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Christian Today Website Articles

Unless otherwise stated, articles in this magazine are transcriptions of material selected by the editor at Christian Today and were first published recently on www.christiantoday.com.

The tragedy of murdered missionary John Allen Chau: Some questions

It's impossible to look at a photograph of John Allen Chau, the young American killed by tribespeople on North Sentinel Island, without sadness. He is in the full glow of youth, with decades of life ahead of him. His friends and family have paid tribute to his gifts and his character: 'He was a beloved son,

brother, uncle and best friend to us. To others he was a Christian missionary, a wilderness EMT [Emergency Medical Technician], an international soccer coach, and a mountaineer’, they wrote on Instagram.

In a moving post, they ask for ‘understanding and respect for him and us during this time’.

Their grief is palpable. But this tragedy raises questions that sadness cannot be allowed to silence.

North Sentinel Island is inhabited by a few – anything from few dozen to a few hundred – tribespeople who are among the most isolated in the world. Though rules appear to have been confusingly slackened quite recently, they are still out of bounds for tourists. The Indian government believes the best policy for the islanders is to allow them the isolation they clearly desire –

they killed two fishermen in 2006 – and operates a ‘hands off, eyes on’ policy, patrolling the coast to deter anyone from landing. A key reason for this is the vulnerability of the tribespeople to modern diseases: their isolation means they lack the antibodies to protect them.

Initial reports of John Chau’s death were contradictory, with some denying that he went to the island as a missionary. It now appears that he did. A release from the All Nations missions organisation in Kansas, US, describes him as ‘one of its missionaries’ who had ‘studied, planned and trained rigorously since college to share the gospel with the North Sentinelese people’.

Its executive leader Mary Ho describes him as a ‘gracious and sensitive ambassador of Jesus Christ who wanted others to know of God’s great love for them’ and says, ‘We remember too, how

throughout church history, the privilege of sharing the gospel has often involved great cost. We pray that John's sacrificial efforts will bear eternal fruit in due season.'

We also have his diary entries from before his death, in which he writes of his attempts to contact the islanders. A boy shot at him with an arrow that went through his Bible. He writes that he shouted out to them, 'My name is John. I love you and Jesus loves you . . . Here is some fish!'

He wrote to his parents: 'You guys might think I'm crazy in all this, but I think it's worth it to declare Jesus to these people.'

'Please do not be angry at them or at God if I get killed. Rather, please live your lives in obedience to whatever he has called you to and I'll see you again when you pass through the veil.'

‘This is not a pointless thing. The eternal lives of this tribe is at hand and I can’t wait to see them around the throne of God worshiping in their own language, as Revelations 7:9–10 states.’

One response, then, is to hail Chau as a martyr, as Ho appears to do in her statement. But those questions won’t go away.

His landing on the island was illegal. Should his personal convictions allow him to override the rule of law?

Not only did he break the law himself – and there might certainly be cases where Christians would feel free do to that – but he implicated other people in his lawbreaking. Is that justifiable?

He was putting lives at risk – not just his own, but the North Sentinelese themselves, who lacked any immunity to any pathogens he may have been carrying. Suppose the price of his

evangelism was the deaths of those he evangelised – would it really have been worth it?

He was going against their clearly expressed wishes and invading their territory. Why should he have thought they would welcome him, when others had been driven away or killed?

Who knew what he was doing, and to whom was he accountable?

How, when he didn't speak their language, was he going to witness effectively to them?

Now, there are answers to all of these questions, based on a particular theological point of view which it appears, from a clue in Chau's message to his parents, that he shared. He said: 'The eternal lives of this tribe is at hand' (sic). He appears to have meant that their eternal destiny was at stake. In other words, unless he preached the

Gospel to them and they became believers, they would go to hell. With that in mind, all of the questions above are beside the point: all that matters is to save souls.

That's a view that is deeply ingrained in a particular strand of evangelicalism. It has driven superhuman evangelistic efforts and made many heroes of the faith. In his own eyes, in the terms of his theology and church culture, Chau was not behaving unreasonably. He was following, with considerable personal courage, the logic of his beliefs.

This is not the place to argue about whether this view is correct. It is right, though, to ask whether glorifying this kind of action is appropriate, even for those who share Chau's apparent beliefs.

Because even if one does believe that everyone who isn't a Christian is going

to hell, that doesn't relieve a would-be missionary of the responsibility of acting ethically and wisely. We are not responsible for God's policies, but we are responsible for our own. If it turns out that this theology is correct, well, so be it – but in the meantime, we have to try the best we can to do the right thing. This doesn't mean breaking the law, trespassing on other people's lands and trying to bring them a 'gift' they do not understand and do not want. It does mean acknowledging that there are some things we can't do, and leaving the upshot to God.

