I tell you there are strange forces at work here. For instance, there's this "Messiah," King of the Jews, who will lead them all into some sort of anti-Roman paradise. Then there's a wild man in the desert named John, who drowns people in water. There's a carpenter's son who goes around doing magic tricks, "miracles" they call them. This man is different: he teaches that god is near—in every man. . . . It's actually quite profound, some of it.

—TRIBUNE SEXTUS, *BEN HUR* (1959)

5 *erato*

THE NEW TESTAMENT AND TALES OF THE CHRIST

With the debatable exception of the debatable creation of Adam and Eve, no single event that took place in the ancient world has had as great an impact on the subsequent history of the Mediterranean and the Western world as a Roman provincial governor's reluctant execution of a local Jew known generally as Jesus of Nazareth, called by some the Christ. Within two generations his name and teachings spread from the tiny province of Judea through the great cities of the Roman Empire—Ephesus, Philippi, Corinth, Athens, and Rome herself—thousands of Jews and Gentiles practiced his teachings and died for their beliefs, and eventually the entire Roman state succumbed to the overwhelming appeal of the Christian movement and its indomitable momentum. The spiritual roots of the next two millennia of European history are buried deep in the Levantine soil upon which this Nazarene had trod. From Giotto's lovely Scrovegni Chapel in Padua to Bach's impressive *Passions*, for centuries the iconography of Jesus' life gave the Western arts their most inspirational material.

The art of film has been no exception. Beginning with the first filming of the famed decennial Passion Play at Oberammergau in 1897 and Luigi Topi's ten tableaux of 1900, the passion of Christ and related narratives have appeared in more than forty major films. These films include one of the American film industry's first epics *(Intolerance)*, two of the medium's most successful epics (the 1925 and 1959 productions of *Ben-Hur*), the first CinemaScope film *(The Robe)*, one of the most expensive films ever shot in America *(The Greatest Story Ever Told)*, one of the most elaborate

made-for-television movies ever made *(Jesus of Nazareth)*, and two of the most controversial films of the second half of the twentieth century *(The Last Temptation of Christ* and *Life of Brian)*. Cinematic versions of the tale of the Christ have attracted such noted directors as Cecil B. DeMille, Mervyn LeRoy, William Wyler, D.W. Griffith, Sidney Olcott, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Franco Zeffirelli, and Martin Scorsese.

Directors and actors who attempt to portray the life of Christ or the era of early Christianity inevitably tread on perhaps the thinnest ice in filmdom—a border between the sublime and the ridiculous, between reverence and boredom. Clothing a serene, emotionless actor in white robes and crucifying him amid the gentle tears of women may yield some of the devotion desired from the scene at Golgotha, but without the banter of the dice-throwing Roman soldiery and the skeptical Jewish leaders and elders, without the stormy heavens and the trembling earth, without the anguish of the disrobed, derided, beaten body of the Messiah and the triumph of his unswervingly divine purpose, the scene will not work. Too much bland reverence yields a dramatic void. The transfiguration of Christ into a glowing god on earth has spiritually satisfied millions of humans for centuries, but it will leave a cinematic audience flat. What is more, such a portrayal is false to the complex character of Jesus as portrayed in the Bible. After all, it was in large part the glorious combination of Christ the transfigured son of God, Christ the prophet, Christ the healer, Christ the rebel, Christ the man, and Christ the suffering, crucified mortal that made the first four books of the New Testament the compelling theological foundation of Christianity.

Christ is the most difficult cinematic figure to portray—even more difficult than an Old Testament patriarch like Moses. He must be a believable human, yet he must reveal his divine spirit; he must stand above humans and never sway from his purpose, yet he must fall victim to human misunderstanding and have his brief moments of emotional doubt and physical pain. He must be able to soothe and heal the meek and suffering, yet he must be capable of terrifying an entire religious establishment and of single-handedly overturning the market inside the Jerusalem temple. He must boldly walk across water, yet meekly be whipped and spat on by his adversaries. He must know that he is the Son of Man, yet he must be able to plead, "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And if all that weren't challenging enough, each viewer has a preconception of what Jesus looked like. It is almost easier for a camel to pass through a needle's eye than for an actor to portray Christ with both reverence and dramatic conviction.

The Gospel According to Hollywood

One of the most severe difficulties the earliest cinematic attempts at a portrayal of Christ faced was simply the silence to which they were necessarily bound. A complex characterization of Christ was hardly possible, for film was still a visual medium, not a verbal one. Consequently, films such as *The Star of Bethlehem* (1908), *Jerusalem in the Time of Christ* (1908), *The Crimson Cross* (1913), *From the Manger to the Cross* (1912), *The Life of Our Savior* (1914), *Christus* (1915), and *Intolerance* (1916) all present what seems to modern viewers a monotonous series of picture-postcard tableaus—the Nativity, the Magi, the raising of Lazarus, the Last Supper, the Transfiguration, the Crucifixion. Kalem's *From the Manger to the Cross* (also known as *Jesus of Nazareth*) shies away from showing the violent moments in Christ's life. When Jesus chases the money changers and dove sellers from the temple, he merely waves a cloth at the transgressors; the entire trearment of the Jerusalem arrest, trial, and execution is curtailed, while the majority of footage shows Christ gesturing to crowds and putting his gentle hand onto the heads of the unfortunate. By no means a bold film, *From the Manger to the Cross* does have its precious, innocent moments. When the titles (from the Gospels) tell us that John the Baptist is "a voice crying in the wilderness" (Matthew 3:3), for example, we see a shaggily clothed man cupping his hands around his mouth. The film charmingly includes the rarely filmed episode from Luke 2:41–50, in which the young Christ is separated from his parents in Jerusalem. The film is also interesting for its primitive use of special effects: unable to shoot at night, the filmmakers show the "midnight arrest" in the Garden at Gethsemane in broad daylight; the fury of the sky above Golgotha is depicted on a moving roll of scenic backdrop; and Christ ascends to heaven on a hoisted rope.

In 1915 the Italian studio Cines followed Kalem's *From the Manger to the Cross* and Pathé's *The Life of Our Savior* with *Christus*. This film resembled *From the Manger to the Cross* in its location shots in Egypt (the flight to Egypt) and Palestine (most recognizably the Via Dolorosa) and in its heavy reliance on New Testament quotations for titles. *Christus* had little chance for success in its 1917 American release, for by then D. W. Griffith's spectacular *Intolerance* (1916) had shaken the film world.

Griffith's revolutionary format—running four simultaneous stories of human intolerance—left much of the Passion footage on the cutting room floor. Because the purpose of *Intolerance* was to "show how hatred and intolerance, through all the ages, have battled against love and charity," Griffith concentrated on the struggle that Christ led against the hypocritical and unjust leadership of the Pharisees. He shows the mobs of Hebrew laborers halting their work perforce while the "reverent" Pharisees walk past in prayer. During the wedding feast at Cana (John 2:1–11) Christ, in a long white robe and shoulder-length brown hair, changes the water into wine. Semibiblically (the Bible has similar scenes in different contexts) Griffith lets the scornful Pharisees into the party, and they protest against the merrymaking. In a typical Griffith touch, a footnote beneath the titles assures the viewers that drinking wine was perfectly acceptable in ancient Palestine.

Griffith's footnotes in *Intolerance* are unique in cinematic history, but this particular note tells us something about the dynamics or morality and drama of New Testament films. It is clear in the Gospels that Christ and his disciples drank wine, both at Cana and at the Last Supper, whence the celebration of the all-important eucharistic ritual. When modern caution and American puritanical ethics demand that a filmmaker go out of his

112 The Resurrection was one of the sequences technicians hand-colored for DeMille's *The King of Kings* (1927). The long shadows, gleaming and streaming light, subtly reflecting armor, and deep-shadowed foreground of this scene exemplify the technically brilliant lighting effects throughout the film. The rock-covered entrance to the Tomb of Jesus is as authentic as can be expected, given that scholars do not know exactly where and how Jesus was buried.

113 Coffins were not used in first-century A.D. Palestine, and many tombs had a rolling rock door. This one in Jerusalem, known as Herod's Tomb, was re-created in *The King of Kings* (1927), *King of Kings* (1961), *Barabbas* (1962), and several other films.

way to justify behavior that might more sensibly be taken for granted, Christ loses some of the character drawn by the evangelists. Wine drinking is scarcely the most important aspect of Christ's earthly existence, but unless the filmmaker includes such mundane elements, we are apt to be left with a cinematic Christ sanctified beyond all human interest. Such unhistorical, inauthentic, unbiblical, and unnecessary purification of Christ turns complex biography and profound religious drama into simplified devotional whitewash. If Christ was divinely pure, he nonetheless lived as a man among men.

Christ appears only briefly in the rest of *Intolerance.* He stops the hypocrites from stoning the prostitute, he carries his cross to Golgotha, and he is crucified in the film's fast-moving climax. But the real meat of *Intolerance* came from two of its other three stories.

Griffith's influence on the Hollywood film industry was immense, and he had no more successful pupil than Cecil B. DeMille. Not surprisingly, DeMille's second "ancient" epic expanded *Intolerance*'s glimpses of the life of the Messiah. *The King of Kings* (1927) was actually DeMille's second choice. He had wanted to do a film called *The Deluge*, but Warner Brothers rained on his parade with *Noah's Ark*. So DeMille turned to his twelve research specialists and had them dig up as many New Testament facts and authenticities as possible. Typically, when set designer Paul Tribe showed the cinemogul his drab, plain, but authentic Palestinian set designs, DeMille rejected them and demanded something more elaborate. Tribe insisted that these were authentic, but DeMille then revealed the other side of the authenticity argument, as well as his feel for the workings of the silver screen: no one *really* knew *exactly* what first-century B.C. Palestinian buildings looked like anyway, he said, and he wanted something that would make an impression on the screen. Tribe was fired, and Mary Magdalene was given an ornate atrium complete with pond, swans, and lily pads. It may not have been authentic, but it certainly sold tickets. After taking on two clergymen as special consultants, DeMille subjected them to his innate know-how as well. They once argued over the authenticity of set designs, whereupon DeMille told one of them to "go to hell!" The clergyman replied, "I can't; I already have a reservation elsewhere."[1]

If DeMille was quick to fudge historical authenticity if it got in the way of cinematic impact, he was inflexible in his insistence on biblical morality amid the cast and crew. As he had when filming *The Ten Commandments* (1923), he distributed copies of the Bible to the company of *The King of Kings*. He had an organ installed in the studio to play inspirational hymns for the actors. He insisted that H. B. Warner (Christ) eat and sleep in solitude, that he ride in a curtained limousine, and that he wear a veil over his head while walking to and from the studio. DeMille's moral dicta had little effect. Warner's solitude reportedly revived an old drinking problem, and the Virgin Mary (Dorothy Cummings) was in the process of suing her real-life husband for divorce.

While exercising moral conservatism, DeMille was spending liberally. When the bills reached $2.5 million, his backers began to insist that he merge his company with Pathé. But the ultimate result of DeMille's demands, artistic, moral, and monetary, was

one of the most popular films of all time. The amount of money earned by *The King of Kings* is not relevant, for DeMille gave away all his profits to charities, and many church groups bought prints of the film to lend free to congregations, missionaries, and private organizations. But *The King of Kings* was probably viewed more often than any other film ever made before the 1975 revolution.

Among other strengths, the film is distinguished by powerful and variegated lighting. Cameraman Peverall Marley looked at three hundred biblical paintings by the European masters and attempted to duplicate as many of them as possible on the screen. To achieve these painterly effects he used seventy-five different lenses, seven different kinds of film, and the relatively new Technicolor process. Marley's boldness and technical wizardry breathed life and religious awe into the massive sets of the Jerusalem temple, its Nicanor Gate and Holy of Holies, the streets of Nazareth and Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives.

Before the film's initial glimpse of Jesus, a little blind girl comes to him on the Sabbath and asks to be cured of her malady (see John 9:1–41). Even though the Pharisees insist that there is to be no healing on the Sabbath, Jesus declares, "Whosoever shall believeth in me shall not abide in darkness." Taking the line literally and subjectively, DeMille blackens the screen and gradually crosses it with a dim ray of light. The dim light begins to turn ever so slowly into a hazy grayness, which expands to cover the entire screen. Very slowly the haze begins to become focused, and we see for the first time the first thing that the little blind girl sees—her healer and savior.

