

Remembering Chris

Francis T. Christy, Jr. (1926 – 2009)

Fisheries economist, social scientist, photographer, flyfisher, compassionate human

Christy, who was born on 4 November 1926 and died on 19 June 2009 at Washington, D.C., leaves behind his wife, Barbara Cleveland, and children, Catherine, Susannah and Sam

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The passing away of Francis T. Christy, Jr. draws a curtain on the earthly life of a man who was a true scholar, a great humanist, resource economist, photographer and friend of fishers.

His working life spanned over six decades, and included pathbreaking work at the Resources for the Future Institute and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) on fisheries resource economics, property rights and subsidies. Christy then went on to document people's

he was ever willing to change long and dearly held perceptions.

Chris, as he was known to his friends, was a great inspiration in my professional life. I am so proud that I had the unique opportunity of knowing him well and being one of his close friends. I had read much of his writings before I first met him. That was during his first visit to my home State of Kerala, in south India, in the early 1980s. That visit had been organized by Rolf Willmann who was then working in the FAO Bay of Bengal Programme in Chennai, in the neighbouring State of Tamil Nadu. That encounter, I believe, changed both our perspectives on fisheries. Chris got a unique insight into small-scale fisheries during that visit and has always acknowledged this fact in many of his subsequent writings. I got my first perspective into the issue of rights, which he was so passionately propagating in those days.

Christy's working life was marked by a lack of fear of making paradigm shifts if the reality which he confronted warranted such action.

lives as a photojournalist. He was marked by a lack of fear of making paradigm shifts if the reality which he confronted warranted such action. His transition from being probably the first fisheries economist to propose the idea of individual quotas in fishing to one who questioned their relevance in small-scale fisheries in the developing countries is a case in point. His keen understanding of econometrics did not sway him away from immediate empathy with real-life situations, which could not be so neatly presented. He viewed these as challenges that ought to be squarely faced, and, if needed,

Fishworkers conference

Later, in Rome in July 1984, when I was instrumental in putting together the first International Conference in Support of Fishworkers, held in parallel to FAO's World Conference on Fisheries Management and Development, Chris was a tacit supporter of that alternative conference that highlighted the central role of "small people" in fisheries. I still recall the day in Rome during that fisher people's conference when we had organized a fishers' cultural festival at the Piazza Novona. It was after office

This remembrance comes from
John Kurien (*kurien.john@gmail.com*),
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hours. I was on the podium, which was erected near the fountain, introducing the Indian delegation. In the distance, I saw Chris mingling in the large crowd that had gathered to hear the music and watch the multi-coloured costumes of fishers from around the world. A while later, I slowly sneaked up behind him and poked my fingers into his ribs, exclaiming, "I caught you spying for the FAO!" He turned around abruptly. Seeing me, he burst into his characteristic laugh, muffled only by his grizzly beard!

Later, in 2000, he donated a large portion of his collection of books and journals to the library of the Centre for Development Studies in Trivandrum, Kerala, where I was then working. That was a great gesture.

Chris continues to inspire. His writings will continue to be re-interpreted. His concern for fisherfolk in the small-scale sector and their rights continues to be a topic of great concern. His memory will live on. People like me, who came to know him well as an economist and as a great human being, will always feel his real presence in our midst. †



NICO VAN DOORN

A true scholar, a great humanist, resource economist, photographer and friend of fishers, Francis T. Christy, Jr. continues to inspire through his writings

In Christy's Words

There is not, however, a general understanding that the condition of open-access is the fundamental source of the problems. This is due, in part, to the conventional Western approaches to fisheries management that emphasize the welfare of the fish rather than the fishermen and which seek to preserve catch levels rather than economic returns.

—from *Common Property Rights: An Alternative to ITQs*

To a considerable extent in the past, the problems of fisheries in the South were exacerbated by misguided and damaging development projects from the North. This was due to two deficiencies in development aid: (a) an almost total lack of understanding of the special characteristics of the nature of fisheries, and (b) an insensitivity to the organization of the social customs and cultural mores of local fishing communities. The North has subsequently learned something more about the former factor but has responded generally by throwing up its hands and doing nothing, because it has not figured out how to provide the continuity of attention that is necessary. There are also some improvements with regard to the latter factor. In both cases, the North has much to learn from the South if it is to provide useful aid to the South on fishery.

—from a personal email communication to John Kurien, reproduced in *People and the Sea: A Tropical-majority Perspective*, First MARE Lecture, Amsterdam, 2001

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