

# Nkhani Zaulere

the Malawi Chatterbox March 2009

## “As an atheist, I say Africa needs God”

Matthew Parris in *The Times*.

I returned after 45 years to the country that as a boy I knew as Nyasaland. Now a confirmed atheist, I've become convinced of the enormous contribution that Christianity makes in Africa. Education and training alone will not do.

I used to avoid this truth by applauding the practical work of churches in Africa. It's a pity, I would say, that salvation is part of the package, but Christians black and white in Africa do heal the sick, do teach people to read and write – but what counts is the help, not the faith.

But this doesn't fit the facts. Faith is also transferred to the flock. As a child I stayed often with missionaries. I also stayed, alone with my little brother, in a rural African village. In the city we had working for us Africans who were strong believers.

The Christians were always different. Their faith seemed to have liberated and relaxed them. There was a liveliness, a curiosity, a directness in their dealings with others that seemed to be missing in traditional African life. They stood tall.

This time in Malawi it was the same. I met no missionaries. But instead I noticed that the most impressive African members of the Pump Aid team, largely from Zimbabwe, were, privately, strong Christians. “Privately” because the charity is entirely secular and I never heard any of its team so much as mention religion while working in the villages. But I picked up the Christian references in our conversations. One I saw was studying a devotional book in the car. One, on Sunday, went off to church at dawn for a two-hour service.

It would suit me to believe that their honesty, diligence and optimism in their work was unconnected with their personal faith. Their work was secular, but what they did was surely affected by what they were. What they were was, in turn, influenced by a conception of man's place in the universe that Christianity had taught.

Tribal belief is no more peaceable than ours and it suppresses individuality. People think collectively; first in terms of the community, extended family and tribe. This rural-traditional mindset feeds into the “big-man” and gangster politics of the African city, the exaggerated respect for a swaggering leader, and the (literal) inability to understand the whole idea of loyal opposition.

Anxiety – fear of evil spirits, of ancestors, of nature, of a tribal hierarchy – strikes deep into the structure of rural African thought. Every man has his place and, call it fear or respect, a great weight grinds down the individual spirit, stunting curiosity. People won't take the initiative, won't take things into their own hands, or on their own shoulders.

Christianity post-Reformation, with its teaching of a direct, personal, two-way link between the individual and God, smashes straight through the philosophical/spiritual framework I've just described. It offers something to hold on to for those anxious to cast off a crushing tribal groupthink. That is why and how it liberates.

Those who want Africa to walk tall amidst 21<sup>st</sup>-century global competition must not kid themselves that providing the material means, or even the know-how, that accompanies what we call development will make the change. A whole belief system must first be supplanted.

And I'm afraid it has to be supplanted by another. Removing Christian evangelism from the African equation may leave the continent at the mercy of a malign fusion of Nike, the witch-doctor, the mobile phone and the machete.

### DOCTOR NEEDED FOR LOCUM

September – early January  
St Luke's Hospital, Malosa

Dr Susannah Woodd, USPG doctor at St Luke's, will be on leave from October to the beginning of January. An overlap in September would be necessary. The locum needs to be self-financing. Experience of working in Africa would be helpful.

If you are a doctor, or know of a doctor, who could cover this period, please contact Bridget Le Huray, Orchard House, 8C Oakley Road, Chinnor, OX39 4HZ  
Tel: 01844 351 192 email: [blehuray@ctlconnect.co.uk](mailto:blehuray@ctlconnect.co.uk)

### Food security

Under President Bingu wa Mutharika Malawi has done well in achieving food security. In November he was awarded the Agricola medal, the highest award of the UN Food & Agriculture Organization. Economic growth for 2008 is expected to have been around 8 percent.

