Beyond the gates of splendor

Beyond the gates was an interesting movie to watch. At the beginning of the movie there were the wairani people describing how some member of their family were murdered. While watching it I was wondering what could be the reason behind the killings. And I guessed it must have been some kind of a religious sacrifice. But then I couldn’t figure out why they murdered the five American missionaries.

In the middle of it I understood that in their society one had to kill for his own survival. “Spear or be speared”. They had done it for so long that they have accepted to live with it. Then I was even more surprised when the two commentators pointed out that the wairanis didn’t have any system of resolving conflicts among themselves and that it could be one of the reasons behind their act. It made me appreciate the sense of law and order in the rest of the world. But as I watched it I also noticed how a human being can be destructive to his own existence even in the civilized part of the world.

Finally I was astonished by the act of the missionaries and their families. Especially by the man whose father was killed by the wairani people and was still able to understand and forgive them. And I saw how love and forgiveness could be more powerful than hatred and revenge. Seeing how the lives of the wairani people change makes you believe that time really can change everything.
A Cycle of Violence

Killing in and of itself is not necessarily a bad thing, and neither is violence for that matter. Both violence and killing has its place in every civilization, but many supposedly rational individuals would probably tend to disagree with my perspective, especially a vast majority of modern Christians. I’ve never understood how modern day Christians have managed to reconcile the inconsistencies between the ethics and morals of the past and present. I suppose that’s why I am not a very good Christian, but I am a confirmed Lutheran, whatever that may be.

In the movie End of the Spear, the people of the Waodani tribe murdered five Christian Missionaries, because they thought that the Missionaries were just as likely to harm the Waodani as the Waodani were likely to harm any other potential threat. The irony of this event is that the Waodani were simply being preemptive and the Missionaries were ill equipped linguistically and could not communicate their intentions to save the Waodani people. As a result the Missionaries died from their good intentions and ignorance. Most people might call this movie a tragedy, but I call it a tragedy in that it advocates self-destructive suicide and attempts to reward the passive anti-violent kind of thinking that has become so prevalent among modern day Christians as well as Americans.

My position on the use of violence is simple. A civilized and rational man recognizes when and when not to use violence as a means of conflict resolution. Mutual cooperation and communication are the first step in any conflict resolution, only if the other party involved is willing to cooperate. Otherwise, violence cannot be avoided, especially if both parties have a mutually opposing solution or goal. When an outbreak of polio started to kill several Waodani the wives of the murdered Missionaries eventually managed to convey this information to a greater or lesser degree through one of the tribe’s women that had been rescued as a small child. It was this event that lead to the civilizing and modernizing of the Waodani tribe.

The Missionaries should have been better equipped intellectually to deal with the potential threat the Waodani posed, but I suppose that they felt secure in their faith in their God. How anyone can continue a system of belief that relies on faith in a higher power to provide answers for humanities problems beyond me. Seriously consider for a moment that there is or is not a higher power, this translates to a single coin toss in terms of probability and certainty. By pursuing self-knowledge and knowledge of one’s surroundings an individual can attempt to exercise a greater and greater level of certainty and understanding in an otherwise uncertain universe. In other words I have a better chance of knowing myself than I have of knowing a higher power, at least until I am dead. I do try to keep in mind that surprise always happens when one’s expectations about what is known fails to occur. I am quite certain that the Missionaries were very surprised to be on the receiving end of more than a few spears.

I accept that violence can perpetuate a given conflict, but when it is applied properly, violence can most certainly solve and end the more immediate conflict, and this was how the Waodani must have seen things, maybe not as refined in the rationalizing, but similar non the less. The Waodani probably thought something as simple as revenge, kill first, and take what is needed, a very shortsighted perspective to be sure.

