



SaltMalawi

Newsletter

A Christian project saving lives in Malawi
Supporting the work of Julian & Caroline Lott

October 2016

On behalf of the trustees, welcome to the October issue of SaltMalawi Newsletter. One or two of our readers who also subscribe to our prayer network have asked about the challenges of building church in a culture where traditional beliefs and practices can sometimes operate in direct opposition, or simply appear to blend in, to the teaching of Scripture. When relevant, these issues and their effects have been touched on in requests for prayer from the team in Malawi which are then circulated to the prayer network. We are grateful to Julian for sharing his thoughts and experience of the reality of this aspect of the work that he, Caroline and the team face on a daily basis - and hope you might find it helpful in praying for and with them in the future.

If you would like to join our prayer network or find out more about it, please let me know via our contact page at www.saltmalawi.org - Brian

Julian writes –

Malawi is in a difficult position at this time. Predictably, the droughts of the past two years are really affecting the nation. There is little water - the reservoirs serving the cities are about to run dry meaning that many families go 3 or 4 days without water in their taps (depending upon whether they live in a well-to-do area of a city or not). The boreholes in the majority of our villages are nearly dry and women are now literally fighting one another to get the water. For others, they are forced to draw water from rivers, but these are drying up too. Our electricity supplies too are greatly affected since the bulk of the power generation is from hydro schemes which in turn are not working properly because there is little water in the rivers. Power cuts of 18 hours or longer are now common. (We have not had electricity for over 30 hours at the time of writing - how we are grateful for solar power)! And now the food situation is becoming difficult - there are families in our area who have no maize. Normally this dire position is one we might expect to encounter in December - certainly not this early in the year. Food will not become available in people's fields until March 2017.

In this newsletter we want to address an issue that affects the lives of the people with whom we work and minister - namely the challenges of remaining a follower of Jesus in villages that are steeped in a real culture of witchcraft. In the following two paragraphs we will briefly talk about witchcraft in general terms. In the villages where we live and work, as well as those elsewhere in the centre of Malawi that we visit from time to time, the beliefs and behaviour that is described is known to be true of the great majority of the people.

Sing'anga (a term that is commonly translated as "witch doctor") operate within most if not all villages of Malawi, and at different levels. On the one hand they are herbalists who offer the sick and poor access to medicine - often based on plant roots and leaves. To a people who cannot use Western style medicine (either because there is no local clinic or, as is frequently the case, hospitals and clinics have no medicines) they appear to offer an acceptable alternative. We even have reports of people who have gone to the district hospital only to be encouraged by the medical staff to go to the local *sing'anga* for help instead! But *sing'anga* communicate with the spirits of the

dead too. They offer their patients power to change their lives. Typically, they supply charms, created using plant roots and leaves, or body parts of creatures (even in extreme cases of humans too). The entry in the national dictionary for "charm" refers to the word *kupeza zizimba* as meaning "by cutting parts off a body". These charms are used to provide protection for health (especially of infants - in the homes of most villagers you often see the young with charms tied around their necks or their waists).



(This photo was taken at Lake Malawi but the type of charm illustrated is the same in our region too). They are thought to provide protection for houses or crops in fields (from thieves, witches or evil spirits), or to prosper businesses (including some churches), or to cause people to love or obey the possessor of the charm. *Sing'anga* may invoke curses to harm your enemies (too often family members) or to provide protection from the curses others might place on you. They are detectives, identifying the person who is the source of a curse that is affecting you (and very occasionally they may be correct). These positions as healers and intermediaries with the spirits are so interlinked that even the healing properties of their medicines cannot be isolated from the involvement of the spirit world.

In many parts of the continent, such as Malawi, the people are thought of as being predominantly christian or muslim, but underneath such a cloak of religion the people appear to remain fundamentally animist in their beliefs and behaviour. This means that in addition to their nominal religion they also practice spiritism, witchcraft, and divination. They use magic spells, enchantments, charms, or sacrifices (of food, alcohol, animals, even in extreme cases children), prayers, dances, and other forms of devotion to the spirits whom they recognise as existing all around them. They hope to get the spirits' blessing upon areas of their life (crops, health, fertility, etc.) or protection from harm. At the heart of witchcraft is a desire to control events or people that are not ours to control. The people take part in dances (see below) where they believe they encounter or even summon up an embodiment of an ancestor, an evil spirit or an animal - some people will intentionally become possessed by such a being in order to get power.



Very many cultural dances include this spiritual aspect. The people trust in divination, seeking counsel or knowledge from the dead. The latter seem to communicate through dreams, omens, or directly through *sing'anga* - through whom the living can address the dead in order to receive advice or ask for favours.