The most impressive scene in *The King of Kings* is the crucifixion. The camera focuses on the foot of the heavy wood cross while it is slowly dragged along the dusty ground. The painful hammering of the nails is not shown; DeMille considered such details as unnecessary and distasteful gore. Instead we see a huge mass of weeping humanity, with the three Golgothan crosses in the distance. The two thieves ask Christ to save them (Luke 23:39–43), and Christ says his last seven words and dies. Instantly the wind begins to howl, and the dust from the ground begins to swirl in the air; the very foundations of Calvary begin to quake, and flickering lightning rips the veil of the temple in half (Luke 23:45). The scene is awesome, and its awesomeness demanded numerous expensive technical preparations by Marley and DeMille. To re-create the dramatic chiaroscuro of paintings by Rubens and Gustave Doré, Marley had to employ twenty-seven thousand amperes of lighting. Yet he had to be careful that this strong lighting did not cause streaks on the swirling dust; the scene had to have a cloudy, torrential look while neither revealing light streaks nor being too dark to film. Finally, the entire scene had to be shot before the whirling clouds of a $70,000 cyclorama. The ultimate result of the sophisticated special effects: the height of human gloom and divine anger, of earthly storm and heavenly torrent. Incidentally, while DeMille was filming this scene, D. W. Griffith walked into the studio. DeMille was honored and asked the pioneer to direct a brief sequence. Griffith did so, though without distinction.

Although DeMille used every conceivable shade and expression of white, black, and gray in his film, he knew that certain scenes had to appear even more visually complex and powerful than the rest. So he had his staff hand-paint the resurrection scene in a dramatic orange hue. Then they gilded the sequence in which Lazarus is raised. The cost of preparing such scenes was huge and the amount of exposed film was vast—reportedly 1.5 million feet—but by visually highlighting the episodes, DeMille was able to avoid a narrative digression that might have ruined his cinematic Gospel. DeMille, like countless readers of the Scriptures, was not completely convinced that Judas betrayed Jesus only for the thirty pieces of silver. Though John (12:6) explains that Judas was Jesus' treasurer and embezzled some of the Messiah's funds, DeMille imagined an affair between Mary Magdalene (Jacqueline Logan, though Gloria Swanson was originally offered the part) and Judas (Rudolph Schildkraut, whose son Joseph played Caiaphas). Fortunately for cinematic history this part of the narrative was edited out before the film's final release—for considerations of length, not accuracy or taste.

The Hollywood premiere of *The King of Kings* was also the opening of Grauman's Chinese Theater (its sidewalk not yet dented with celebrity paw prints), on May 19, 1927. The film became so well established that no other major cinematic portrayal of the life of Christ was attempted in America until 1954. In the meantime, however, Julien Duvivier directed *Golgotha* (also called *Ecce Homo*, 1932) in France. Unlike his predecessors, he treated only the last week of Christ's life and the resurrection. And unlike DeMille, he overzealously emphasized the innate piety in the story of Christ; consequently, he created a lengthy, plodding, monotonous film. Still, Duvivier's failure was not from lack of ambition and spectacle. Magnificent mattes of Jerusalem and panning subjective shots of its Passover crowd (of "hundreds of thousands," which may have been a little too ambitious) start *Golgotha* off impressively. Jacques Ibert's full but themeless music is an unfortunately apt accompaniment to this sincere but colorless narrative.

Golgotha does not suffer from lack of fidelity to the sources, either. The film includes the tribute to Caesar, Judas's cupidity, the Last Supper on an "upper balcony" (Mark 14:15), Peter's triple denial of Christ (and the subsequent cock's crow), the dream of Pilate's wife (Matthew 27:19), and Jesus' instructions to Simon Peter—"Feed my sheep" (John 21:17). But typical of *Golgotha*'s pious and unsubtle approach to the Gospels, this last statement by Christ is followed, preposterously, by a shot of a flock of sheep. Duvivier thought that the same literary symbols that elevate the style of the Bible could elevate his film. He was wrong, but at least he did not juxtapose shots of Peter and a rock.

Many privately produced films of the life of Christ had appeared over the years. Not counting the short-lived *The Great Commandment* (1942), one modest production ($600,000) surfaced in 1954. *Day of Triumph*, the Rev. James K. Friedrich's fifty-third film, starred Robert Wilson as Christ and Lee J. Cobb as Zadok. Zadok was a high priest mentioned in the Old Testament, but this fictitious Zadok rebels against Roman tyranny. We see Jesus through Zadok's eyes, and Judas betrays Jesus to further the goals of the

revolutionary group, to which the Iscariot also belongs. This plot is not quite so far-fetched as DeMille's affair between Judas and Mary Magdalene; there was indeed an insurrection against Roman provincial rule in Judea in the thirties A.D., though its biblical proponent was Barabbas (Mark 15:7), not Judas Iscariot.

The post-*Ben-Hur* splurge of "ancient" films in the early 1960s gave birth to a handful of new films about the life of Jesus. The first of these Scripturamas was a full-bodied, wide-screen, colorful *King of Kings* (1961). The film had an impressive list of production credits—produced by Samuel Bronston, narration written by Ray Bradbury and delivered by Orson Welles, and music by Miklos Rozsa. It was shot in Spain and used much of its $8 million budget to photograph its three hundred-plus sets and twenty thousand extras (the numbers according to MGM propaganda).

The film does have impressive and authentic moments. During the Sermon on the Mount, Christ (Jeffrey Hunter, whence the film's nickname "I Was a Teenage Jesus") realistically seems to hold his crowd spellbound. Some members of the crowd ask their teacher questions, and the mobile camera keeps interest alive during the lengthy theological and moral exegeses. Siobhan McKenna's Virgin Mary is also commendable, surpassed only by Frank Thring's ringlet-bearded, sleazy-smiled, intelligent but evil Herod Antipas. The film strives for authenticity in matters large and small. The historian Josephus wrote that the newly arrived Pontius Pilate angered his subjects by displaying medallions bearing the image of Emperor Tiberius. These medallions and the ensuing arguments are depicted in *King of Kings*. The traditional Passover feast includes the eating of "the bitter herbs," and these symbolic indelicacies are included in the film's Last Supper sequence. And Palestinian tombs were opened and closed by stones rolled across the door, just as Christ is temporarily entombed in the film.

King of Kings also contains many unacceptable moments—unacceptable both historically and dramatically. Jesus' visit to John the Baptist's prison cell is unbiblical, and his representation by a Roman advocate before Pilate undermines much of the meaning and purpose behind the Passion. Perhaps more disturbing is the heavy emphasis on the insurrection led by Barabbas (Harry Guardino). To portray Barabbas as an anti-Roman insurrectionist is authentic, as we have seen, but to displace the spiritual message of Jesus with political and physical street fighting is inappropriate. Several traditional biblical eccentricities were underplayed as well—John the Baptist's wildness and Salome's sexuality, for example. Robert Ryan as John the Baptist seems more like a pious preacher from Ohio than "a voice crying in the wilderness," and Brigid Bazlen's "dance of the seven veils" omits the unbiblical but artistically traditional unveiling. Lastly, director Nicholas Ray avoided the "da Vinci syndrome" in staging the Last Supper, but if Leonardo's positioning all the apostles on one side of the table was implausible, Ray's Y-shaped table was no more historical. In reality, if Jesus' party followed the Greco-Roman custom of their rulers, they would have been at three couches arranged in a U-shape.

Any artist who tries to film a cinematic portrait of Christ must face an initial problem in deciding which of the Gospels to use, or, if using more than one, how to combine them and bring them into concord. The makers of *King of Kings* chose the route taken by all of its predecessors—to combine the four Gospels. During the crucifixion sequence Jeffrey Hunter recites Luke 23:34: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." Then he tells another condemned man, "Today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). Ignoring Christ's pain and suffering, and making it seem as if he had nothing better to do than recite memorable apothegms from his cross, *King of Kings* now turns to John 19:26 and has Christ say, "Woman, there is your son." Not content with a single set of dying words, the script demands that Jesus proclaim both John's "It is finished" (19:30) and Luke's "Father, into Thy hands I commend my soul" (23:46). The conciseness and unity of Christ's last remarks from the cross in each of the four Gospels give the literary works some of their most poignant and succinct moments. To bunch five of these statements together in the one moment of film overburdens this poignancy.

114 The kiss of Judas (Otello Sestili) from *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (1964). Harsh and ultrarealistic, Pasolini's cinematic gospel avoids the clichés of Christmas-card Scripturamas. Unshaven and testy, Pasolini's Christ (Enrique Irazoqui) can wither a fig tree; he embodies Christ's power, not his tenderness.

When Pier Paolo Pasolini began his version of the life of Jesus, he took into consideration the different approaches of each of the four evangelists. Choosing not to blend them all into one account, he based his film on Matthew alone. The resulting *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (*Il Vangelo secondo Matteo,* 1964) thus became the first film about the life of Jesus that had a revolutionary, albeit ancient, unifying principle. Pasolini followed Matthew in offering a stark, unembellished portrait of the Messiah, and, unlike his predecessors, Pasolini included the unpleasant and controversial episodes in Jesus' life. One gaunt Galilean whom Jesus heals has a grotesque tumor on his nose and forehead; Jesus stares coldly at his mother and says, "Who is mother to me?" (Matthew 12:48); Jesus is unwelcome and rejected in his native Nazareth (13:54–58); he wills a fruitless fig tree to wither (20:19); he suffers a draining moment of despair at Gethsemane (26: 37–39); and he screams "with a loud voice" just before he dies on the cross (27:50).

Pasolini's production is perfectly suited to the spare tone of Matthew. The film adopts a rough, grainy texture: Christ wears a scraggly ten-day beard; Caiaphas and his

Pharisee mob wear tall, suggestively papal miters; the miracles are executed without hoopla; and the bleak, hillside landscapes (of Calabria) decorate the entire setting with an effectively primitive aura. The dreary music of Prokofiev's *Alexander Nevsky* and the lonesome strings of Bach and Mozart add to the stark realism, as do Pasolini's cast of unknowns. Jesus is played by a young Spanish economics student (Enrique Irazoqui), Judas by a Roman truck driver (Otello Sestili), and the Virgin Mary by Pasolini's mother. Pasolini used these amateur actors and a physical crudeness to create a mundane, human climate, unlike the artificially shimmering sanctity of all previous and most subsequent films about the life of Christ. He shoots them with repeated long close-ups of unassuming, unmade-up faces, and he frequently uses the zoom lens to create intentional disturbances in the narrative. Pasolini's interpretation of Matthew is accurate, believable, and theologically powerful. If only he had smeared a bit of honey on the lip of this cup of bitter absinthe, he might have created one of the most widely acclaimed films of its era. But the Marxist director, whose original Italian title, *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo,* intentionally avoided use of the word *saint,* chose instead to present a powerful, intellectually frightening curiosity, a cinematic voice crying in the wilderness.

At about the time *King of Kings* was released in 1961, the producer, director, and writer George Stevens, who had been planning a film based on the life of the Messiah, was flying to Israel and Lebanon to examine horizons for location shooting. He decided that the Holy Land looked too eroded and unimpressive, so he shot his version of the life of Christ, *The Greatest Story Ever Told,* amid the mesas of Utah, which, he insisted, "looked more authentic."[2] His words sound twisted, but his point is a familiar one, and a sound one: historical authenticity cannot be allowed to interfere with dramatic necessity or with the traditional understanding of certain biblical events. In short, give unto history what is history's; give unto art what is art's. If Giotto could paint imaginative and inauthentic scenery for his scenes of Christ's life in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua, then why should Stevens not shoot the magnificently imposing mesas of Utah for the cinematic Palestine? Of all the critics who panned *The Greatest Story Ever Told* in 1965, not one denied the merits of the splendid scenery or the film's beautiful cinematography. The miraculous feeling surrounding the raising of Lazarus is enhanced by the setting, along the foreboding side of a steep, rocky mesa. The evocative environment and the exultation of the Hallelujah Chorus from (appropriately enough) Handel's *Messiah* help make this one of the most sensuous moments in any film version of the New Testament.

115/116 John the Baptist (Charlton Heston) is about to baptize "Him by Whom he should be baptized" (Max von Sydow, left foreground, facing page, top) in *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965). Director George Stevens thought that this Utah location "looked more authentic" than Palestine. A Renaissance depiction of the baptism of Christ (Joachim Patinir, c. 1500) is set in a similarly rocky, unworldly setting. Any artist, whether Renaissance painter or twentieth-century film director, has the option of rejecting historical authenticity in favor of artistic expression.

Unfortunately, the massive topography of *The Greatest Story Ever Told* is reflected in the elephantine pace of the film. The visual impressions are marvelous, the dramaturgy downright ponderous. Stevens had promised "vigorous ideas" for his film, but his version of the "greatest story" lacks the profundity reasonably expected from such a bold multimillion-dollar enterprise.[3] Christ (Max von Sydow) acts with full Messianic devotion, but his interminable succession of parables and quotations pouring forth from his oral malocclusion lack the vitality that revolutionized the spiritual basis and undermined the entire Olympian substructure of the ancient world. Von Sydow delivers his lines as effectively as possible, but New Testament parables and quotations, which work so well in print, cannot really develop a dramatically viable figure on film. Moreover, Christ is portrayed only as an inspirational figure. Perhaps Stevens intended a one-dimensional portrayal to convey Christ's divinity; if it does so, it does so by default, for no other aspect of Jesus' character is effectively presented.