The limited success of wealthier countries in fighting hunger can be seen in UNICEF's *State of the Worlds Children 2009*:

Country	Under-5 deaths per 100 births	Gross National Income \$
Nigeria	189	930
Zambia	170	800
Kenya	121	680
Malawi	111	250

Joshua Kurlantzick, an expert in development, writes:

"When I visited Malawi in 2005, famine was all anyone could talk about. Over egg rolls in a greasy Chinese restaurant, Stephen Carr worried aloud that the country's entire farming sector might collapse. Yet over the past three years, Malawi has boasted record harvests, and has become a supplier to the World Food Programme."

Policy Interaction of Blantyre differs. The snag is the cost. The price of maize is at a record level. A 50kg bag, which might feed a family of four for 6 weeks (*with orphans, families may be 10 or 15: ed.*) costs £23, while the average income is about £10 pm. It is access to food that matters.

Many poor Malawians settle for the cheaper *madeya* (maize-husks); some are eating water-lily tubers, on sale on roads near Nsanje. The key, says another study, is a decision to import in a timely way.

## Population Growth: the 2008 census

- total of 13,066,320.
- Increase: 2.8% p.a. (88-98 : 2%)
- Highest growth: Mwanza (4.1% p.a.)
- Lilongwe 669,021 Blantyre 661,444 Mzuzu 128,432
- Average household size is 4.4.
- Density: 139 per sq.km; (1978: 85)
- 200,000 more men than women

The toughest question is how to stop population growth. Mountain sides are being stripped of all their lovely brachystegia trees, for charcoal and tobacco curing. Paraffin is too expensive for many.

Malawi is the fastest urbanizing country in Africa and in the world – *UN Population Fund 2007*. Annual growth in the urban population between 2020 and 2025 is estimated to be 214,000, compared with 193,000 in rural areas. The report says that employment in the cities is not growing fast enough to absorb over 200,000 new arrivals each year.

"The critical factor about the rapid urbanization is that it is not associated with any commensurate economic growth. The urban centres do not have the capacity to absorb the burgeoning population.

"Over a quarter of Malawi's urban population is poor. Poverty and HIV/AIDS infection are mutually reinforcing. The urban prevalence rate is 25%, almost twice the rural rate of 13%."

## Fair Play for Georgina

Primary Justice Forums across Malawi are helping poor people, especially women, to get a fairer hearing.

For a bright 16-year-old leaving school, a secondary school should have been the next step for Georgina. But coming from a poor family Georgina became the wife of her maths teacher – a sure passport to a brighter future.

Soon, however, the marriage came under strain. Her husband was spending more and more time with his first wife and in desperation she fed him a love potion. Her husband took her to court and she was ordered to pay a large fine which her family couldn't afford, so she was sent to gaol.

Just as things looked very bleak, the local Primary Justice Forum, introduced by the Catholic Commission for Justice & Peace, paid the fine, saving Georgina from prison. Mediating between the two families, the forum also helped the two parties reach an out-of-court settlement. Next they got Georgina back into school.

Women and girls in poorer countries find it difficult to get a job and generally get paid less than men for the same work. Yet in Africa it's women, not trucks, who carry two-thirds of all goods on the move. 44 million girls stay at home to fetch water or work around the house. Many women are subject to violence, rape and infection with HIV and AIDS. (*Department of International Development*)

There has been progress. In Malawi the Under-5 death rate has come down dramatically from 33% in 1970 to 11% and almost as many girls as boys attend secondary school. The obstinate and awful figure is that 1 in 18 women die in childbirth. In the UK, one in 8,200 face the same fate.

## The SS Chauncy Maples

Or *CM* as she is known to many Malawians, is the oldest ship in Africa, first sailing on the Lake in 1901. From then until 1957 she served the Anglican Church as a travelling school, training college for teachers and catechists and a mobile clinic.

In her second life, from 1967 to 1999 she served the Malawi Lake Services as a passenger/cargo steamer.

In her third life, beginning in 2009, she is to be converted into a hospital ship, serving people on the lakeshore. Visit [www.chauncyaples.org](http://www.chauncyaples.org) to find out more.

