concern of the story, where sin appears only as a convoluted subplot? Clarke offers hints, particularly in reflection on *racham*, one of the prevalent Hebrew terms rendered in English as "mercy." Pointing to the term's shared linguistic root with *rechem*, "womb," he observes that a mother's care is bodily—a feeling and a yearning. Beyond the problem-solving of atonement or the calculus of covenant and conditionality, how might mercy be defined as tangled in the feeling of God, just as "womb-like love" originates purely with "the nature of being a mother" (44)? What might mercy continue to mean in a world after sin, in *shalom* fully restored?

Publishing with an independent press allows *Disrupting Mercy* leeway to approach mercy from many angles, interrupting exposition with personal stories, close readings of moments in novels and films, or (in one instance) quiet, blank space to hold the grief of the millions displaced from their homes. Clarke prefaces each chapter with an "initial thought to ponder," often guiding the reader to search online for a recording of a musical performance or work of art to be a silent conversation partner in the chapter's discussion. Each chapter closes with a prompt for reflection and space to journal reflections.

Disrupting Mercy invites readers to conversation about the many ways we meet God's gifts of extreme kindness. (It would make an excellent selection for an adult education class.) The text also invites us, as we are restored to God's ecology of love, to become participants in extending God's mercy, accepting the "invitation to flourish within a community of grace" (88).

Josh Wallace is a pastor and educator in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, in Treaty 6 Territory. He teaches at St Thomas More College and serves as Church Engagement Minister for Mennonite Church Saskatchewan.

Amanda McBaine and Jesse Moss, directors, *The Mission*, National Geographic Documentary Films, 2023. 103 minutes.

I was sad as I left the theater. The film had portrayed a tragic story, with its main character dead and the key supporting characters feeling the weight of a young life wasted. There was, however, more complexity to the story than that and therefore more to my sadness. The value of the film, to me, was its underlying invitation to be self-critical about *the mission*, especially in regard to our methods of engagement with peoples who value their isolation.

The Mission is a documentary film about the life and death of John Allen Chau, a young American missionary who was killed in 2018 at the hands of the Indigenous peoples of North Sentinel island in the Andaman Sea, whom John was attempting to reach with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

There are disparate voices to be heard in this film, through which the filmmakers not only tell the story but also help viewers reflect on its meaning and

significance. One of the voices is John Allen Chau himself, based on his personal journal entries that his family made available to the filmmakers. These excerpts are delivered to the audience by a voiceover actor (Lawrence Kao) and are often accompanied by animated scenes that recreate critical points in John's life, including his fateful trip.

The same approach was utilized by the filmmakers to include the perspective of John's father, Patrick Chau (voiceover by David Shih), a voice that acts as key counterpoint to John's. As such, these two voices represent the central tension of the story, typographically portraying the reckless son and his restless father. Generally, on the one side is John's sincere devotion and his adventurous spirit; on the other is Patrick's grave parental concern and his ideological questioning. For those who are willing (me included), there is ample opportunity to identify with each of these characters at different times throughout the film, especially as complexities surface in both: John is not without his doubts and Patrick is not without faith.

The color commentary in the film is delivered by a select group of interviewees, including several who have close ties to John and his story: close friends, co-workers, and classmates, as well as former professors, pastors, and mission agency personnel. Their voices are a mixture of sympathy, support, admiration, and doubt.

The film's thematic core is a simple question of whether John's mission (and maybe more specifically his method) was a good idea or not. Clearly, the filmmakers are inviting viewers to engage the voices as they provide varying levels of acclaim or disdain.

Along those lines are two key interviewees who feature prominently in the narrative, neither of whom knew John personally but nevertheless have ties to his story: first, historian and journalist Adam Goodheart, another American whose fascination with North Sentinel island took him there some twenty years earlier; and second, former missionary Daniel Everett, who gave thirty years of his life among a tribal people in the Amazon and then gave up his mission and his faith.

Interestingly, it is the voices of these two men that, by the end of the film, become dominant. They are, in fact, the last voices that are heard, and so they carry significant weight in terms of the filmmakers' communicative intent. It is in these voices that the filmmakers' verdict is heard as the voice of triumph is silenced and the voice of tragedy endures.

That conclusion, however, only follows the one story: a critique of the evangelical mission. Ideologically, this film critiques at least two kinds of sensationalism: *evangelical* sensationalism on the one side, in the form of its narrow and cavalier missionary strategy, and *anthropological* sensationalism on the other side, in the form of exploitative exploration. Both are aligned with the colonial quest and a fascination with the remote and unreached.

It is important, however, to remember that this film was made not by evangelicals but by National Geographic, and in so doing, they made themselves vulnerable. They are, after all, well known for exoticizing the uncivilized in a way not too dissimilar from how evangelicals have exoticized the unreached. By holding up a mirror to themselves and being self-critical, National Geographic seems to be exposing their own version of sensationalism. Yet, by doing this, they are also delivering a counter critique of evangelicalism. The film is indirectly asking if evangelicals are willing to do the same, to embrace a similar humility and learn from past mistakes.