Individual sequences of the film reveal considerable artistry. Claude Rains's Herod the Great interviews the three Wise Men in the dark, bare atmosphere of an ancient stone palace. Another creepily naturalistic evocation of the ancient world is the slaughter of the innocents, executed without a word. Some thirty years later, the turmoil and despair aroused by the mechanically patrolling Roman troops suggest a political climate perfectly ripe for the wild prophet in camel's hair. The crucifixion sequence gathers its compelling momentum visually from brilliantly severe editing, and aurally from the thunderous shouting of the huge crowd around Golgotha, which is effectively drowned out by alternating moments of spiritual silence and rich music.

One of the most severely criticized aspects of *The Greatest Story Ever Told*'s 222 minutes was the inclusion of scores of Hollywood stars and starlets—some in decidedly minor roles. Charlton Heston (John the Baptist), Roddy McDowall (Matthew), Sidney Poitier (Simon of Cyrene), Carroll Baker (Veronica), Shelley Winters, Ed Wynn, Pat Boone, John Wayne, Angela Lansbury, Victor Buono, Joseph Schildkraut, and Sal Mineo never really find the opportunity to display their talents or to enhance the quality of the narrative; in fact, "star-hunting" distracts the viewer from the film's supposed biblical essence. In one sense, this misuse of such a wealth of thespian talent parallels the film's misuse of the awe-inspiring mesas of Utah: the setting and the leading cast members were unquestionably well chosen by Stevens, but his script (based on Fulton Oursler's novel) and direction failed to mold this raw material into the titanic work of art it originally purported to become. *The Greatest Story Ever Told* rises majestically above many of the other films about the ancient world, yet it lacks the unifying dramatic vision and spiritual uplift that should have shaped it into a true masterpiece. It is as if the film were a magnificent and gigantic block of flawless marble that was skillfully chiseled but never given the final, essential sculptural embodiment of unity and life.

The countercultural revolution of the sixties made possible the portrayal of a "hipper" Christ, and in 1973 two musical adaptations of Jesus' life, *Jesus Christ Superstar* and

117 Judas's ghost (Carl Anderson) fronts the dazzling Motown sequence from *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1973), one of two musical versions of the Passion. Two decades later the animated feature *Hercules* (1997) revived the Motown style for its opening number by the Muses.

Godspell, moved from stage to film. Norman Jewison's uneven *Jesus Christ Superstar* had some successful moments. Judas (Carl Anderson) in a bright Da-Glo orange jumpsuit sings atop some staggering Israeli scenery, and Herod (Joshua Mostel) hilariously wiggles and jiggles his rubber-tire gut beside his plastic swimming pool—which he tauntingly invites Jesus to walk across. Although the work sprang from a "pop" sensibility, the theological and political problems posed by Judas—who praises Christ for beginning with an inspiring idea, but accuses him of overreaching—are sophisticated and believable. Judas's guilt after the betrayal is adapted well to harrowing guitar rhythms; Jesus' crucifixion is presented with eye-opening silhouette photography; and the glaring lights behind the Motown dance of Judas's ghost succeed in carrying both spiritual message and show-biz pizzazz.

Jesus Christ Superstar also has some severe flaws. The Andrew Lloyd Webber–André Previn rock-operatic score makes Jesus (Ted Neeley) sing too frequently in the outer limits of falsetto, and the "heavy" symbols—tanks rolling across the Israeli desert and Phantom jets soaring above—are trite attempts at contemporary political relevance. The often sensitive lyrics (Tim Rice) occasionally cross the line between the sublime and the ridiculous:

118 The Crucifixion, as presented in *Jesus Christ Superstar.* Roman helmets become hard-hats; cuirass and cloak become T-shirt and jeans; and machine guns supplement spears. Such weak attempts at contemporary political relevance marred the film.

119 The Crucifixion, as presented in *Godspell* (1973). Anachronisms, childish and amateurish humor, a dated peace-and-love philosophy, and Jesus crucified on a Manhattan Cyclone fence modernize the Passion but leave it devoid of meaning and stature.

God, Thy will is hard,
But you hold every card.

Even with its flaws, *Superstar* is a positively divine effort compared with *Godspell.* From the opening scenes, in which a female "apostle" is called from her heathenish Xerox machine to be baptized in a sanctified Manhattan fountain, to the closing scene, in which Judas blows his Cracker Jack–box whistle and crucifies Christ (in his Superman T-shirt) on a Cyclone fence, *Godspell* tries hard to be clever and contemporary. But guided by the powers of a cinematic Beelzebub, it fails miserably. Tony and Maria made more believably sanctified figures dancing along their *West Side Story* Cyclone fences. Incessant mediocre imitations of the Three Stooges, John Wayne, Howard Cosell, and Chester Conklin signal only the film's adoration of its own adorableness. These flower children could never have withered a fig-tree, and somehow the Last Supper loses some of its prototypical symbolism when the wine is drunk from Dixie cups. To be sure, *Godspell* offers some artistic

120 The Crucifixion, as presented in *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965). The sharp, unified marching of these Roman troops characterizes the stern, legal climate under which Christ was executed. The soldiers carry pikes and sledges in their right hands, *scuta* (rectangular, curved shields) in their left; they wear the *lorica segmentata* (segmented chest armor). A few extras are smiling.

musical numbers on skyscraper rooftops twelve hundred feet above Manhattan bedrock, but the film is otherwise childish and tasteless. A curiosity of the short-lived peace-love era, *Godspell* lacks the grace and breadth of understanding necessary for a successful cinematic rendering of the New Testament.

Franco Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth* reused several motifs employed in the earlier versions of the life of Christ. In assembling this 1977 made-for-television movie, which at $18 million was by far the most expensive television movie produced to date, Zeffirelli included a conversation between the three Wise Men (à la *Ben-Hur* [1959]), a rocky canyon in which John could do his baptizing (à la *The Greatest Story Ever Told*), a Simon Peter who could raise the roof with his boisterous behavior (à la *The Big Fisherman*), and an extraordinary emphasis on the anti-Roman political climate of first-century A.D. Palestine (à la *King of Kings* and *Barabbas*). Another borrowing from *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, a cast full of luminaries of the cinema, inevitably leads to "star-hunting." While we should be concentrating on the art and the story line, we find ourselves forced to recognize Anne Bancroft (Mary Magdalene), Peter Ustinov (Herod the Great), James Earl Jones (Balthazar), Laurence Olivier (Nicodemus), Ralph Richardson (Simeon), James Mason (Joseph of Arimathea), Olivia Hussey (Mary), Anthony Quinn (Caiaphas), Ernest Borgnine, Donald Pleasance, James Farentino, and others. The problem is not so much the crowd of famous actors but rather that the New Testament does not give those actors enough to do. The script is necessarily sparse, the characterizations are necessarily underdeveloped, and even a great actor can look holy or blasphemous in only so many ways.

Before the film was first screened, a great controversy arose when Zeffirelli told an interviewer that "Jesus will be portrayed as an ordinary man." Letters by the thousands poured in to protest the heresy, and General Motors, which had originally agreed to sponsor the film, was forced to reverse gears and back out of the project. Obscuring the corporation's real concern that thousands of offended Christians would turn to Ford or AMC, GM released this announcement: "General Motors found the program so sensitive and beautiful that they think it would be wrong for a commercial company to take advantage of it."[4]

For all the uproar, this Jesus hardly turned out to be an ordinary man; Zeffirelli used the same stereotypical blue-eyed, soft-spoken Jesus moviegoers had come to expect. But *Jesus of Nazareth* has other problems. When Jesus threatens the entire destruction of the world (Matthew 10:34), he sits calmly, munches on a pomegranate (an ancient symbol of fertility), and mumbles in an undistinguished monotone, "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace on the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." Such a line was much better suited for Pasolini's angry Jesus. Zeffirelli employed consultants from Catholic, Jewish, and Islamic quarters to enhance the picture's historical authenticity, but for some reason he omitted numerous New Testament set pieces, like Jesus' summoning of Peter to be a "fisher of men," instead adding several excruciatingly dull scenes.

In one, Judas and Zerah, his fictional go-between with the Sanhedrin, plot Jesus' capture. In another, Jesus tells the parable of the prodigal son, unbiblically at tax collector Matthew's house. Zeffirelli should have learned from his predecessors that politics and parables do not work in a screen version of the life of Jesus.

Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth* does succeed in creating a marvelous cultural and atmospheric background in which the life of Jesus takes place. He opens the floodgates of history when he has Joseph and Mary arrange their marriage contract amid white stucco buildings separated by dusty Palestinian alleys, intense sunlight, and sharply falling shadows. His film borders on neorealism as Joseph suspects his immaculately pregnant wife of infidelity and as Mary's labor pains force her to scream out in harrowing cries. Here Zeffirelli's Jesus is indeed an ordinary man, or an ordinary baby, anyway. And when we see his bar mitzvah, we have a genuine feeling that the young Jesus belongs to this world; his divine mission has not yet begun. Later, when an extraordinary Jesus delivers a young boy possessed by an extraordinary demon, the boy growls, gasps, grovels, foams, and shrieks with compellingly primeval terror. (Might Zeffirelli have included such a scene in the pre-*Exorcist* days?) Each of these scenes plays its part in establishing a tangible, historical, human background to Jesus' life.

Other atmospheric touches make watching the film a remarkable visual encounter with history. The traditional cow and ass in the stable, the stream of sunlight performing the annunciation to Mary, and the tableau of Mary and Elizabeth standing before two well-framed arches reveal Zeffirelli's admiration for Renaissance iconography. The smoky air inside the Jerusalem temple, its obscured walls echoing forth muffled Hebrew prayers along with the bleating of marketable sheep, creates the perfect arena for Jesus' disruption of business. Best of all is the sequence in which Jesus bears his cross up the Via Dolorosa. The Christ suffers the pain of bearing the heavy cross (here a historically authentic crossbeam and not the whole cross), and yet his tolerance is admirable. The entire journey toward Golgotha, maddening in its haste, confusing in its intent, pitiable in its execution, captures more successfully than any other film about the Passion the essential pace and desperation of that angry and agonizing passage. Everything happens so fast that Jesus himself and his followers can hardly believe that they are helpless to do anything about it. When this sequence culminates with Jesus being roped and nailed to the crossbeam, raised to the vertical beam, and crucified, the rain-drenched deposition and the palpable grief of Mary provide an ironically calm counterpoint to those hectic hours that just elapsed.

But wonderful as many scenes are in *Jesus of Nazareth*, Zeffirelli's work is undone by an equal number of hideously inappropriate episodes: the endless talk at Matthew's house, the incessant and ridiculous yelling by John the Baptist, the gathering of zealots at the Baptist's grave, and the contrived political duping of Judas Iscariot. The smoke-filled temple, the Renaissance tableaux, the haunting dogs barking in realistic ancient Palestin-

ian streets, and the frantic struggle up the Via Dolorosa—all these Zeffirelli films with great subtlety and genius—but as soon as the film steps out of its first-century A.D. Judeo-Roman ambiance into an unhistorical and unfilmable world of ideas, theology, and verbose arguments and parables, it loses its relevance, its continuity, and its artistry. The director would be well advised to go and cinematically sin no more.

Perhaps it was Zeffirelli's production that inspired the Monty Python comedy troupe to satirize the whole affair in their *Life of Brian* (1979), a film to be discussed in Chapter 8. But another interesting and controversial variation on all the film versions of the life of Christ came in the form of Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988), a film adaptation of Nikos Kazantzakis's novel. Warned by a prefatory disclaimer that the film is about the "incessant, merciless battle between the spirit and the flesh," we are presented with a shockingly human portrait of Christ, played by Willem Dafoe.

Before his mission becomes clear to him, Jesus serves the Romans as the carpenter who prepares crosses for crucifixions, but the anti-Roman zealot Judas (Harvey Keitel) helps him realize the error of his ways. But even as Christ begins his mission, he does not understand his relationship with God. Confusing Judas and the other disciples he has picked up along the way, this ever-evolving, "fragmented, almost schizophrenic" Christ first plans to save the world with love, then determines to fight with the sword, then finally realizes, much to his horror, that he must face crucifixion.[5] His physical torment—during his audience with Pilate, when he is beaten and crowned with thorns, as he carries his cross in slow motion and is painfully nailed and raised into place—leads logically to the extraordinary climax of the film. On the cross he experiences visions of his young guardian angel, surveys the beautiful earth as the celestial visitor remarks that "sometimes we angels envy you," and then has visions of his own, lovely earthly life as it might have been. He envisions his wedding to Mary Magdalene (whom he has always desired), fathering a child, growing old, and, above all, escaping the horrors of crucifixion. As an old man he hears Paul preaching about Jesus, who died on the cross. When Jesus interrupts Paul to show that he is still alive, Paul tells Jesus that he can crucify and resurrect him if he needs to: "My Jesus is much more important!" Finally Jesus envisions his old friend Judas, who accuses him of cowardice and reveals that this lovely "guardian angel" is in fact Satan, offering another, final, glorious temptation. Judas tells Jesus that his crucifixion is the key to universal salvation. So Christ submits spiritually to his necessary martyrdom and utters the ultimate biblical phrase, "It is accomplished."