## **The rich and the Poor**

*Salim Lone, a Kenyan journalist, berates Western donors for widening the gap in Africa*

There was never any real prospect that western governments, which have gleefully presided over the creation of new classes of the super-super-rich, would use their considerable powers to push African leaders to pursue policies which would shift resources away from the rapacious national elites towards the poor...

People are being lifted out of extreme poverty at less than 1% a year. Abutting every African slum are the castles of the unimaginably rich. But the poor do not always tolerate such inhumanity.

Africa needs strong revolutionary leaders, popular enough to put pressure on both their elites and their international partners to modify their policies. But it is well-nigh impossible for such leaders to get themselves elected.

The US and Britain are ready to countenance wars of aggression by governments which are partners in the war on terror – as when Ethiopia invaded Somalia. Uganda has also committed appalling human rights abuses against its northerners. None of these crimes elicited a peep from western leaders.

In the end only Africa's own leaders and people can address its rawest suffering. Africa's voice is rarely heard. It's the statements of its leaders that reach donors' ears, not the anguish and aspirations of its people.

## **Health or Wealth ?**

Malawi and Tanzania face one problem in common: an economy based on tobacco. Malawi's crop last year was the biggest on record, the price was high, and it provided 65% of its exports.

Tobacco is expected to increase by 28% in 2009 to 250,000 tonnes: 15% of Malawi's GDP and 70% of its exports. Government is worried that this may cause a fall in the acreage planted to maize.

Since 1960 it has been known that smoking is the main cause of lung cancer, difficult to treat as our lungs can't just be removed.

The BBC has discussed the issue in the case of Tanzania, the third largest exporter in Africa. 1½ million depend on growing tobacco and there is a

steady market of 1.3 billion smokers in the world, mainly in East Asia. Multi-national growers' bodies provide free seed, loans and technical support. Yields average 1,200kg per hectare, bringing in around \$1,200.

Farmers in Tanzania are planting 26 million trees to counter the concern that tobacco-growing leads to deforestation, as firewood is needed to cure the tobacco. Malawi is short of land and cannot do this; Tanzania still has unused land.

Other options are not, they say, viable. Paprika (peppers) are a fickle crop to manage and less profitable. Tobacco grows in hot, dry and sandy areas, not good for food-crops.

The case against smoking tobacco is strong. Malawi already has the highest number of women smokers in Africa with the exception of South Africa. The strongest argument against smoking is the risk of damaging for life the health of unborn children.

The BBC concluded enigmatically: "There are fewer smokers in the West but growing numbers across China and Eastern Europe. Smoking – and its attendant health problems – is a choice. Poverty usually is not."

## **China & Malawi**

Since diplomatic links were switched from Taiwan to mainland China last year there has been a flurry of new links. 234 Malawian leaders have visited China; trade has increased by 112%.

New projects include a parliament building, a stadium, a national highway and crucially the Zambezi-Shire canalization. Now a new cotton-mill is being built in Balaka and should be in production by June. This is expected to create an annual revenue of US\$ 40million and to involve 50,000 local farmers.

## **Africa Invest**

- is already employing 1,000 men and women on eight new farms in different parts of Malawi, helping women and men to grow peppers & chillies for export, rice and potatoes for home use and local markets.

The plan has sprung from the fertile mind of John Maguire, a Christian entrepreneur with imagination and wide experience. Africa Invest has only a handful of professionals; nearly all its acitivists are "outgrowers". These are Malawian women and men, farming their own land but with seed, fertilizer and sprays from Africa Invest. Over 5,000 families have signed on as outgrowers; only 1,000 individuals are directly employed.

Goodall Gondwe, Minister of Finance, says: "Africa Invest has established a fresh approach to viable commercial agriculture. It carries immense potential to our rural areas, with real benefits for small farmers, their families and communities."