So this is where we live . . . among a people who have been greatly deceived by the enemy for thousands of years. Today I asked the leaders of some of our churches in Lilongwe and Dedza what their church members believe. Each of them can point to some in the church who live dual lives, trusting charms, visiting *sing'anga* etc. Probably these are people who have not been with us for long. Usually those who are not willing to change do not wish to stay with us for long. They will wear the face of respectability on Sunday mornings, but in times of conflict or other testing are quick to return to the traditional elements of animist activity. Several of the other denominations that operate in these villages are well known as positively encouraging animist beliefs in order to attract members, and are at best syncretistic in their beliefs and activities.

The pressure upon those who truly desire to follow Jesus is intense. Our members face unrelenting opposition, as well as the discouragement of seeing people leaving the church after they have slipped back into witchcraft. Sometimes they return, wanting to repent and start again but not always. As an example this last week we successfully prayed for some considerable time for the deliverance of a woman (below) who is herself the daughter of a *sing'anga*, to whom she had been an assistant when younger.



Within days of having been delivered from powerful and destructive evil spirits earlier this year this woman had taken her son to a

sing'anga in another village for healing, under pressure from her family and husband. This is a common problem. The result was that the woman became oppressed by evil spirits again, some seemingly worse than the ones that had control over her life previously. She then left the church for several months before she allowed us to pray with her again. Unclean spirits attack both spiritual health and physical well-being. Involvement with a *sing'anga* invariably opens a person to the influence of unclean spirits. It will also divert a person's heart away from the worship of the true God. It is in itself an intense form of disobedience, but is so common that people hardly see anything wrong in it.

This type of difficulty is predictable, though disappointing to watch. What is more problematic are the attacks on us and our church members directly by witches (we have probably had to pray in the homes of every single member at one time or another for protection from witches that come in the night to frighten, attack or otherwise oppress both adults and children), and the way in which the children get drawn into witchcraft themselves through the influence of grandparents or other trusted relatives. Two of the children staying with John had been heavily influenced by their uncle who was a *sing'anga*. One wanted to be free and after prayer was released and has remained so. The other enjoyed the power and 'excitement' of that lifestyle and despite prayer never got released fully. He has since returned to his village.

The opposition to the preaching of the gospel also goes through seasons of intense spiritual activity. During our time in Malawi we have personally experienced this too. Of course the spiritual battle works both ways. In the first village where I worked the *sing'anga* left the village after reporting that I was appearing to him in dreams and in his fear he wanted to go. Several other *sing'anga* we have known have come to faith in Jesus and been set free themselves. Indeed, one of our church leaders is a former *sing'anga*.

We normally conclude our newsletters by thanking you for your prayerful support for our work. In writing this particular issue we are more conscious than ever that we can only survive in this work through the authority and power of the Lord Jesus. Your prayers are more valuable than you know. I will finish by

quoting from Jesus, "I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father" and "Peace I leave with you . . . do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid". *John 14: 13, 27*

Julian & Caroline

Some excellent news to share.

You may recall that in our May Newsletter we mentioned that a UK-based couple were exploring a sense of calling from God to work alongside Julian & Caroline and the team in Malawi. We invited you to join us in praying that the way would open clearly before them. I am delighted to tell you that after much searching and prayer on their part, those prayers have been answered and Roger & Helen Jacobs (right) are now preparing to travel out in January 2017. They will live on the farm, initially in the house previously occupied by Andy & Jenny. The plan is to stay for a year with a view to a longer term commitment. The beauty of this arrangement is that Roger & Helen are no strangers to the mission field in Malawi having worked there as missionaries from 1995 to 2009, mostly based in Mzuzu. During 2006/7 they met Julian and Caroline and have been friends since then. Roger pastored churches and ran Bible training programmes for pastors during their time in Malawi while Helen, a physiotherapist, focussed on children's ministry, helping to run a primary school and medical clinics as well as feeding programmes. Currently they are living on the Wirral and settled in their church, The Longcroft Christian Fellowship, where Roger serves as an elder. We can praise God for such an elegant solution. We now need to pray that a way will be made through the immigration issues (we know so well) as Roger & Helen apply for a TEP (temporary employment permit) to clear the way for the first 12 months – clearing this last hurdle will enable them to fix the date of their flight out in January. We will keep you posted.



You can email Julian & Caroline at - lottsinmalawi@gmail.com

Financial gifts can be made via - SaltMalawi Ltd Charitable Trust, Featherbridge, Ford Lane, Langley, Stratford upon Avon CV37 0HN Email – treasurer@saltmalawi.org

Website - www.saltmalawi.org

This newsletter is circulated by Steve Dorey - stephen.dorey@saltmalawi.org

SaltMalawi Ltd is a company limited by guarantee - Registered Number 06972024
and registered with the Charities Commission - Registered Number 1139160