Scorsese's vivid portrayal of Christ's reverie of the normal human familial existence caught the attention of a number of Christian groups long before Universal released the film, and when it became clear that the film contained a scene in which Christ not only desires Mary Magdalene but even has sex with her, they mobilized. They boycotted businesses owned by the MCA corporation, and five thousand people picketed Universal Studios as early as one month before release. When Kazantzakis's book was published in

1955, it caused public disturbances in Greece, but protest of the film assumed a global scale. On the Left Bank of Paris an arsonist torched a theater that was showing the film, and Zeffirelli himself withdrew his *The Young Toscanini* from the Venice Film Festival because it had listed Scorsese's "completely deranged" film on its program. Never mind the disclaimer that tells the viewer at the outset that the film is fiction, and never mind that Christ's corporeal family life is a mere vision that is revealed as part of Satan's plan to undermine the crucifixion and frustrate human salvation, Scorsese's film was condemned from the outset.

But controversy bred box-office interest, and *The Last Temptation of Christ* broke box-office records in Los Angeles during its first weekend of release. Amid all the controversy, the film itself was rarely subjected to rational critique. But Roger Ebert of the *Chicago Sun-Times* and the widely watched *Siskel and Ebert* television program devoted his entire review of the film to defending the Christian legitimacy of the concept. And more than a decade removed from the publicity glare of its release, it is much easier for the viewer to appreciate how Scorsese rejected the customary genteel pageantry of previous film versions of the life of Christ. Dafoe as Christ is a disturbed genius, and he walks in a world where animal blood sacrifices persistently hint of the essence of crucifixion. The words he speaks are not scriptural or King Jamesian but modern English from the pen of Paul Schrader, who also wrote Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* and *Raging Bull*, other films about tormented souls, and he is surrounded by a cast who speak in unabashed New York accents. Although the Jerusalem temple scenes are visually impressive, crowd scenes are noticeably absent; in fact, one of the most interesting aspects of the temple sequence is a practical explanation of why money has to be changed there—to collect temple tax monies in non-Roman, thus "pagan," coins. Helping to establish the wide spectrum of atmospheres and moods, Peter Gabriel's orientalizing music ranges from mournful to dionysiac and earthly to visionary.

Supporting Characters

A universally acceptable film based on the New Testament is probably an impossibility. Christ in the Gospels looms above all as a keen, energetic, forceful, dramatic, intriguing, humanized divinity. Portrayed on the screen by a mere mortal, he necessarily *becomes* a mere mortal, whether Scorsese's struggling visionary or Pasolini's vengeful crusader or George Stevens's greeting-card good shepherd. It is not that these films are not good films; it is just that they fall understandably short of otherworldly expectations. Realizing the unfathomable scope the figure of Jesus demands of the cinema, a number of filmmakers have turned instead to stories that include Christ or the Baptist or the Apostles—for example, Rossellini's *Atta degli Apostoli* (*Acts of the Apostles*, 1969)—but concentrate instead on a non-Gospel narrative. Such stories do not try to re-create the New Testament on film. *Day of Triumph* (1954), the modernized *The Last Supper* (1914), and *Anna und Elisabeth*

121 Willem Dafoe heals and comforts poor children in Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988). Similar to Pasolini's *The Gospel According to St. Matthew,* Scorsese's film focuses on a human Christ who interacts with other humans. The film's release caused a tremendous theological controversy, and the film is still rarely shown on cable more than a decade later.

(1933) made meek attempts at such an approach, as did the silent versions of *Salome* (1908 and 1913). Later, Theda Bara's *Salome* (1918) was based loosely on the ancient account recorded by Josephus; in this it followed Richard Strauss's and Oscar Wilde's versions. Alla Nazimova's financially disastrous *Salome* (1922) also found its basis in Wilde's play; in fact, the costumes and sets designed by Natasha Rambova (Rudolph Valentino's second wife) try to re-create the drawings Aubrey Beardsley executed for the Wilde drama. The resulting cotton-ball pearl wigs, thick makeup, and bird-cage jail made the two lone sets of *Salome* into a linear visual feast, albeit limited without Richard Strauss's full score and Oscar Wilde's dialogue.

Columbia gave the Judean princess still another cinematic chance to dance for the Baptist's head in *Salome* (1953). But Jesse L. Lasky's story and Harry Kleiner's screenplay take more than considerable liberties with the New Testament and Josephus. They have Salome (Rita Hayworth) dance to *save* John the Baptist from the destruction that Queen Herodias (Judith Anderson) demands. While Rita whirls and spins skillfully before the previously jaded but now excited King Herod (Charles Laughton), the Roman Claudius (Stewart Granger) tries to help John out of his prison cell. Salome's plan fails, and the

122 Salome (Alla Nazimova) and Jokanaan (John the Baptist, played by Nigel De Brulier) stand before the memorable linear designs and bird-cage prison of *Salome* (1922). The costumes and sets are based on the drawings executed by Aubrey Beardsley for Oscar Wilde's *Salome.*

revolting silver platter is soon carried in. Claudius and Salome leave the palace and are next seen listening to a well-known, white-robed, Judean prophet addressing a mountainside crowd in familiarly parallel phrases, "Blessed are they . . . "

To make matters worse, this pro-Baptist stance by Salome comes as a sudden reversal at the end of the film. Previously she had been a bitter enemy of Claudius, the Romans, and their anti-Herodian politics. This hatred for Rome and Romans had begun when the Emperor Tiberius banished the whoring princess from the capital. The liberties and inconsistencies go on and on. Only Salome's dance deserves commendation, and no doubt this dance was the tasty core around which the rest of the rotting apple was originally designed.

The story of Salome has always been a popular cinematic source. Theo Frenkel's *Herod* (1908) was one of the first biblical films ever made, and then there were Spanish versions in 1940 and 1970 and an Italian version in 1972. Another Italian film, *Erode il Grande* (*Herod the Great,* 1958), starred Sylva Koscina and Edmund Purdom, and Ken

Russell's British *Salome's Last Dance* (1988) featured Glenda Jackson as Herodias. Other Italian films of the sword-and-sandal era set in the early days of Christianity include *Pontius Pilate* (1964), with Jeanne Crain, Basil Rathbone, and John Drew Barrymore, and *Sword and the Cross* (*La Spada e la Croce,* 1958), which outdid DeMille's foiled plot for *King of Kings* by having Barabbas kidnap Mary Magdalene.

One other major film focuses on a specific New Testament personage. *The Big Fisherman* (1959), based on Lloyd C. Douglas's last novel, tells a tale about Peter but offers little authenticity and little entertainment. The Arabian Princess Fara (Susan Kohner) swears to kill King Herod and rides to Judea to do so. There she becomes a good friend of John the Baptist, then of Simon the fisherman. She and the piscatorial Simon quickly and unconvincingly become converts to Jesus' preaching, and her murderous resolve weakens as Jesus' "Thou shalt not kill" echoes in her mind. Meanwhile, Simon (Howard Keel) has repented of his earlier atheism and become a "fisher of men."

123 Rita Hayworth performs the traditional dance of the seven veils in the perplexing *Salome* (1953). At far left foreground is a salivating Herod (Charles Laughton), and to the right is the anti-Baptist Herodias (Judith Anderson). In this film, Salome dances to *save* the Baptist's head!

124 Simon (Howard Keel), soon to be called Peter, leaves a career in traditional piscatology to become a fisher of men in *The Big Fisherman* (1959). Christ is not shown in this scene, and elsewhere the camera glimpses him only from behind. Several films tried to depict Christ in an elusive style; William Wyler's *Ben-Hur* (1959) succeeded best.

The film's 180 minutes are hardly filled with taut drama. The plot never decides whether it should emphasize piety, adventure, or romance. The architect of the sets apparently never learned that in antiquity (as well as in modern times) columns were usually built to hold something up, not to stand alone as superfluous and expensive rows of landfill. The distastefully painted red-marble interior columns also detract from the film's visual value. Director Frank Borzage chose not to depict Jesus' face, so he had to portray the Christ with voice alone; unfortunately, the chosen voice sounded more like a narrator for *The Bell Telephone Hour* than anyone God would send as his representative on earth. And how much research would it have taken to establish that when the knowledgeable Princess Fara reads Greek scrolls, she should read from left to right, not Semitically right to left?

None of this appeared to bother Howard Keel or Herbert Lom. Lom seems genuinely to enjoy his role as the evil Oriental despot Herod Antipas, and Keel playfully bangs heads together, yells angrily, gestures wildly, and even prays with the same robust and hearty spirit that he injected into all his work. Before his conversion, he boasts: "God can

send all the storms he wants, just so long as I can catch all of His fish that I want." Biblical authenticities appear sporadically—Jesus renames Simon as Peter, establishing him as the "rock" upon which he will build his church, and he heals Peter's mother-in-law (Matthew 8:14), though in the film she is said to be Peter's nurse because the cinematic Peter is unwed. For archaeological authenticity, or near authenticity, Herod's palace includes several panels from Augustus's Ara Pacis.

The most popular films about Jesus have depended less on the accounts of the evangelists or the invention of screenwriters than on the material of best-selling novels, all but one of which blend the story of Christ with the glory of Rome. From five historical novels the screen was enriched by nearly a dozen successful films—*Barabbas, The Last Days of Pompeii, Ben-Hur, The Robe,* and *Quo Vadis?*—making Rome and Christ a screen pairing to rival cowboys and Indians. The screen adaptations of Bulwer-Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii* have already been discussed in connection with Roman history; only the 1935 RKO version and the 1960 Italian version adapt the novel to include the story of the Christ, dramatically (and unhistorically) connecting his crucifixion with the most famous eruption of Vesuvius.

In 1962 Dino De Laurentiis (*Ulysses, The Bible . . . In the Beginning*) produced *Barabbas* (1962). The screenplay by Christopher Fry (*The Bible . . . In the Beginning*) was based on Pär Lagerkvist's 1951 Nobel Prize–winning novel, which had already in 1952 been turned into an unheralded Swedish film by Alf Sjöberg. The cast includes Anthony Quinn, Silvana Mangano, Arthur Kennedy, Katy Jurado, Harry Andrews, Vittorio Gassman, Jack Palance, Ernest Borgnine, and Valentina Cortese. Even the nonspeaking Christ has a familiar name—Roy Mangano, Silvana's brother and Dino de Laurentiis's brother-in-law.

Because Lagerkvist's novel probes thoroughly the relationship between Barabbas and Jesus, director Richard Fleischer is careful to draw close parallels between the two. He has every historical right to do so: the paleo-Christian author Origen tells us that Barabbas's first name was Jesus, *bar Abbas* means "son of the father" in Aramaic, and early Christian mythology generally conceived of Barabbas as "the dark side of Jesus." Fleischer initiates this Jesus-Barabbas connection in the opening scenes. While the Roman soldiers scourge Jesus in the same dark dungeon in which Barabbas has been imprisoned, Barabbas (Anthony Quinn) hears the Romans' laughter. Soon after his release from the lightless cell, his eyes temporarily useless, Barabbas's groping hand accidentally finds the warm blood recently shed by the Christ. Then the pure darkness of the dungeon that has been effectively covering the screen abruptly flashes into bright sunlight; the wooden outer doors of the dungeon open with a thundering but dull thud. The bright glare of the sun makes Barabbas rub his shocked eyes; he cannot see anything because of the sudden brightness, but what he cannot see is Pontius Pilate washing his hands of Jesus' blood. Shading his pained eyes, the freed Barabbas then washes his own hands in a public fountain. Has the blood of Christ come off *his* hands?

Back at Barabbas's favorite inn, the whores and drunkards declare that he is a more appropriate King of the Jews than Jesus, and they mockingly perform an investiture, just as the Romans did with Christ, here with basket crown and broomstick scepter. Just then Christ wends his struggling, cross-bearing way past Barabbas, and thereafter the curious but uncomprehending Barabbas witnesses the unnatural darkness around Golgotha (the eclipse is authentic, filmed at Nice), the entombment of Christ, and the resurrection.

The freed Barabbas resumes his degenerate criminal life—thieving, drinking, and murdering—but he begins to wonder why he was saved instead of Christ. He thinks he understands when Pontius Pilate explains to him that a prisoner freed on a holiday cannot be put to death; Barabbas sees a distorted relationship between himself and Jesus—that Jesus died to save him, and that he, like Jesus, cannot really die. Through the sulfur mines of Sicily and the gladiatorial arenas of Rome, Barabbas survives overwhelming odds. After many years he finally finds sympathy for Christianity; he hears that the Christians are burning Rome, so he grabs a torch but is caught by Roman soldiers. Ironically, Barabbas now hears that this Neronian conflagration was not at all planned by the Christians. Disappointed, he finds that he still cannot understand Christ's purpose, the Christian plan, or his own purpose. Ultimately he is crucified as a Christian martyr and entrusts his soul to Christ; as the "son of the father" he has almost become a second Christ. Barabbas has died for Christ, the debt is paid, and the question is answered: Christ died for Barabbas so that Barabbas could die for Christ.