Efuloni Nyirongo grows peppers in the Eswazini area in the north. "I am happy about Africa Invest. They are transparent." He tells of another trading company who took their crop, worth MK3 million (£13,600) and never paid them.

A chief in Mzimba says his people are grateful for seed, spray and market but new scales are needed. The director says new electronic scales are on order that will stop growers being cheated.

Africa Invest plans to offer irrigation to clubs by using boreholes with solar-powered pumps to tap underground streams. "This could be a major breakthrough. It will cost \$20,000 but will be there for ever." It is also starting adult literacy classes to widen participation.

Africa Invest Fund opens to UK investors this month. Minimum investment: £1000. Ask an independent financial advisor to assess the risk. Further information from [www.africainvest.co.uk](http://www.africainvest.co.uk) & *Church Times* of 27 February 2009.

## R.I.P.

**Joan Knowles**, 1912-2009, worked in Tanzania and Malawi as a nurse from 1942 to 1971, especially at Mponda's and St Anne's Nkhotakota. After her return to the UK, she turned her house into a healing centre and was cared for in old age by Christine Moss, her nurse friend with whom she had worked in Malawi.

**Richard Baxter**, a member of the Iona Community, joined Blantyre Synod in 1955 and was the first warden of Chilema Lay Ecumenical Training Centre, assisted by John Leake. He left in 1969 for a similar post at Dunblane. His love of African music will be an abiding memorial. He died of a heart attack.

## In brief

**Bishop Christopher Boyle** has been appointed Assistant Bishop of Leicester and will be leaving Northern Malawi in April. Your prayers for Bishop Christopher in his new work and for the Diocese of Northern Malawi.

**Vacant dioceses** The Dioceses of Upper Shire, Lake Malawi and Northern Malawi are all without bishops, please pray that elections will take place soon.

**Correction** St. Andrew's Hospital, Ntunthama, near Kamuzu Academy, has 100% Malawian staff as well as St Anne's, Nkhotakota. Apologies for error!

**"The Life of George Ndomondo – Shepherd Boy, Clerk, Politician, Guerilla General, Detainee, Priest"**: £7 post free from Rachel Eaton, 21 Church Rd, Tadley RG26 3AX. A splendid read on the 1964 rebellion and much else. £4.50 goes to MACS for each copy sold.

**"Josiah Mtekateka – priest's dog-boy to bishop."** If you have this small booklet, please lend it to the editor for a week. It is hoped Bishop Josiah' Life will soon be on the web.

**UMCA History – 3 vols.** Malawian historians such as George Ndomondo are in dire need of copies. Any offers?

**Storms and floods** have ravaged houses and crops, costing millions of kwacha. Mulanje district is worst hit; Lilongwe & Dowa come next. Ten other districts have also suffered. Despite this, crops are very promising in most areas.

**An oil pipeline from Beira to Nsanje** and a storage depot are being funded by Qatar. Work begins shortly. Malawi's storage capacity will be increased from 10 days to 90.

**On the Songwe river**, a massive joint project between Malawi and Tanzania will generate 340 megawatts of power and irrigate 5000 acres, funded by the African Development Bank.

**Lafarge Cement** is investing \$200m. in a new plant in Balaka District. China's Shanghai Construction has also signed an agreement to start production in the same area.

**The \$6 billion Shire-Zambezi Waterway** is to start construction in 2009. This will turn Nsanje into an inland port only 148 miles from the Indian Ocean.

**The Blantyre-Limbe road** is being made a state-of-the-art double highway. Japan is funding the project. It is due for completion in November 2009.

**Other road projects** include Zomba-Jali-Phalombe (\$45m); Jenda-Rumphi (\$90m); Karonga-Chitipa (\$45m) and several more.

## Malawi Reunion & AGM of MACS

### 19 September 2009

10.30-3.30 St Saviour's Church Hall, Pimlico, SW1V 3QW  
**Come, and bring a friend with you**

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