I have yet to encounter any individual that has not had some sort of conflict with another human being; must be human nature at work. Yet, most people wholly detest the use of violence. Some have even stated that they would rather die than resort to using violence even in self-defense, and I simply cannot fathom how any person would throw their life away based on a coin toss based belief system. I think this is why I have an extremely intense dislike for most every religion. The use of violence isn’t always the answer, but it is an answer, even if it is not the right one.
Beyond the Gates of Splendor

The documentary, Beyond the Gates of Splendor, tells the dramatic and moving story of the Waodani, a warlike and violent tribe living in the remote regions of the Amazon in Ecuador. The tribe was known for its blood feuds, which often lasted decades. Disputes between members were often settled with bloody stabbings. Afterwards, revenge was common. It was later determined that at one time, around seven out of every ten Waodani deaths were homicide. This violent people clashed often with the Shell Oil prospectors during the middle of the twentieth century.

Five missionaries went to try to make peaceful contact with the Waodani by airplane. They brought gifts and strove very hard to learn about this remote group. They even gave rides aboard their plane to tribesmen. Unfortunately, one of the men they conversed with was in the middle of a large dispute with a number of the other men. To settle his anger, and that of the clan, the Waodani decided to kill the foreigners. This was taken out with brutal efficiency, one missionary being drowned, the others speared to death. The Waodani man who started the killings was later murdered himself.

Soon after receiving word of the killings, the wife of one of the missionaries and the sister of another, went to live with the Waodani. Despite their heartbreak, they managed to forge new relationships with the people. The new missionaries began to slowly teach the people, and learn from them in turn. Soon, the homicides all but disappeared. Later, the son of one of the murdered missionaries also moved in with the people. He and his family befriended the Waodani family responsible for his father’s murder. They lived there for many years.

The events shown in this documentary are all true. Initially, when the Waodani were asked if this story could be told, they refused. The people had become very ashamed of their old murderous lifestyle. However, after hearing about the increasing violence in America, notably the Columbine Massacre, they gave their consent. They said that if their story might help others stop their violence, then it is worth retelling.
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Summary

Basically 5 missionaries entered the Amazon Jungle in hopes to spread their beliefs.
They encountered a savage tribe called the Waodani. These people are savages, spearing anyone, anything, for whatever the cause may be. The five missionaries were later speared to death upon contact with the Waodani. Later news spread back to the families. Some of the wives of the deceased missionaries venture to the Waodani and began living with them. They soon were able to change the Waodani's minds and their violent ways. Years later now the Waodani have been able to live in peace due to this encounter, ultimately changing their ways.
Mincayani and Dayumae's tribe was attacked by the Aenominae. Dayumae's father ordered Mincayani to hide Dayumae in the forest, but Dayumae turned herself to the foreigners to seek for a place to live. As time passed by, Mincayani grown to be an adult, him and his tribe members were discovered by Steve's father. Steve's father was a gospel missionary, who had been living in Waodoni, Ecuador with his family. One day, Steve's father and other missionaries decided to make contact with Mincayani's tribe in person, but from the lack of communication and understanding, all the missionaries including Steve's father was under attacked and killed by the tribe members. Soon after the incident, Dayumae found out that her tribe was responsible for all those missionaries' death. She felt guilty and wanted to go back to the tribe to resolve all the conflict. As the opportunity arrived, Dayumae, Rachel-one of the missionaries' wife, Steve's mother and Steve took their risks to go to Mincayani's tribe, because they wanted to stop the killing and spearing tradition of the tribe. While they were living in the tribe, they found out that the Aenominae members were diagnosed with Polio. They were being quarantined for eight weeks. After the quarantine, Steve and his mother left and went back to America to start a new life, while Rachel was still living with the tribe. Years later, Rachel diagnosed with cancer and passed away. Steve went back to the tribe for Rachel's funeral. Kimo and Dayumae told him about Rachel's will of wanting him to stay and live with them. Steve was in dilemma of whether to go back to America to live with his own family or to live with his tribe family. One morning, Mincayani took Steve out to the river sandbank where Steve's father was killed. Mincayani told Steve about his guilt of killing Steve's father, instead of taking revenge, Steve forgave Mincayani's killing and he puts a final end of spearing and killing.