Barabbas is an Italian-produced "ancient" film of the early 1960s that is raised above the rest by the captivating mystery surrounding Barabbas's purpose in the early Christian movement. Uncertain whether his own apparent immortality is a blessing or a curse, Barabbas finds himself gifted with an unnatural luck. Years of hard labor and fighting mature the one-time thief and murderer, but they cannot clarify the Christian doctrines for him. Anthony Quinn plays this role with the spirit of his Zorba and the grotesquerie of his Quasimodo, and somewhere underneath the vulgarity lies a probing intelligence. It was a cruel, filthy, laborious life for an ancient criminal, and Quinn accentuates the earthiness of his plight as well as the uniqueness of his divine relationship.

Visually, *Barabbas* is not a remarkable work of art worth its $10 million budget, except for one sequence set in the Sicilian sulfur mines. For minutes we are plunged into an inhumane, troglodytic darkness in the bowels of a mountain. From a wizened veteran of Roman cruelty Barabbas learns to wear a kerchief over his eyes to prevent blindness. For years he labors in murky, cramped, tomblike trenches, and regularly he is "promoted" to the next lower level, each time reaching closer and closer to Hades. Finally an earthquake shakes the entire sulfur mountain, and the interior that had been dark for so many years now explodes into deadly sulfuric fires. Helpless, nameless slaves struggle to free themselves, but all that is left at the end is a massive tableau of strewn limbs and mud-spotted, broken bodies.

Faith, Hope, and Chariots

Of all the novels written about Rome and Christ, none has been so successfully adapted to the cinema as *Ben-Hur.* Born in the mind of an Indiana lawyer, nurtured in the New Mexico territory, and finished under late-night lamps that offered up his creator as an easy target for the vengeance of Billy the Kid, Judah Ben-Hur from his very conception met every challenge with conviction and rode his chariot triumphantly out of middle America, through fifty years of best-seller lists, onto the treadmills of the Broadway stage, across the standard and wide screens of Hollywood, and ultimately into the bulging coffers of thousands of businessmen. Not quite "the best business venture since General Motors," *Ben-Hur* nonetheless ranks as one of the most successful literary, theatrical, and cinematic productions of all times.[6]

Why? Rome, Christ, and Humanity: the indomitable might of an ancient civilization, the sudden rise of the son of God and of spiritual fervor in the Judean hotbed of rebellion, and a believable hero who finds himself inextricably involved in and challenged by the power of both clashing forces. This overwhelming political and religious battle between Rome and God creates or smashes friendships or bitter enmities, makes or breaks families, and inaugurates the ultimate triumph of the good over evil. This awe-inspiring combination separates *Ben-Hur* from other novels about the ancient world; it is a theological-philosophical-romantic adventure story of universal proportions. There were imitators by the dozens, but *Ben-Hur* remained the essentially inimitable tale of the Christ and the most dependable theatrical war horse of the century.

It all began when General Lew Wallace—son of a West Pointer, Indiana state senator, general, both hero and goat in the Civil War, and governor of the Territory of New Mexico in 1878 during the rampages of Billy the Kid (whom he had personally antagonized)—published the novel *Ben-Hur* in 1880. It sold poorly for the first year, then blossomed into popularity. Eventually it sold more than two million copies, ranking second to the Bible on all-time best-seller lists for fifty years—until *Gone With the Wind.* Wallace himself became so well known that an admiring President Garfield sent him to Turkey in 1881—ostensibly to be minister of the United States, but actually to give him the opportunity of experiencing the Mediterranean area firsthand: despite the detailed descriptions in *Ben-Hur,* Wallace had never seen Rome or the Holy Land.

In 1899 the Broadway producers Marc Klaw and Abraham Erlanger put this fascinating man's more fascinating book onto the stage. After observing the three-and-one-half-hour dress rehearsal (with William S. Hart as Messala), the impresario Charles Frohman warned the producers that they would lose their shirts. "The American people will never stand for Christ and a horse race in the same show." This turned out to be probably the worst prediction in the history of terrible theatrical predictions. The play ran for twenty-one years and earned some $10 million. The chariot race was normally run on a 12,000-foot treadmill, and when the aging Wallace himself saw a stage performance of the race, he said, "My God, did I set all this in motion?"[7]

125 The aftermath of the sulfur-mine explosion in *Barabbas* (1962). This is one of the better visual sequences in the $10 million film. Viscous mud, strewn limbs, and splintered rafters cover the well-composed screen.

In 1907 Sidney Olcott directed the first film version of *Ben-Hur.* It consisted of one dozen scenes of extremely limited scope. Twenty soldiers and spectators view the three-lap chariot race, Governor Gratus is wounded by a tile that falls four feet, and the boyhood friendship between Judah Ben-Hur and Messala is omitted. Nonetheless, Harper Publishing and the Wallace estate sued Kalem for filming the book without their permission. There had never been such a test of copyright violation before, and this particular case set the precedent for novel-based films: Kalem had to deliver $25,000 dollars to the plaintiff, and as a direct result books became a regular part of filmdom's source material—for a fee.

By 1924 *Ben-Hur* had earned its reputation as "the greatest play on the stage," as William Jennings Bryan dubbed it. Following the success of DeMille's silent version of *The Ten Commandments,* executives of the recently formed MGM corporation decided to film *Ben-Hur.* When the studio had trouble negotiating a purchase price, they offered to pay the owners of the copyright 50 percent of the film's gross. This business venture turned into financial misery for MGM, for the film eventually earned more than $7 million but cost $4 million to produce; MGM lost money, but Harper Publishing did not—

not at more than fifteen dollars per word. The film earned its huge profits even though it was banned in Italy (where it had been shot); Mussolini objected to the film's triumph of Jew over Roman.

This version of *Ben-Hur,* released on Christmas Day 1925, starred Ramon Novarro as Judah Ben-Hur and Francis X. Bushman as Messala. Two years in the making and running more than twelve thousand feet, the film established once and for all the credibility and viability of the Hollywood epic. The sophistication of the film's spectacular effects stands up even to today's standards. The opening crowds outside the towering walls and Joppa Gate of Jerusalem, the shining star over the desert and the revolutionary three-strip Technicolored Nativity sequence, the fiery naval battle, and the chariot race are still impressive.

Building the huge Joppa Gate ramparts and the chariot circus consumed much of the production's expense and time. The $300,000 Antioch circus was designed by Cedric Gibbons—who shortly thereafter designed the "Oscar" statuette—and it covered five acres and held more than three thousand extras. When the race was filmed, forty-two cameras were used, and each cameraman was allotted more than one thousand feet of film. This was *spectacle.* The results may fall short of the 1959 version's chariot race, but that is like saying that emeralds are not as precious as diamonds. To create a realistic race, director Fred Niblo offered a prize to the stuntman who finished first; the crowd of extras even began betting on certain favorites. But all of this excitement caused a rather dramatic crash during the shooting of the race. This time, DeMille could not be blamed for sawing the axles.

The naval battle was filmed off Livorno, and it developed into such a consuming process that one of the triremes caught fire from the smoking smudge pots, forcing scores of armored Italian extras to save themselves by leaping overboard. That evening the equipment manager found three suits of armor missing and three extra sets of street clothes. Wishing to avoid adverse publicity, he secretly sank the three extra sets of street clothes in the ocean. One version of the story ends here and blames MGM for three deaths. Another version claims that the three men returned the next day, explained that they had been rescued by a fishing trawler, and demanded their clothes back. MGM gladly bought the men brand new suits. In any event, Louis B. Mayer and Irving Thalberg brought the production back to California to finish what at first appeared to be a looming disaster.

This version of *Ben-Hur* follows the novel, particularly the final third of the book, much more closely than either the 1907 Olcott silent version or the 1959 sound and color version. Toward the end of the film Judah leads a Christian army of rebellion as a crusader for the Messiah, but the ill-conceived army falls to its knees in prayer upon hearing that Christ ordered them to "forgive their enemies." Several sequences from the New Testament are included, and this version also presents the near fistfight that Judah and Messala have before the chariot race. Both MGM versions, however, eventually edited out the romantic triangle of Messala, his concubine Iras, and Judah; the moral and narrative complications of an involved novel cannot all be accommodated in a two-, or even three-and-one-half-hour film.

Lacking a soundtrack, the 1925 version delights its viewers instead with pictorial charm, whether in the light, romantic play after Judah recaptures Esther's pet dove in the marketplace, or in Messala's attitude toward Judah upon returning to Jerusalem as a Roman commander—first cold in front of his assembled troops, then tender once out of public view. Although the sound version embellished this scene, the emotion is conveyed perfectly by Novarro and Bushman. Vivid emotion of a different sort can be seen in the galley scene, when one desperate slave begins to bite his chains. When words are necessary, the titles of the silent version are succinct and periodic. Judah, after his adoption by Quintus Arrius the elder, tells Sheikh Ilderim that he will race against the now-hated Messala in the chariot race "not as Arrius, the Roman, for glory, but as the unknown, for revenge." When Messala and Judah are about to quarrel, Judah grasps Messala's arm and says, "It is good to have a Roman who understands the Jews." Messala replies, "The Jews must learn to understand the Romans."

The 1925 *Ben-Hur* was rereleased in 1931 with a partial soundtrack. The pounding of horses' hooves, the crack of whips, and the shouts of crowds gave the film part of the dimension it was lacking in the new sound era. But the film, for all its merits, fell into relative obscurity in the onrush of color and sound. Then, just as *Intolerance*'s Griffith had appeared in DeMille's studio to help him direct a piece of *The King of Kings,* so did some ironic historical continuity occur in the productions of *Ben-Hur:* one of Metro's junior staff members assigned to assist in crowd control for the shooting of the chariot race in 1924 was a fledgling Hollywoodian director named William Wyler.

Thirty-four years later, the same William Wyler sat high above a new reconstruction of the Antioch circus. This one covered eighteen acres, cost an even million dollars to build, and would be filmed in Technicolor, stereo, and wide-screen Camera 65. Just before shooting was to begin, Wyler turned to his assistants who were about to return to their duties of crowd control and mused, "I wonder which of you is going to be the director of the *next Ben-Hur.*"[8]

Wyler's 1959 version of *Ben-Hur* establishes from the beginning the vital threads around which the rest of the plot will be woven—Rome, Christ, and the complicated friendship between the Jewish Ben-Hur and the Roman Messala. Following delicately handled scenes of Joseph and Mary entering Jerusalem, the Wise Men in the desert beneath the starry sky, and the humble Nativity, a shofar blast celebrating the birth of the Redeemer dissolves into a trumpet blast from a Roman legionnaire. Brightly and impressively clad Roman spearmen and archers file past a carpenter's shop in the little village of Nazareth. As they file through the town, the camera glimpses the scrubby field in which the young Jesus contemplates his mission. Rome and Christ.

The quarrel between Ben-Hur and Messala is written with smooth, powerful phrases and shot in the dank stone corridors of Jerusalem's Roman garrison. When Judah (Charlton Heston) and Messala (Stephen Boyd, with black contact lenses darkening his blue eyes) first see each other, they embrace warmly and instantly pick up their childhood

friendship. "Down Eros, up Mars!" they shout laughingly after they have sportively hurled javelins into the arsenal's wooden cross-beams; little does Judah know how other wooden cross-beams will change his life, and little do they both know that their friendship has only hours to live. Judah tries to remain cheerful and warm toward the loving but insanely ambitious Messala, but the news that two more Roman legions are on their way to Jerusalem digs deep at his Hebrew roots. (Decades later Gore Vidal, who wrote most of the first half of the script, reported that Boyd was told to play the part as if they had been homosexual lovers in their youth.) Judah warns the swaggering Roman, "Rome is an affront to God!" But Messala understands the Realpolitik of the period: Caesar "is God, the *only* God, he is power, real power on earth, not—" Here he roughly gestures upward to the sky and Judah's invisible god. Messala then ironically echoes the words of the New Testament when he delivers his ultimatum, "Judah, either you help me or oppose me; there is no other choice. You are either for me or against me." "If that is the choice, then I am against you," decides an angered Judah, and the two part in an enmity that now looms far larger than their lifelong love for each other. Friendship and politics.

Growing from this bitter quarrel is Messala's triumph and the destruction of the aristocratic House of Hur. Wyler depicts these events not with dialogue but through skillful direction. Wyler understood the demands presented to him by the epic scope of the project, pacing the film regally but not ploddingly. From the rooftop of their house Judah and his sister, Tirzah, watch the martially impressive entry of the Roman Governor Gratus through the streets below. The magnificence of the scene is equally due to Miklos Rozsa's compelling march music and to the visual spectacle, but when Tirzah accidentally knocks a tile loose from the roof, it gathers momentum as it slides and bounces toward earth, unluckily causing Gratus's horse to rear and smash the governor's head against a brick wall. Messala's soldiers burst into the Hur courtyard and arrest everyone. Judah pleads with the silent Messala succinctly: "It was an accident." With all the Heston teeth and their glorious enunciation, Judah repeats, "It was an accident." Messala remains silent. "At least let the women go," pleads Judah, realizing that Messala will not believe him. Messala says coldly to his troops, "Let the *servants* go." Judah, Tirzah, and their mother are dragged off to years of torture and misery. After a dissolve Messala alone walks up to the roof to examine the tiles. Without saying a word, he looks around and then touches several tiles lightly; to be sure, one slides down and plunges to the street below, causing a different horse to neigh. No human words are necessary; it was an accident. Fate and, ultimately, revenge.

