

Ecuador Martyrs and the End of the Spear

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Fifty years ago last month, five young American missionaries were speared and hacked to death with machetes on a sand bar in the Curaray River in Ecuador. The missionaries were seeking to make contact with the Auca Indians, a 250-person tribe that anthropologists characterized as the most violent people-group ever known; the homicide rate even *within the tribe* was greater than 60%. The Aucas (also known as Waodani) regularly killed any outsiders they ever encountered. They lived in constant conflict with neighboring tribes and lived and died by the end of the spear. The American missionaries believed the only hope to save the Waodani from extinction was for the tribe to hear the Gospel and come to understand its principles of forgiveness and reconciliation and peace.

The five missionaries prepared to make contact with the tribe for several months. They learned Waodani words and phrases. The Missionary Aviation Fellowship pilot, Nate Saint, flew his single-engine Piper in circles over the jungle, searching for any sign of the Waodani. Finally, contact was made and through an ingenious design, gifts were lowered to the tribe in a basket at the end of a very long rope. On January 3, 1956, the missionaries landed on the sandbar in the Curaray River and set up camp. Three days later, three Waodani came out of the jungle. There was a friendly exchange and one of the Waodani even took a ride in Nate Saint's airplane. But on January 8, several Waodani warriors burst out from the jungle and killed the five in a matter of moments. Though the missionaries had guns (which their agencies required them to carry), they shot their weapons into the air rather than defend themselves, an action they had decided upon beforehand. They had said to one another and to their families, "The Waodani are not ready for heaven; we are."

But this was not the end of the story. Three of the young widows stayed in Ecuador to work with other tribes and try to establish relationships with the Waodani. By God's amazing grace, a relationship was established, and within three years, one of the widows, Elisabeth Elliot (along with her pre-school daughter), together with Nate Saint's sister, Rachel, went to live among the Waodani. They showed love, shared medicine and health-care principles, and spoke the truth of God's Word to the Waodani. The intra-tribal murders stopped and the inter-tribal warfare ceased. The Waodani began to thrive and prosper and today there are about 2,000 in the tribe and more than a third are Christian.

There is more to the story. Perhaps you heard part of it from the cable-channel broadcast of our church's worship service of January 8. Due to our technical difficulties, that service was played for more than 7 weeks straight. It was interesting timing for technical difficulties, because just now the feature film based on the story of the Ecuador martyrs, "End of the Spear", has been showing at our local cinema. I encourage you to see the film. To make it easier for you to take a chance on something you might not be sure about, our church bought all the tickets to two showings in order to give them away. So if

you would like to attend the 4:00 matinee on Saturday, February 25, or the 1:15 show on Sunday, February 26, please call 743-0484 and make your reservation. These tickets are free.

Maybe by seeing the film “End of the Spear”, we will appreciate more Jim Elliot’s personal creed: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” It’s based on the words of Jesus Christ, who said in Mark 8, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.” That’s the reason someone will keep his gun in the holster when facing the sharp end of the spear.

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Bible verses are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version (ESV).