There is a terrible mis-match between the world-view of a stone age tribal people and that of a 21st-century North American evangelical. The tragedy is that John Chau was evidently encouraged to believe that this didn't matter.

We should, as his family requested, respect him for his courage. But those questions still won't go away.

Michael Gove: We must preserve creation through God's gift of creativity

Religious traditions have unique insights into the stewardship of the natural world, environment secretary Michael Gove argued at a lecture for the Theos theological think tank yesterday.

Gove, a Roman Catholic, quoted extensively from Pope Francis' encyclical LAUDATO SI, which calls for Christians to work for social and environmental justice.

He said humans have 'caused environmental damage and deterioration on a dramatic scale in the

last century, with pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, biodiversity loss, habitat erosion, soil depletion, soil depletion and deforestation’ and suggested many of the answers needed lie within religious traditions. As well as drawing on Christianity, he cited Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, and Sikh writers.

Gove referred to the ‘polarised’ views of those who advocate lower growth in the name of sustainability and those who argue for accelerating innovation and the power of science to ‘reshape our expectations of the possible’.

He said: ‘It is my belief that faced with these two powerful and contending visions, the wisest way forward rests in harnessing the best of both.’

It is important to consider ‘how we manage our way out of methods of production and patterns of consumption which are wasteful and profligate’, he

said, ‘the best way to ensure we use limited resources more wisely is to increase the productivity of those resources, through restraint, re-use and recycling, all of which are made easier by technological advance’.

‘If, as Christians, we believe creation is a gift we must preserve, then we also believe creativity is a gift we must use to the full,’ he said.

He concluded: ‘The chance is still ours to forge a new relationship with the planet. As religious leaders down the ages have urged, we can be better stewards of our earth and plant a harvest for the world. And that is surely a mission which can unite us all.’

Western countries are not doing enough to stop global surge in violence against religious minorities – report

Western nations are failing to help the world's religious minorities as they grapple with a surge in violent attacks and intimidation, a new report has claimed.

Religious Freedom in the World 2018 warns that religious minorities are coming under increasing threat as a result of 'ultra-nationalism' by governments as well as groups of extremists.

The report by Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) examined 196 nations over a two-year period up to June 2018.

It says that there has been a ‘spike in hatred’ against religious minorities in countries around the world and an ‘especially serious decline’ in religious freedom in India and China.

Other countries where religious freedom has deteriorated include Burma, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Turkey.

‘Many of the others – including North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Eritrea – the situation was already so bad, it could scarcely get any worse,’ it said.

Elsewhere, the report says governments have failed to respond to requests for assistance from religious minorities trying to return to northern Iraq after the ousting of the Islamic State.

Where Christians and Yazidis have been able to return, ACN said this was with the help of only a few foreign governments, leaving church

organisations to step in and fill in the gap by repairing and rebuilding many of the destroyed homes.

‘This work of rehabilitation has mainly been done by charities and church organisations,’ it said.

‘Had they not provided this assistance, the Christian community in the region could have vanished.

‘Western governments, to whom appeals for urgent assistance were made, badly let down the communities concerned.

‘Christians and Yazidis were recognised as victims of genocide – self-evidently deserving of help – and events have shown that there were eminently viable means of doing so.’

The report went on to say that the plight of religious minorities worldwide has been exacerbated by inaction and

an attitude of ‘indifference’ on the part of Western countries.

‘Most Western governments have failed to provide urgently needed assistance to minority faith groups, especially displaced communities wanting to return home,’ the report read.

‘There is a barrier of indifference, a cultural curtain, behind which the suffering of entire communities of religious minority groups goes largely unnoticed.

‘Hence, with notable exceptions, religious illiteracy and apathy blinds the West from the surge in ultra-nationalist violence, which is being perpetrated against minority faith groups.

‘This blinkered indifference does not extend to racial, cultural, or gender matters, only to religion. This report calls for the suffering of ignored

religious minorities to be recognised and action taken to defend their rights.’

Christian charity launches emergency appeal to help thousands of fair trade producers put at risk by Brexit

A Christian development charity is appealing for donations to support fair trade producers facing economic uncertainty and hardship as a result of Brexit.

Traidcraft Exchange said the fallout from Britain’s decision to leave the European Union is hurting fair trade suppliers in poorer parts of the world who have traditionally sold their products to the British market.

It is now seeking donations to help cushion the impact on suppliers experiencing a sudden drop in orders.

