

# FILM



The Grandfathers

## A different heart

*The Grandfathers* (2011, PG)

For those who saw the first documentary in this trilogy, this will be a must-see film. *Beyond the Gates of Splendor* (2002 documentary) was followed by the *End of the Spear* (2005 dramatised version). These films are based around the murders of five missionaries, Nate Saint, Jim Elliot, Ed McCully, Pete Fleming, and Roger Youderian in 1956 by men from the Waodani (or Huaorani) people, who live in the Amazonian rainforest area of east Ecuador.

The Waodani and their neighbours were characterised as one of the most violent peoples in recorded history. The first documentary told the story from the viewpoint of those who went to live with the Waodani people after the murders, including Steve Saint, the son of Nate, and his family. I have always found it to be a profoundly moving and challenging story of reconciliation.

*The Grandfathers* continues this theme, but focuses on Steve's son Jesse, as he works through his time with the Waodani people, learning subtly about the events that took place in the 1950s, which formed his father and have now formed him as a man, and have led him to continue a ministry in his own right.

The film itself is a cultural study and testament to Jesse's generation, and also different forms of film-making as it is part conventional documentary, part Terrence Malik style of personal reflection, and even part music video (how can one not like a documentary that has the Eurhythmic singing Missionary Man in the background?).

The style may actually be difficult at times for some people to watch, but there are many fascinating parts, and it links well with the first documentary, often using references and even jokes, albeit with Jesse's comments, rather than his father's.

It is sobering to witness the next generation simply being with the people who had killed your own grandfather and his friends, but for Jesse he cannot contemplate being without his new relations, summing up the Christian gospel: 'Same man, - different heart.'

*Book of Eli* (2010, MA)

Sometimes Hollywood surprises you with a film with religion at its centre. This sometimes erratic and quite violent film (be warned, many characters are dispatched to meet their creator), centres on a 'book' carried by Eli, a contemporary road warrior played by Academy Award winner Denzel Washington.

He is on a mission in a post-apocalyptic world to deposit this book at a remaining civilised centre for safe-keeping. One person asks Eli what was the world like before (the apocalypse). He replies simply "People had more than they needed. We had no idea what was precious and what wasn't. We threw away things people kill each other for now."

The film is summed up by one poster "Some will kill to have it. He will kill to protect it." Eli is an enigmatic survivor in this post-apocalyptic world (much like the film *The Road*). Throughout the film he consistently refuses the temptations and rewards, including sexual advances he is of-

fered. He acknowledges God's provision. "Dear Lord, thank you for giving me the strength and the conviction to complete the task you entrusted to me. Thank you for guiding me straight and true through the many obstacles in my path. And for keeping me resolute when all around seemed lost. Thank you for your protection and your many signs along the way. Thank you for any good that I may have done, I'm so sorry about the bad. Thank you for the friend I made. Please watch over her as you watched over me."

He is depicted as a moral and upright person, perhaps like an Old Testament prophet, who also provides swift judgement on the immorality around him. What is this book? Aptly for this contemporary period, it is a copy of the King James Bible.

He has one person as his nemesis: Carnegie, a ruthless local war lord figure who tries to seduce Eli into joining him, because he wants this book at all costs. He knows the book.

He says "I grew up with that book, I know its power." Further that it is "A weapon aimed right at the hearts and minds of the weak and the desperate. It will give us control of them.... People will come from all over, they'll do exactly what I tell 'em if the words are from the book. It's happened before and it'll happen again. All we need is that book." The film certainly highlights that words and this book have power, and significant parts of Eli's dialogue are quotes and references from the bible.

Eli of course completes his mission. The KJV bible is put in place with other religious works, the curator seemingly implying that it is the lost piece that the world needs, an integral work of culture and a future help in terms of the re-civilisation of the world. The role of the bible is clearly pointed to in the past, as it will be in the future, though we know it as more than a cultural work.

Eli concludes the film, depicted as the faithful servant, "I'm so very tired, but I go now to my rest at peace. Knowing that I have done right with my time on this earth. I fought the good fight, I finished the race, I kept the faith."

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