted business, more especially when dealing with the handovers and succession processes, says Fr. Andrew Ulemu Kaufa, SMM in his recently published book *The Elephant in the House: Future Sustainability of Catholic Media projects in Eastern Africa* (2020). Fr. Andrew is currently the Social Communications Coordinator for the regional body of Catholic bishops, the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa (AMECEA). Fr. Jailos Mpina, SMM caught up with him in a Q & A interview in July, 2020. The excerpts:*

1. *The Elephant in the House: Future Sustainability of Catholic Media projects in Eastern Africa* is a book that encourages the importance of adopting some entrepreneurial approaches by Church media projects in Eastern Africa to guarantee them future sustainability. How important is this book to Catholic media houses and church projects in Africa?

Taking as point of departure media projects that expatriate missionaries started in the 20th century but are now defunct or struggling to survive, plus the blame game which is always played between the founding members and the local people who take over leadership, I sought to establish what goes wrong and what ought to be done to change the narrative.

Mind you in Malawi, we, the Montfort Missionaries and the Missionaries of Africa are, in the same manner, appreciated for the contributions we have made to the change but we are also blamed for starting projects but not granting them future sustainability. In the book, I cite the Montfort Press in Blantyre and Likuni Press and Publishing House (LPPH) in Lilongwe.

In short, what the book highlights is three-fold:

- a) *For future sustainability of any church project including the media, there is a need for the dioceses and religious congregations to maintain the original vision of the founding fathers but in an innovative manner so that the project remains relevant to the changing environments.*

By this, it implies 3 things: firstly, that those taking over leadership ensure that the project appreciate changes in time and adapt accordingly; secondly, that the project continues to respond meaningfully to the ecclesial and social needs as regular pastoral analysis indicate; and thirdly, that the project continues to create and sustain value, first to the workers and people in the neighbourhood in terms of the development of their lives and to the local Church as a pastoral entity in terms of its growth.

- b) *For future sustainability of church media projects, there is a need to rethink the way they are run. The current way of running these projects has a lot of pitfalls.*

In the book, I argue that these projects must embrace the entrepreneurial approach of running business. This implies an understanding that we are not venturing into these projects to make money but to serve the needs of the Church and the society.

And talking about an entrepreneurial approach, I argue that since the Church in Africa has taken for itself the ecclesial model of 'Family of God', let us learn from familial entrepreneurship as the Chinese, Greeks and Jews do it. Here we can appreciate how a firm is smoothly handed over from one generation to the other within the same family, and the firm continues to grow. There are some skills involved in familial entrepreneurship which are relevant for the Church as well.

- c) *For future sustainability of Church projects, there is a need to have a systematic succession plan integrated in the human resource management and ensure that that succession is properly managed. Studies in Succession Planning and Management (SPM) reveal insights that are very pertinent to the Church. For instance, it is not mere handover but a process whereby future leaders are groomed and appointed on the basis of performance as opposed to mere handover where church politics tend to play their role.*

2. What is this elephant in the house?

This is an American expression which I have learnt from the first AMECEA Social Communications Coordinator (1968-1974), Fr. Joseph Healey, a Maryknoll Missionary who normally uses it to explain what he considers as the major challenge with Catholic media in Eastern Africa.

According to Fr. Healey with whom I agree, the elephant in the house is future sustainability of Church communication in Eastern Africa. For me, I extend it even to the Catholic media projects: their future sustainability ought to be looked into strategically right now.

3. What motivated you to research on the sustainability of church projects?

As already stated above, the diocesan priests in Malawi are very critical to us missionaries. Little do they think that within the bracket of missionaries, there are expatriate missionaries from Europe and African missionaries. And when they look at the existing projects such as the Montfort Media and Luntha TV, whose contribution to the local church is valued highly, they wonder what the future holds when the expatriate missionaries who founded these projects are all gone.

4. In many dioceses in Malawi and many parts of Africa, most of the projects founded by expatriate missionaries died prematurely when the missionaries left. Is lack of funding the only issue at stake here?

In fact, my research revealed that it goes beyond funding. Even when the outgoing expatriates make the funds available, the problem is the entire approach. For this reason, the Church has proved not to be good at running projects which require a business approach as Protestants and people do in the normal world out there. For this reason, Church projects tend to be on Congregation or diocesan support machine, so to say.

My response lies in these questions: how do we ensure that the original vision is transferred from the outgoing to the incoming leaders? How are the incoming leaders identified? What role does the Congregation or diocese play in managing this process, say through the Board of Directors as the decision-making body?

5. How important is this book to the confreres who are in Africa and those motivated to work in and for the Church in Africa?

I have been humbled by the response of those who have read the book and those who have gotten a snippet of it through the radio programs where I have been interviewed as they are telling me that this topic is timely. The Secretary General of AMECEA Secretariat, Fr. Anthony Makunde who hails from Tanzania says that adopting a business approach is not an option for the Church but a must for any non-profit enterprise which are faith-based. On his part, Dr. Zeleza Manda at Malawi Institute of Journalism (MIJ) recommends the book for use by all Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) owners, teachers and students of media management, political parties and others grappling with succession and management issues.

6. It is said that the best way to chase the hippos is to drain the swamp. What should we do with the elephant in the house?

My opinion is that the book does not offer comprehensive solutions as to how we can chase this elephant away but rather it ignites a discussion. I encourage members of the Montfort Missionaries to read this book and, may be, organize a discussion on it, even if it would be a virtual discussion of confreres from different entities.

7. St. Louis-Marie de Montfort relied much on Divine Providence and at the same time, he was also mindful of future sustainability of the Company of Mary in terms of personnel, LIBEROS. How do we prepare the young confreres managing these projects in line with the Montfortian spirituality?

Well, it is also important to note that in the Parable of Talents (Matt. 25:14-30), Jesus taught His disciples to use their God-given gifts in the service of God, and to take risks for the sake of the Kingdom of God. We must appreciate the formation which the Congregation gives us

as God's free gift. Now, failure to use these gifts, more particularly the scientific tools in entrepreneurship and business administration, is in itself a misunderstanding of the Gospel. In fact, it is a negative judgment on Divine Providence if not a manifestation of laziness on our part. By virtue of Incarnational Theology, Christian thinkers such as Saint Thomas Aquinas and Pope Albert the Great reminded us of the importance of engaging into faith dialogue when it comes to world affairs which include the field of economics. With this conviction, I do not see any contradiction between what I am proposing and the Montfortian spirituality.

8. Where can we get the copies of the book?

The book is available at Montfort Bookshops and Grey Matter Bookshop in Malawi and at Pauline Bookshops in Nairobi and Lilongwe. Soon after the COVID-19 lockdowns, it will be distributed across AMECEA region. Furthermore, it will soon be available online via Amazon.

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