The launch of the appeal comes not long after the charity's sister business Traidcraft plc warned that its future was in question unless it could find a sustainable alternative model.

It blamed the crisis on the uncertain economic conditions caused by Brexit as it revealed that it would be significantly downsizing and cutting the number of product lines it sells in the UK.

Over 8,000 artisans and producers stand to lose their jobs or experience a decline in their income as a result of the losses at Traidcraft plc, with producers from India and Bangladesh among the worst affected.

Hand-embroidered card manufacturer Swajan, based in Bangladesh, employs over 750 people, many of them women.

Traidcraft Exchange said the company faces a 65 per cent fall in orders.

‘For years artisans from poor and isolated regions have been able to sell to the UK fair trade market. Now that existing deals are coming to an abrupt end we owe it to them to cushion the blow and help them chart a new future,’ said Kate Dixon, spokesperson for Traidcraft Exchange.

‘Every supplier has different needs – some will need help finding alternative fair trade buyers and some will need short term direct financial support.

Donations to the urgent producer appeal can be made via the Traidcraft Exchange website

WWW.TRAIDCRAFT.ORG.UK/PRODUCERS and over the phone at 0191 497 6445

Churches urged to embrace contactless payments as more Brits go cash-free

Churches are being advised to take action now to ensure they don't miss out on vital donations as Britain increasingly moves towards being a cashless society.

With more and more Brits choosing the likes of Apple Pay and plastic over cash, the Church of England's Parish Buying team is encouraging churches to embrace contactless payments.

Contactless payments have already been in place in petrol stations, retail stores and restaurants across Britain for several years, and churches are being urged to follow suit, particularly in the run-up to Christmas, when churches

enjoy some of the largest attendance numbers in the year.

Parish Buying offers churches a range of options, from small handheld card readers to more sophisticated self-service donation units.

Recent figures revealed that debit card payments outstripped cash based payments for the first time in 2017, with over two thirds of Britons now opting to use their plastic.

The decline of cash is forecast to continue at a rapid pace, with the financial website *This is Money* predicting that only one in six people will be making payments with traditional notes and coins in 10 years' time.

Esther Stewart, marketing and parish support officer at Parish Buying said: 'As less and less people carry cash, it's becoming increasingly important for

parishes to look at alternative ways to receive donations.’

John Knox, director of resourcing parishes at the Church of England’s Diocese of Leeds added: ‘It’s about modern ways of giving – alternative ways for people to give in an increasingly cashless society.’

Poirot star David Suchet helps Christian charity support more blind children this Christmas

Actor David Suchet is lending his support to a Christian charity’s drive to help more blind children this Christmas.

Christian Blind Mission’s ‘Colours of Christmas’ campaign is raising funds to provide life-changing cataract surgery

for children in some of the poorest parts of the world.

A cataract occurs when the lens of the eye becomes cloudy, causing vision to be blurry.

It is one of the leading causes of blindness in the world today but can usually be fixed with surgery.

Christian Blind Mission said the cost of providing the surgery to one child was just £95, but Suchet said that even this was ‘tragically out of reach’ for so many in poorer parts of the world.

Suchet, best known for his role as Poirot in the long-running TV show, said he was ‘proud’ to be supporting the campaign to make more widely available a procedure that is ‘almost a matter of routine’ in the UK.

‘It’s hard to imagine Christmas without colour, particularly for a child,’ he said.

‘As a grandfather, I love to see my grandchildren enjoying the bright colours of the tinsel, the sparkling lights, colourful wrapping paper – all part of the joyous celebration of Christ’s birth.

‘So, it’s a tragedy that there are children needlessly living in a world without colour or light, unable to see the faces of family and friends – simply because they live in poverty and can’t access a straightforward operation to restore their sight.’

Christian Blind Mission said that removing cataracts from a child’s eye is a relatively simple procedure that takes less than one hour.

One of the children it wants to help is five-year-old Sesan, who lives in Nigeria with his parents.

His family makes just enough food to eat off a small plot of land but they live

in poverty and their house has no electricity or water. For them, the cost of cataract surgery is too much.

Sesan's father Noah said his child's blindness has 'been affecting the heart of almost everyone in the family'.

His brother helps him to play football with the other children by guiding his hands, but the cataracts are making day to day life very difficult.

'He falls down most times,' says Sesan's mother, Olanike. 'He cannot play with his friends as he would love to.'

To give to the 'Colours of Christmas' campaign, visit here

[HTTPS://WWW.CBMUK.ORG.UK/CHRISTMAS/](https://www.cbmuk.org.uk/christmas/)