Judah next encounters two strangely parallel characters who propel him toward his destiny. The first is Christ, who is a minor character in the film—a character whom Judah sees but does not know. When Judah is being led in chains across the desert to the sea (shot on location in Israel), Christ's gentle hands offer him a drink and stroke his hair. Then, toward the end of the film Judah sees Christ bearing his cross along the Via Dolorosa. "I know this man," realizes Judah, knowing him only for his human kindness, not for

his divine origins. Unlike in most New Testament films, Christ is not the protagonist; his crucifixion is merely a contemporary political event. Yet Judah feels a strong bond with this Christ and tries to repay the gift of water while he bears the cross. Wyler, with the help of Rozsa's music, is careful to draw a parallel between the two water sequences.

The other key figure in Judah's story is Quintus Arrius, played by Jack Hawkins. (Wyler chose British actors to portray his Romans, Americans to portray the Hebrews.) Arrius is the Roman consul whose life Judah saves and who in turn gives Judah his freedom. Before the attack by the Illyrian pirates, Arrius orders that "number forty-one" (a less sonorous number sixty in the novel) be unchained. As Judah recalls that "another man saved me once," we hear Rozsa's Christ theme, and we understand that Arrius serves as a Roman parallel for Christ. Critics in 1959 were disappointed that most of the naval battle was enacted with models in an MGM tank in Hollywood (beneath a fifteen thousand–foot cyclorama). But the real emphasis of the battle is not on the outcome of the military and political struggle but on the outcome of the human struggle above and below the deck of Arrius's flagship. Never mind the model ships, any shortcomings in the exterior scenes are far outweighed by Rozsa's insistently accelerating music, the famous "battle speed . . . ramming speed" of the pounding *hortator,* the frenzy of the slaves as they tug at their chains until their ankles bleed, desperately attempting to free themselves before the pirate ship rams their galley, and finally, Judah's heroic rescue of Arrius, echoing the consul's words: "We keep you alive to serve this ship."

In the novel and the 1925 film version, Judah becomes an ardent follower of Christ long before the Crucifixion. Wyler's Judah, though, becomes a believer only when the stormy hour of Christ's death heals his long-lost mother and sister of leprosy. The timing of Judah's conversion makes its climax more poignant: Christ died to save others, and Judah is one of the first benefactors of Christ's death. Judah believes, his family is restored, his vengeance satisfied, and his odyssey at an end.

Immediately after MGM's success with *Quo Vadis?* in 1951, *Ben-Hur* was conceived specifically as the studio's next "spectacle." At the time *Ben-Hur*'s $15 million budget made it the costliest film ever produced. The shooting script called for three hundred sets, one hundred thousand costumes, and ten thousand extras, not to mention the numbers of goats, sheep, asses, and camels. Jerusalem was reconstructed at Anzio (where much of *Cleopatra* was shot three years later), Nazareth was reconstructed at Foggia, and the massive *Quo Vadis?* sets from 1951 were reconstructed, too. The book rights cost nothing, of course; MGM had already paid dearly for them in 1925. Seventy-eight trained thoroughbreds were bought in Yugoslavia, and they were fitted to eighteen 900-pound chariots. Cowboys and stuntmen were hired to drive them. The million-dollar Antioch circus was then constructed, and forty thousand tons of sand and crushed lava was supplied for its racing surface. On top of all this expense, two cameras were knocked over during a racing mishap.

And indeed it is the spectacle of *Ben-Hur,* not the carefully planned connection between Christ and Judah, that is most memorable. As if the Broadway treadmills had run continuously for sixty years, the chariot race and *Ben-Hur* had become synonymous. In fact, when MGM producer Sam Zimbalist approached Wyler with an offer to direct the new film, Wyler's first wish was to direct only the chariot race. In the event, the majority of the work on that scene was executed by second-unit directors Andrew Marton and Yakima Canutt. Heston was excited about the chariot race, too. The day after he arrived in Rome he began taking three-hour lessons in driving a *quadriga* (followed by one-hour instructions on javelin throwing), but most of Judah's charioteering was performed by a stuntman. For the racing scenes in which he did appear, Heston was fitted with a pair of contact lenses to prevent flying sand from injuring his eyes.

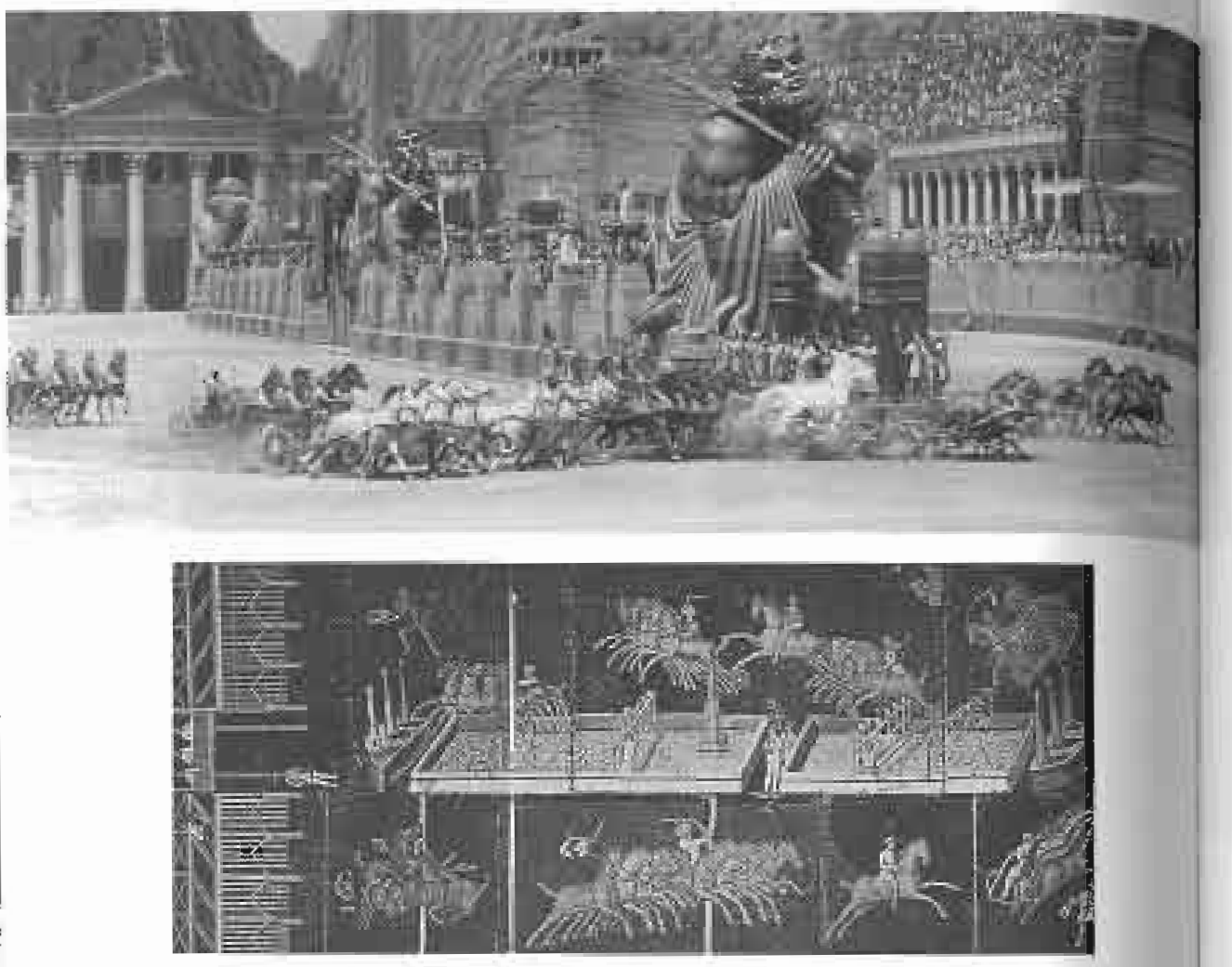
General Lew Wallace had planned his book so that Judah's bitterness should peak just before the great race. Every step Judah took through the Israeli desert, every agonizing stroke of the galley's oar, every heart-rending thought of his imprisoned mother and sister had been mental and physical preparation for this moment of vengeance. And for Messala it was life or death—defeat his worst enemy or die. Wyler skillfully emphasizes the climactic importance of the race with the evil stares that the contestants give each other before the start, with the heavy betting before the race (four to one odds for Messala: "The difference between a Roman and a Jew," snaps Messala to Sheikh Ilderim), and with the last-minute terror—the unveiling of Messala's sharply picked chariot wheels.

The nine contestants stand abreast, and from a crane high above we see them parade their handsome chariots around the evenly lined sands of the arena surface. The Antioch crowd, eight thousand strong, roars with anticipation, and a Tyrian-purpled Pontius Pilate pompously strolls to his magnificent box. The central *spina* is jammed with people and statues, and above it rest the seven gold-plated fish that will mark off the successive laps. Numerous camera angles capture the grandiose parade and magnificent setting beneath the Syrian mountains (matte), but everyone from ancient Antioch to the modern movie audience is nervously waiting to see how Judah is going to avoid those frightening blades.

The names of the contestants are read; they hail from the corners of the Roman Empire—Alexandria, Messina, Carthage, Cyprus, Rome, Corinth, Athens, Phrygia, and Judea. Pilate (Frank Thring) raises the white handkerchief, and all crouch for the start. A false start triples the tension. One last hateful look between black-robed Messala and Judah, and then Pilate drops the flag.

Immediately Messala rushes into the lead. In the opening fury one chariot takes the turn too close and hits the granite spina. Messala then sidles over to the Cypriot's chariot and drills through his spokes with his whirring, razor-sharp scythes. The first fish goes down; lap one. Rozsa's driving music from the naval battle and his heavenly Christ theme are conspicuously absent. Instead, our ears are overwhelmed by the thunder of twelve dozen hooves, the clanging of metal, and the sharp crack of whips, sounds that helped earn an Academy Award. Our concentration is focused on the rhythmic gallop of hand-

126/127 One of the great strengths of Wyler's *Ben-Hur* was its treatment of Christ's Passion as a political event of contemporary significance to Judah and his family. Here Judah (Charlton Heston), his leprous sister (Cathy O'Donnell) and mother (Martha Scott), and Esther (Haya Harareet) watch Jesus along the Via Dolorosa. Throughout the film Christ's face is kept from our view, but other players see it and react strongly to make him seem all the more compelling. Similar Passion iconography can be found in Hieronymus Bosch's *Procession to Calvary,* c. 1488. The Roman soldiers wear conventionally contemporary armor. Such representations have popularized the misconception that Christ carried the entire cross to Calvary; he probably carried only the crossbeam. But historical accuracy and artistic necessity belong to different families. Notice that the ƒ-shape of Bosch's cross is duplicated in the *Ben-Hur* shot, but not in most other cinematic crucifixes, which are T-shaped.



128/130 The circus from the most spectacular action sequence from all the "ancient" films—the chariot race from *Ben-Hur* (1959). The columned edifice in the rear houses the *carceres* (cells) where the contestants first lined up their chariots. The mountains and the upper-deck crowds are painted mattes. The awning to the right covers Roman Governor Pontius Pilate's box. The *spina* (center strip) contains three columnar *metae* (goals) at each end. On the spina are the metallic dolphins that mark off the laps. This circus cost $1 million to build, and the chariot race took three months to film. An authentic chariot race from a second-century A.D. Roman mosaic found in Lyons, France, shows similar details: the spina, dolphins, metae, whips, *quadrigae* (four-horse chariots), and carceres. In antiquity up to twenty-four seven-lap races were run in a single day. In another cinematic chariot circus, this one from Guazzoni's silent *Messalina* (facing page, 1922), eggs just behind the metae mark off laps. This spina also includes a central obelisk. The imperial box, right, is quite elaborate.

somely trim horses. We marvel at their dark manes and forelocks flying behind and above their speeding, glistening, sinewy necks, and at the natural symmetry of their four-abreast muscular bodies. The wreckage and driverless horses of the Cypriot are just cleared away when Messala rams his deadly blades into the Corinthian's spokes. The frail wood splinters with a grinding, grating buzz (the special-effects technicians used dynamite charges to splinter the spokes and wheel hubs), and the doomed Greek is suddenly dragged along the rough sand at thirty miles an hour. He frees himself and with an agile leap narrowly escapes the furious onrush of the next team of horses. But he has just leapt in front of a second team. In a flawlessly edited cut, the Corinthian is trampled under sixteen relentlessly pounding hooves. The scurrying slaves bear his body in on the stretcher but must rush out again from the spina after the next lap to carry off the Phrygian, forced into the wall by Messala. There is no law in the arena; many die.