Those who share a disdain for evangelical sensationalism—John's father, Patrick, among them—will say that it was obviously a mistake to send John to North Sentinel island. Though Patrick considers himself a believer and a proponent of Christianity, he clearly blames fundamentalist extremism for his son's misguided mission, and he furthermore holds All Nations responsible as the agency that sent his son to his death. So, the question emerges, *Is there a non-evangelical, Christian perspective on the mission that the film provides, other than Patrick's heavy-laden fatherly voice?* If there was, I think I missed it. Without it, the film seems to be more a study of extremes.

Even John's most honest friends seemed to be trapped in a narrow evangelicalism. One of them makes this statement in the film: "John was doing exactly what Jesus told him to do." This is the typical certainty of which evangelicals are often guilty (or praised, depending on where you stand). Does it not lead to presumption? Certainly John was acting in accordance with his understanding of the Great Commission. But is John's understanding of the Great Commission the only measuring stick? He was faithful to his convictions, which we should applaud, yet John's actions are also his own. He is accountable, as are we all. None of us can say that everything we do is aligned perfectly with the heart and mind of Jesus. There is always an element of subjectivity, always the reality of limitations. We are human, after all, as was John.

I do not doubt John Chau's sincerity. He was stalwart in his faith and determination. But I do doubt his certainty. Because John himself doubted it. His journals make it clear that, as he took his big risk and faced the prospect of death, John was faithful *and* doubting. He knew in whom he believed—Jesus—to whom he entrusted his soul in meek surrender, yet he questioned the outcome of his mission and also the method. Faith can be beautiful and naïve at the same time. John faced his doubt, which is simply a sign of his humanity.

In that way, every viewer of this film is like John, a believer (in something) who is struggling to align actions with beliefs, whatever the cost. That faith perspective is true to the human condition, not just for religious humans but for all. Even the atheist acts in accord with his or her beliefs and chooses to live with the consequences. Every one of us exists within that epistemological framework, yet we are all free to choose and adjust our beliefs.

John was free, and he chose to act on his belief that Jesus was calling him to the North Sentinelese. Did he absolutely need to go at that particular time and in that particular way? Were there perhaps other ways that John could have been faithful to Jesus instead of going on *this* mission? It's easy to ask questions like these from afar. In the end, John answered them by doing what he did. And he paid the price willingly, heroically.

The question remains for the viewers: What would we have said to John? If we were among his friends and advisors before he made his fateful trip, what questions would we have asked him?

Because of the covert nature of his mission, John chose a select few to be his advisors. Did no one encourage him to wait and pray, to perhaps continue his research and preparation until a more opportune time? How exactly was All Nations involved in John's mission? Did they only encourage John, or did they question him? In the end, who was with him? Who said, *Now is the time?* Who said, *This is the way?* Was it only John?

That's why I used the word "cavalier" earlier to describe John's mission strategy. It was drastic, narrow, if not arrogant. Certainly, it was adventurous, but was it wise? The other obvious element was that he was noticeably alone. Where was the community? Where was the support team? All of this contributes to the sensational nature of John's mission, and it aligns with the all-too-familiar perspective within evangelicalism that says, "It's up to us—we are the hope of the world." And "we" means evangelicals, or at least it means those who believe like evangelicals believe.

John clearly embraced this perspective and a strategy that put the elite missionary (himself) in an exaggerated role. It is what some people call a "Messiah complex." The filmmakers even talked with All Nations personnel about this self-identity in regard to John, but the agency leadership ruled it out (perhaps too quickly). In the bigger picture, it is simply unconvincing that John's chosen mission was the only outlet for his missionary drive, or the only directive from above. For those of us who believe in a God of love, we are still curious about God's plan for the North Sentinelese, but we do not presume to know it exactly.

Is there room in the evangelical heart and mind for self-criticism in regard to mission strategy? I would think that many evangelical mission agencies, even those that share much in common with All Nations, would *not* have sent John Chau to North Sentinel island, at least not in the way that he was sent.

Upon watching this film, my sadness, therefore, is not simply over John's death, though I do grieve that. Mostly, I was sad with Patrick who lost a son, without the hope of reconciliation. But I was also sad for those who could only see John's death as martyrdom and who leave no room for self-criticism about the methods of their mission. That perspective is simply too narrow. I was also sad for the likes of Everett, who lost his faith in God in the midst of his own mission and who now sees no good in the missionary efforts of others. That is a harsher

judgment than I am able to bear and also too narrow of a perspective. I am much more comfortable believing that we can be full of faith and courage, yet also self-critical. We can be bold and strong, yet also weak and humble. This complexity, I believe, is true to the human experience and true to the story of John Chau.

*Mark J.H. Klassen lives in Yarrow, British Columbia, Canada, and serves as an elder at the Yarrow Mennonite Brethren Church where his wife, Amy, is one of the pastors. They served in India for six years (2005–2011) with Multiply (*https://multiply.net/*; formerly MB Mission). Since returning to Canada, Mark has worked as a writer for the mission agency and has fulfilled the role of Managing Editor of Witness for the past twelve years. A graduate of Youth With A Mission's University of the Nations (BA) and Regent College (MA), Mark also operates a small writing services company called Namesake (*https://www.namesake.ca/*), which he will continue to manage when he completes his time of service with Multiply in December 2024.*