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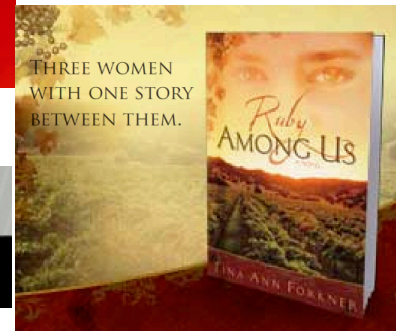
Pop Culture From A Spiritual Point Of View

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He can't be slowed. He can't be stopped. He can't be killed.

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ABOUT

REVIEW

Yodok Stories (2008)

Release Date:
Friday, August 22, 2008

MPAA Rating:
UR

Genre:
Documentary

Starring:

Director:
Andrzej Fidyk

Synopsis:
"Yodok Stories" follows a 36 year-old North Korean defector, Jung Sung San, who managed to escape through China to South Korea. One out of nine people who fled to "safety" in Seoul, he inspires eight other refugees to recreate the past through theater, and together they work to develop a musical about the concentration camps. Despite death threats and many obstacles, the musical becomes a tour de force for this ensemble of refugees.

Yodok Stories (2008) | Review

One Part of the Axis of Evil
Darrel Manson

President Bush included North Korea in his "Axis of Evil." We know that it's not a nice place. We know that they want to be (and may already be) a nuclear power. We know the government is harsh. We know that it is one of the most totalitarian states in the world. But we may not know just how evil the government is.



Twenty years ago, documentary film maker Andrzej Fidyk made a film about the elaborate parades celebrating forty years of Communist rule. Since that time, he has wanted to make a film about some of the things he learned while there, specifically the existence of concentration camps built on the Nazi and Stalinist models. In North Korea, anyone accused of being a criminal is arrested, and so is their family—parents, children, grandparents. Most never leave the camps alive. It is estimated that at least 200,000 men, women and children are in these camps. Whereas the thought of nuclear weapons in the hands of Kim Jung II may be frightening, the real evil of the regime is found in the way it has treated some of its own people.

Of course, you can't just bring your camera and visit such places. Instead, he began making plans for a play, which turned into a musical about the camps. *Yodok Stories* shows the play being prepared and talks to some of the few survivors of Yodok concentration camp who have made their way to South Korea, including the play's director. There are former prisoners and former guards. One of the people interviewed was once one of Kim Jung II's bodyguards. All tell stories of incomprehensible atrocities that place in Yodok and the other camps.

It may be hard for Americans to grasp the depth of degradation and cruelty that these camps represent. This is blatant inhumanity and abuse. There is rape, torture, execution, starvation—all done to people who may have done nothing wrong.

When injustice sinks to such a appalling level, people may wonder where God is to allow such suffering and brutality. I think it is important that prayer comes up often in the film. The first time is when we see the director of the musical going to the border between the countries and praying to his ancestors that he will be able to tell to the world the story of what happened to his family. Later we go to a church service in Seoul where a long pastoral prayer speaks out against Communism and the North Korean regime.

The most moving of the prayers, for me, was in the final scene as balloons are being launched to carry pamphlets to North Korea, we hear the Lord's Prayer being sung, but there are amendments to the prayer which are especially poignant. The prayer begins, "Our Father who art in heaven—are you there? Hallowed by thy name." It concludes (starting from where we would say "Lead us not into temptation"): "Do not put us on the execution scaffold, but deliver us from prison. Father, do not go just to South Korea. Please come also to Yodok. Father, please come to this land."

It is not easy listening to the stories told by Yodok survivors. But for those who care about the world—those who seek to do what the prophet Micah says is required of us (to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God), those who seek to be the embodiment of Christ on earth—we must hear the cries of the oppressed and the broken. *Yodok Stories* gives voice to their pain. Perhaps it can be the beginning of seeking an end to such atrocities. Perhaps we will be the agents by which God's work will be done. *Father,*



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please be in Yodok.

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