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# Just news

## Praise the lord and pass the buck

While viewing the schools within the ministry of the Dallas First Baptist Church, I had the eerie feeling that I was watching a film about Hitler's Nazi youth

BY KAMILA AL-NAJJAR

**T**hy Kingdom Come . . . Thy Will Be Done is a documentary film directed, written and produced by Antony Thomas about the rise of the born-again Christian fundamentalist movement and its parallels with the right-wing political machine in the United States.

Since 1967 Thomas has directed 18 films and is well-known for his *Death of a Princess* (1980), which nearly caused diplomatic relations between Great Britain and Saudi Arabia to be severed. Born in India, raised in South Africa and educated in England, Thomas was censured by South African authorities in 1964 and forced to emigrate to England in 1967.

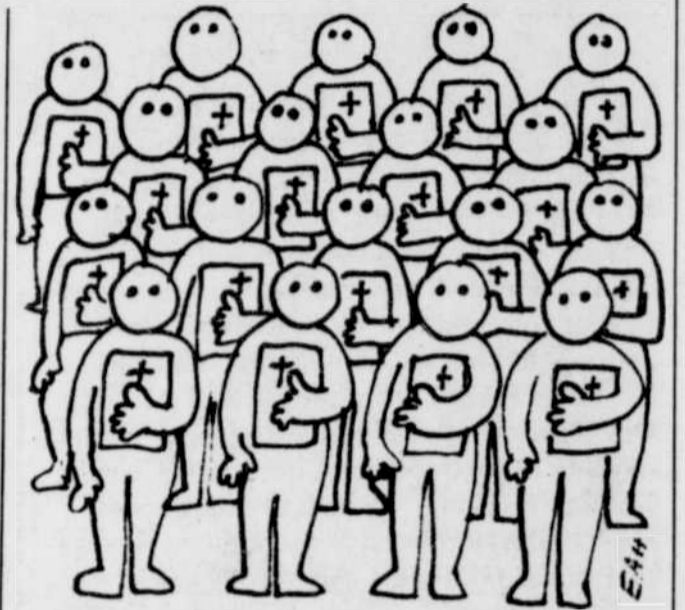
Thomas's film takes the viewer into specific individuals' lives as they tell their stories of disillusionment — from personal dissatisfaction with their lives to extreme drug and alcohol use. The one thing all these people had in common was that they had been born again and had given their lives to Jesus Christ, their lord and savior.

*Thy Kingdom Come . . . Thy Will Be Done* was broadcast throughout Europe and England last spring and received rave reviews. The controversial film, co-financed and originally produced as two hour-long segments by the PBS documentary series *Frontline*, was scheduled to be shown in May 1987 but was canceled after the Jim and Tammy Bakker scandal broke. The film gives the viewer an inside look at the pre-scandal Praise the Lord Ministry and Heritage USA, a 350-acre sprawl of what is described by born-again Christians as the "ideal city." There are no realities there, no crime, no homeless roaming the streets, no alcohol, nothing but a Christian fairytale city.

Heritage USA offers its inhabitants a 500-room luxury hotel and even a Main Street USA Christian shopping mall with stores such as the Heavenly Fudge Shop, Bakker's Bakery and Deli, and everything else one can imagine in a "perfect city."

The streets of Heritage USA also contain a visionary house built for disabled children. The only resident of the house is Kevin Whittum, who stands 28 inches tall, weighs 20 pounds and has osteogenesis (brittle-bone disease). "Kevin's House" was built from \$1,000 donations to PTL after viewers watched Jim and Tammy Bakker plead, cry and beg for money to help Kevin. Kevin was the main visual used by the Bakkers to conjure up sympathy for contributions.

The filmmakers also visit the First Baptist



Church in Dallas, Texas, which with a membership of 26,000 is the wealthiest Protestant church in America. Thomas shows the segregation of the ministry, which has separate churches in Dallas for Hispanics and blacks. W.A. Criswell, minister and leader of the church, when asked why there are segregated churches, said, "Birds of a feather flock together . . . they, minorities, don't mix very well."

While viewing the schools within the First Baptist Church's ministry, which range from preschool to college, I got the eerie feeling that I was watching a film about Hitler's Nazi youth. There was no questioning of authority, but instead just conformity to rules and regulations of the church and Bible.

In an interview with the *San Francisco Chronicle* in January, Thomas said, "I found the solution in some ways analogous to Hitler, please don't take this the wrong way, but I think Hitler's power came from the complete demoralization of the German people in the '20s and '30s. It's the philosophy of having all the answers and giving severely dislocated people a doctrine that promises a better time. In terms of the fundamentalists it's this: 'I promise you a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Once you have this you are guaranteed a place in heaven. I will also give you a Bible, which will give you answers to any problem you ever encounter. I will direct you to the chapter and verse.' It's a powerful formula for people in crisis."

*Thy Kingdom Come . . . Thy Will Be Done*, in an updated, 90-minute version, is scheduled to air in Portland on Wednesday, April 6, at 10 pm on Channel 10.

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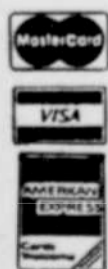
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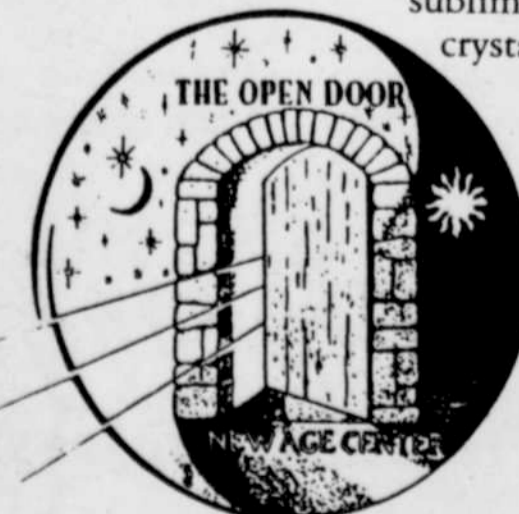
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