The third fish has been marked off above the spina. The camera closes in on Ben-Hur and Messala, then provides a subjective shot from Ben-Hur's view as he maneuvers his handsome Arabians (actually Andalusians) between two other teams. We just begin to appreciate the broad backs and sinewy grace of the charging steeds when the Athenian and Carthaginian run afoul of each other and smash into the wall. Another subjective shot closes in on the slaves clearing up this wreckage. We have Ben-Hur's vantage point, and he cannot avoid the crippled chariot chassis. His own chariot flies into the air, and Ben-Hur is left with a deep gash on his face. (Contrary to rumors, it was not Heston's gash, but that of stuntman Yakima Canutt's son, Joe.)

131 The end of the chariot race—Judah's victory and Messala's bloody destruction—in *Ben-Hur* (1959). Messala, thrown from the chariot, was dragged down the stretch by his horses; to avoid such injury, ancient Roman charioteers carried knives to cut the reins. The silent 1925 version of *Ben-Hur* was banned in Mussolini's Italy because Jew triumphs over Roman.

The sixth fish. Messala finally closes in on Judah. His blades start to drill into the Judean's spokes, but Judah pulls away. Messala closes in again and demolishes the outer rail of Judah's chariot. Judah again pulls away in the nick of time. Messala furiously turns his whip on Judah as the seventh and final fish is marked off. Crack after crack of the Roman's whip lands around Judah's head, but the determined Hebrew takes the stinging leather with his strong forearm. Messala is closing in for the kill when his wheel locks with Judah's. The wheel rides up Judah's sturdy axle, flies off, and flips Messala out of his chariot. Messala has wrapped the reins around his wrists, so his body is dragged down the stretch for an excruciating length of time. He courageously frees himself but is immediately trampled by the Alexandrian's team. In desperation he grabs onto the yoke and is dragged by the panicked team. Victorious, Judah finishes the race and rides slowly past the horribly mangled Messala lying in the sand.

After Judah is crowned by Pilate, the next scene takes us to the opposite extreme. No crowd, no colorful pageantry, no handsome rushing horses, no thundering noise. Messala, bloodily black and blue, his body crushed, lies in a dim room. The doctors must amputate immediately if the tribune is to live, but Messala insists on seeing Judah. Messala has not lost after all, for he cruelly informs Judah that his mother and sister are lepers. Messala falls into convulsions and his hand, despite the spasms, grabs Judah's arm. His blood-garbled voice, wretched in intent and grotesque in its very sound, taunts Judah, "Look for them . . . in the Valley . . . of the Lepers . . . if you can recognize them. . . . It goes on, Judah, the race."

The entire galley of humanity beneath the deck of the political, military, and religious struggles of first-century A.D. Judea gives *Ben-Hur* its unique quality. An eccentric Arab sheikh (Hugh Griffith) kisses his horses goodnight, chastises a careless charioteer by saying, "You treat my horses like animals," and later remarks to the monogamous Judah, "One god I can understand, but one wife? That is uncivilized!" The character adds an Oriental mystique to the film and is a supportive friend to Judah. Similarly, Simonides (Sam Jaffe) and Esther (Haya Harareet) help to make Ben-Hur into a believable person rather than an impenetrable superman. And enmeshed in this humanity, spectacle, and political furor is the tempering Passion of Christ. This, General Wallace, you did indeed set into motion.

Ben-Hur was a huge critical and financial success. Nominated for twelve Academy Awards, it won eleven of them, a number unmatched until *Titanic,* nearly four decades later. The only nomination that failed to produce an Oscar, Best Screenplay, was the victim of a union quarrel over crediting Christopher Fry along with Karl Tunberg, S. N. Behrman, and Gore Vidal. Two years of planning and nine months of shooting, three months for the race alone, which included one hundred miles of practice laps, paid off in the end. Until 1975 *Ben-Hur* ranked ninth on the all-time money-making list (just behind *The Ten Commandments*), the book inspired an animated version in 1980, and a CD set of Rozsa's marvelously sweeping and full-bodied soundtrack is in print more than forty years later. During 1959 and 1960 $20 million worth of Ben-Hur merchandise was sold: toy swords, helmets, armor, model chariots, armor, candy, umbrellas, barrettes, towels ("Ben-His" and "Ben-Hers"), and hardcover and paperback editions of the novel. As always, Ben-Hur meant Rome, Christ, art, and money.

Bigger Than Biblical

For reasons of size, dependability, expense, and familiarity, "ancient" films seemed to appear whenever the industry underwent a dramatic technical or economic change—at the dawn of the epic film (*The Last Days of Pompeii,* 1908), when the first large budgets were allotted (*Intolerance,* 1916), when black-and-white or color effects were improved (*The King of Kings,* 1927), when the made-for-television movie became popular (*The Story of Jacob and Joseph,* 1974), or when cameras and lenses were perfected. In the early 1950s

132 The insane Roman Emperor Caligula (Jay Robinson) tests Christ's "magical" robe in *Demetrius and the Gladiators* (1954), the sequel to *The Robe*. He kills a prisoner, then holds the robe and orders the corpse to rise—a Roman's misconception of Christ's message. The robe is an *abayeh*—a long woolen garment seamed only at the shoulders. Caligula wears a sleeved, embroidered *tunica* and a felt *palla* (cloak).

Hollywood faced a viewership crisis: television was stealing audiences from the movie theater. Some industry leaders thought that the ultimate solution to the problem was a bigger, bolder picture than viewers could get in their homes. So Twentieth-Century Fox developed an anamorphic lens that would broaden the actual size of a movie's visual appearance and allow it to encompass more "scope"; it would thus lure away the unsatisfied viewer back from the limited nineteen-inch box. The commercially practical wide screen was born in 1953, and a novel set in ancient Judea and Rome was called upon to make or break the revolutionary CinemaScope process. Lloyd C. Douglass's best-selling *The Robe* did the job masterfully. Audiences raved about the panoramic views of Golgotha, of Roman troops, of Galilee, of Rome, and even of Victor Mature's nose.

Billed as the super-colossal film of the day, *The Robe* actually lacks the battles and special effects that characterize so many "ancient" films. Instead, Richard Burton (Marcellus Gallio) and Jean Simmons (Diana) enact a rather convincing love affair that

is complicated by two obstacles. The first is the jealousy of crazed Emperor Caligula (Jay Robinson), and the second is the strange insanity that has overcome Tribune Gallio since his Judean service, during which he dutifully participated in the crucifixion of Christ. His slave Demetrius (Victor Mature) becomes a believer in Christ and hides the Savior's "magic" robe from his master. Ultimately the weakened Marcellus sees so much good in Christianity that he chooses to die a Christian with Diana rather than live a pagan under Caligula.

One secret of *The Robe*'s success (some $20 million worth) was the novelty of the wide screen. But the passion of Christ is handled tastefully (his face is never shown, as in *Ben-Hur*), the action moves quickly, and the conversion of Marcellus is believable. The admiration that the viewer develops for the lovely Diana and young Marcellus changes to sincere pity when they are sent to their deaths. As one might expect, Alfred Newman's angelic score gives *The Robe* one foot in heaven already, and Michael Rennie (Peter) and Dean Jagger (Justus) help make the Christians of the film decent people rather than snippety zealots. Richard Boone is a more convincing Pontius Pilate than one might expect of a type-cast bad guy, while Jay Robinson as Caligula raises his eyebrows, his voice, and his capacity for self-proclaimed divinity with humorously insane hamming. What *The Robe* lacks in profundity, this campy Caligula adds in entertainment.

The printers had barely completed their work on *The Robe* before Fox sent them the unprocessed reels of *Demetrius and the Gladiators* (1954). Part of this sequel was shot concurrently with *The Robe*. Mature, Rennie, and Robinson repeat their roles, and Susan Hayward, Debra Paget, Anne Bancroft, and William Marshall joined the cast. Even Franz Waxman used much of Alfred Newman's score from *The Robe*. Who knew that from this one piece of red homespun so much film could be fashioned?

Caligula is now searching for the magical robe; trying to hide it, Demetrius is arrested and sentenced to the gladiatorial arena, where he becomes chummy with a likable Nubian ex-king named Glycon (William Marshall), a pagan who is curious about Christianity. But when Demetrius tells him that Christ declared that "slave and king were all the same in His eyes," the dethroned but still proud Nubian monarch replies, "No wonder they crucified him." Glycon soon converts, but soon Demetrius finds himself in the clutches of sharper claws than those he faced in the arena—the claws of Messalina (Susan Hayward), the lecherous wife of Claudius. After Peter and Glycon make the newly debauched Demetrius see the error of his ways, he repents and spearheads a revolt that results in the death of the loony Caligula and the accession of his uncle Claudius. As in the unfinished *I, Claudius,* the intelligent monarch is played with a distinguished air. Barry Jones delivers Claudius's restrained but characteristically witty lines to the Praetorians: "You have made me Caesar and I will act the part. I am not a god, nor am I likely to become one." *Demetrius and the Gladiators* is even less profound than *The Robe*, yet its action carries it well enough. Demetrius says it best when he remarks to Messalina, "To be a Christian is anything but dull these days."

133/134 No film about early Christianity can ignore the beast-filled arena. Here Demetrius (a stand-in for Victor Mature, who had had enough trouble strangling the lion in *Samson and Delilah*) does his best against a half-nelsoning tiger in *Demetrius and the Gladiators*. Directors complained that carnivorous cats sometimes stubbornly refused to attack the Christian extras. The beasts seem hungrier in an ancient terra-cotta relief, which shows gladiators battling two lions and a bear in an ancient Roman arena. Gladiators who fought against animals were known as *bestiarii*.

Whither Goest Thou?

In 1905 the Polish novelist Henryk Sienkiewicz won the Nobel Prize for literature with his positivist novel *Quo Vadis?* set in Neronian Rome. By 1912 an ex-interior decorator named Enrico Guazzoni had put the story onto celluloid for Cines. Guazzoni later directed *Julius Caesar* (1914), *Fabiola* (1916), and *Messalina* (1922), and each of these four films reveals his philosophy: "To employ spectacular architectural masses on various planes, each filled with a wealth of detail, to express the supreme majesty of space."[9] The lovely painted-

marble, three-dimensional interiors and handsome costuming in his *Quo Vadis?* make the film visually complex, and the occasional location exteriors (some along the Appian Way) expand the visual space. The fire with which Nero levels "old Rome" so that he can build his "new Rome" is somewhat disappointing, but five camera angles and many shots of the panicking populace compensate for the mediocre special effects.

Besides the architecture and decor, the film succeeds in its engaging characterizations and its unprecedented epic length. Chilon, the ragged go-between, and the corpulent Nero, who likes to look through his colored eyeglass, help dispel the ennui embedded in the cumbersome plot. Guazzoni might have done better, as did Wyler with *Ben-Hur*, to simplify the novel's story, for four hundred literary pages just do not fit well into two silent pictorial hours. But Guazzoni was pioneering the epic film, and he must be excused. There is a surplus of Romans saluting other Romans, but the film is still worth viewing. It was extremely successful in Italy, throughout Europe, and in America in 1912 and 1913. Beyond the film's own merits, it contributed to the cinematic idiom a strong man, Ursus, and an impish quidnunc, Chilon, who influenced Maciste and "the Monkey" in Pastrone's *Cabiria* the following year.

Ambrosio's 1924 *Quo Vadis?* repeated the one major mistake that Guazzoni's had made. In trying so hard to include all of the narrative intricacies of the novel, the film unfolds very slowly. Moreover, without a soundtrack, the book's Christian philosophy and Peter's impressive sermon in the Roman catacombs are ineffective. In their place we see mere drawings of the Christian fish symbol in the sand and the pious looks of the martyrs before their deaths in the arena.

In 1951 MGM shot *Quo Vadis?* (printed as QVO VADIS on the film's title screen) in Italy and made it into their first ancient spectacle since the silent *Ben-Hur*. Produced by *Ben-Hur*'s Sam Zimbalist, this Technicolor production outsizes the silent versions of Sienkiewicz's novel in many ways. Where they had been mere romantic melodramas set in ancient Rome, this version is a spectacular cinematic vision of Rome in which a melodrama unfolds. The gilded splendor of the interiors in Nero's palace, the crowd filling the huge, bluish courtyard beneath it in the dim light of dusk, the pomp, excitement, and massive crowds in the Forum, Marcus Vinicius's entry along a refurbished two-mile stretch of the Appian Way, and the huge, sixty thousand–seat arena could exist only in a multi-million-dollar Technicolor film of the 1950s. Yet the sets, sumptuous and rich, are rarely gaudy. Visually, MGM's *Quo Vadis?* is magnificent, and if the film has one chief hero, it is ancient Rome.

The authenticity of the sets, characters, minor properties, and dialogue derive from the Oxfordian education of Hugh Gray (*Ulysses, Helen of Troy*). Thanks to him Nero plays a lyrelike cithara instead of a fiddle, the triumphal Vinicius hears the traditional "Remember, thou art mortal," and the imprisoned Christians sing authentic Yemenite hymns from the centuries surrounding the birth of Christ. Most of Gray's fact-filled notebooks went unread, for MGM had a film to shoot, not a lecture to give. Nonetheless, the Roman

135 Many iconographical scenes from the European Masters have been re-created for the screen versions of the Passion, but none so closely or so strikingly as this Last Supper rendition à la da Vinci in *Quo Vadis?* (1951).

authors Petronius, Seneca, and Lucan all find their way into the romances, and Tacitus's statement (*Annals* 16:19) that the dying Petronius left a nasty note for Nero is realized. The authenticities were neither overplayed nor underplayed; they fit suitably into the sweeping pageantry of the film.

The screenplay of *Quo Vadis?* is a welcome improvement over its silent predecessors. Peter's (Finlay Currie) sermon in the catacombs allows the Roman commander Marcus Vinicius to overhear the recitation of numerous biblical passages, most important "Upon this rock I will build my church." The sermon adds an important dimension to the way Marcus Vinicius understands (or fails to understand) Christianity. The episode also includes flashbacks to the raising of Lazarus, the Last Supper (staged exactly like da Vinci's), and the crucifixion. Currie's kindly interpretation of the apostle brings to life the gentle words, derived from another of Jesus' dictums, that Peter speaks to a young boy: "We'll go to Greece and fish for men there; and maybe we'll have time to fish for fish, too." Currie also enlivens the scene described in the Acts of Peter in which Peter sees Jesus going toward Rome. "Quo Vadis, Domine?" he asks—"Whither dost thou go, Lord?"

Marcus Vinicius (Robert Taylor) has some interesting reactions to Christian doctrine. When he hears about "the dead carpenter, a rabbi who was crucified," he abruptly replies, "I'm just a heavy-skulled soldier; what in the name of Jupiter is a 'rabbi'?" A condescending Marcus is amazed that Lygia (Deborah Kerr) believes in Christ: "That beggar-faced philosophy shouldn't be stuffing your luscious face full of nonsense." And Marcus's offer to worship Christ if it will win Lygia's love has a distinctly Roman tenor: "I'll accept your god if you want. I'll have a large statue of Christ carved from marble. There's an army of gods these days; we can always find room for another."

The screenplay by John Lee Mahin, S. N. Behrman *(Ben-Hur)*, and Sonya Levien also gives a marvelous characterization of the articulate and reluctantly flattering Petronius, the author of the *Satyricon*. He commits suicide when he falls out of favor with Nero, and when he does so he muses that "It will be interesting to see if the Christian afterlife does indeed exist." Then he dictates the Tacitean letter to Nero:

> To Nero, Emperor of Rome, Ruler of the World, Divine Pontiff:
>
> I know that my death will be a disappointment to you since you wished to render me this "service" yourself. To be born in your reign is a miscalculation, but to die in it is a joy. I can forgive you for murdering your wife and mother, for burning our beloved Rome, for befouling our fair country with the stench of your crimes. But one thing I cannot forgive: the burden of having to listen to your songs.

Peter Ustinov's Nero is one of the most magnificent pieces of hamming in the history of film. Raging with power, bursting with horrible music and poetry, full of insecurity, and suspicious of all, he burns Rome to enhance his own experience of his poem about the burning of Troy. He sighs and complains of his divinity and responsibilities, and he occasionally becomes comically pretentious. His last words, "Could this be the end of Nero?" seem to parallel the similar words of another cinematic Caesar (with the *praenomen* Rico) in the twentieth century—the director Mervyn LeRoy's own *Little Caesar* (1931). Like Jay Robinson's Caligula in *The Robe* and *Demetrius and the Gladiators*,

Ustinov's campy exaggeration provides an important comic touch, even as it reflects the darker side of humanity. His adviser Tigellinus (Ralph Truman) represents totally committed evil; when the soon-to-be martyred Christians sing devotional hymns in the arena, Tigellinus calmly comments, "The lions will sing louder, I think." And Nero's wife, Poppaea (Patricia Laffan), is a real lizard.

Just as Wyler had worked on the production of the 1925 version of *Ben-Hur* before directing the 1959 production, Mervyn LeRoy earned his "ancient" bona fides as an Israelite extra in DeMille's 1923 *The Ten Commandments*. In fact, LeRoy—like Wyler a Jewish-born director of a "Christian" film—developed his epic techniques from those he saw DeMille use in 1923. Besides his experiences with "the Master," LeRoy drew on his own childhood memories of the 1905 San Francisco earthquake in filming the sequence in which Rome burns; the same sequence was reused ten years later in MGM's *Atlantis, the Lost Continent*. LeRoy wrote in his autobiography that he had always wanted to do an epic, and the energy he injected into *Quo Vadis?* evidences this desire. Well aware that a failure could ruin MGM, LeRoy used every penny of the $12 million budget to create a top-notch piece of epic entertainment.

The ten months of shooting went smoothly, but a few incidents did make headlines. Robert Taylor had an avidly publicized separation from his wife, Barbara Stanwyck (presaging the *Cleopatra* scandal). Then the fifty-plus lions LeRoy had brought from circuses all over Europe refused to attack the Christians. The tamers told LeRoy to feed the lions less food, so he tried to shoot the martyrdom sequence after two weeks of virtually starving the lions. Still nothing. He finally had to settle for some fake close-ups, which mar the film. DeMille had the same problem in filming the arena sequence from *The Sign of the Cross* (1932); some people swear that in the soundtrack of the lion sequence of that film DeMille can be heard shouting in the distance, "God dammit! Get going!" LeRoy mused over historical fact: "I still don't know how the ancient Romans staged their bloody circuses."[10] (Answer: When in Rome, do as the Romans; catch them live from Africa instead of renting them from German zoos and circuses, and your Christians will be eaten.)

Two other incidents that occurred during the shooting of *Quo Vadis?* are well established legends of Hollywood. One day during the filming of the arena sequence, LeRoy received a phone call from Elizabeth Taylor, who was on vacation in Rome. She had just had a fight with husband Nicky Hilton and wanted some place for refuge. What better way to hide than to dress up in a toga and join an already togaed crowd of $\overline{\text{LIX}}$DCCCCXCIX (59,999) in a reconstructed Roman arena? And one hired member of the Triumph sequence's crowd of cheering Italian extras was reportedly the aspiring actress Sophia Loren.

With his score for *Quo Vadis?* Miklos Rozsa became the master of the "ancient" film score. Inspired by the research of Hugh Gray, he used what few fragments of ancient Greco-Roman music have survived and adapted them for his score. In addition to the Christian's Yemenite hymns, most notable was Nero's song about the burning of Troy/

Rome, the lyric of which was originally inscribed on a tombstone nearly a century after Nero's reign. Rozsa later scored *Julius Caesar, Ben-Hur, King of Kings*, and *Sodom and Gomorrah*.

Quo Vadis? appeared again in an Italian 1985 made-for-television version, but Nero's persecution of the Christians had long been a popular forum for films. Besides Arrigo Frusta's *Nerone* (1909), which has some superb mattes, Guazzoni's *Agrippina* (1910), Caserini's *Nerone e Agrippina* (1913), J. Gordon Edwards's *Nero* (1922), a half-dozen schlocko attempts were made in Italy during the early 1960s revival, including *Ten Gladiators* (1963), *Challenge of the Gladiator* (1964), *Le Calde Notti di Poppea* (1969), and *Fire Over Rome* (1963). DeMille's *The Sign of the Cross* (1932) has also had its part in lionizing Nero. Following two silent versions of the Wilson Barrett play (1904 and 1914), DeMille as always found satisfaction in the unique combination of fantasy and sober historical authenticity. The street scenes of Rome—with their little shops, fountains, bakeries, inns, fountains, and peddlers' carts—create a feeling for the life of the average Roman. DeMille uses these humble settings well. Marcus (Fredric March) wants to know "which fountain Mercia [Elissa Landi] goes to," reminding us that water in antiquity did not normally come from private sinks; two Christians draw "the sign of the cross" in the dust by the curb of a crowded street; and a Latin advertisement for gladiatorial contests is posted on the wall. This poster morphs into English for the benefit of the film audience, a device also used in DeMille's *The King of Kings* to translate *INRI*.

Staying within Paramount's budget of $650,000, DeMille could not create the lavish Neronian Rome that he might have liked. Nero's (Charles Laughton) court consists merely of a throne, a marble ledge, and a stairway, which DeMille carefully keeps within the camera frame; the crowd scenes are doubled with a prismatic lens. DeMille did find time and money to include gladiators, dwarfs, amazons, lions, tigers, an elephant, and a bull in the arena sequence, and Poppaea's bath of asses' milk became one of the best-known symbols of DeMillean antiquity. But only DeMille would cut from a naked Poppaea (Claudette Colbert) amid the foaming lactic suds, to another woman disrobing and climbing into the bath to entertain the empress, then to two kittens leaning over the edge of the pool and lapping up the milk. The DeMillean touches are there, but the story lacks power. Nonetheless, the film was successful enough to be rereleased in 1944 with a Second World War anti-Roman—Mussolini's Rome, that is—prologue.

Besides Columbia's *Salome* and Fox's *The Robe* and *Demetrius and the Gladiators*, two other films based on the New Testament and early Christianity were produced in the wake of *Quo Vadis?*—MGM's *The Prodigal* (1955) and Warner Brothers' *The Silver Chalice* (1954). *The Prodigal* is loosely based on the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15: 11–32; the story had been filmed previously by Raoul Walsh as *The Wanderer* (1925). Edmund Purdom plays Micah, the titular son who takes his prematurely inherited bag of silver to Damascus; there he "squandered what he had in reckless living"—says Luke—by

136 A chaste external scene from DeMille's controversial milk-bath sequence in *The Sign of the Cross* (1932). The asses' milk poured into the huge bucket at the top of this bucket brigade of lactic lackeys leads into Poppaea's palace bath via a small spout.

trying to buy his way into the fleshy arms of sexy Samarra (Lana Turner), high priestess of Astarte—says Hollywood. The buildings in Damascus are more or less appropriately covered with frieze decorations and double-horse columns from Persepolis, but "the gifts from Bagdad" that Samarra receives are a little premature for the ancient world; Bagdad was not built until the Middle Ages. The "tinted wall" of Damascus, however, where one can purchase his venereal pleasures, is based on Herodotus's description of the prostitute market in ancient Babylon. Ultimately, despite the talents of Purdom, who here plays the same type of dissolute, resolute role he played in *The Egyptian*, and Louis Calhern (the high priest), *The Prodigal* looks rich but plays absurd. Bosley Crowther's assessment—"pompous, ostentatious, vulgar, and ridiculous"—was unkind, but not unfair.[11]

The Silver Chalice was based on a best-selling novel. But unlike the films adapted from the literary *Ben-Hur, The Robe, Quo Vadis?* and *The Last Days of Pompeii*, this film fails to bring either profundity or entertainment to the screen. Howard Bristof's theatrical set decorations are eye-catching and original, and Jack Palance does his best to portray

the evil magician Simon, but this story of the Holy Grail just does not hold water, let alone divine liquids. How Virginia Mayo's eyebrows were rotated to a vertical plane must remain a mystery. Perhaps Paul Newman evaluated *The Silver Chalice* best. The young actor had been "introduced" in the film, and when this debut was about to be shown on television in Los Angeles for the first time, Newman took out advertising space in the local papers and apologized for his performance. Describing his feelings when he looked at the embarrassing film, Newman said, "I was horrified."[12]

Mention should be made of several films in which mobs of early Christians face mobs of Roman soldiers or mobs of ravenous lions. *The Sword and the Cross* (1960, not to be confused with the 1958 film of the same title) martyrs Christians in 120 A.D. Cilicia; *A Sword for the Empire* (1965) martyrs them under Commodus, *Gladiator of Rome* (1962) under Caracalla, and *Fabiola* under preconversion Constantine. *A.D., Androcles and the Lion,* and *Constantine and the Cross* have been discussed in Chapter 2. And lastly, one of the founding fathers of Christendom, *Augustine of Hippo* (1972), had his lone screen appearance in an artistic Roberto Rossellini film. But here we have abandoned our ancient chariot for a medieval cart.

Jon Solomon

The Ancient World in the Cinema

REVISED AND EXPANDED EDITION

Yale University Press New Haven and London

Designed by Sonia Shannon.
Set in Adobe Garamond type by Running Feet Books.
Printed in the United States of America by Sheridan Books, Chelsea, Michigan.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Solomon, Jon, 1950–
The ancient world in the cinema / Jon Solomon. — Rev. and expanded ed.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-300-08335-1 (alk. paper) — ISBN 0-300-08337-8 (pbk. : alk. paper)
1. Historical films—History and criticism. 2. Civilization, Ancient, in motion pictures. I. Title.

PN1995.9.H5 S6 2001
791.43'658—dc21 00-044915
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

The paper in this book meets the guidelines for permanence and durability of the Committee on Production Guidelines for Book Longevity of the Council on Library Resources.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To Lois, *quasi quasar universi mei*