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VISUAL BIBLE: The Gospel of John movie

By Ted Parks

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HOLLYWOOD, Calif. (ABP) -Jesus in the movies is nothing new. But allowing an entire New Testament Gospel to speak word-for-word in the glossy idiom of the big-screen is unique, say the producers of "The Gospel of John."

A production of Toronto-based Visual Bible International, the new film "follows the gospel precisely, neither adding to the story from other gospels, nor omitting complex passages," explain the movie's makers. Unlike other movies about the life of Jesus, the filmmakers insist, "The Gospel of John" sticks to one New Testament account rather than borrowing episodes elsewhere in Scripture or from extra-biblical sources.



Garth Drabinsky, producer of "The Gospel of John," believes the fourth Gospel provides an ideal text for translation from page to screen. A film and theater veteran, Drabinsky called John "a magnificently ... structured story on a dramatic basis."

"The Gospel of John" is not Visual Bible's first attempt to translate the

words of Scripture into images. Earlier projects by the company include video versions of the New Testament books of Matthew and Acts. But the earlier productions were made under previous owners, explained Alex Panousis, Visual Bible vice president of consumer marketing.

The latest film, produced under new ownership, is a step up from the made-for-video Matthew and Acts, said Panousis, who emphasized the extensive research behind every aspect of the latest production.

“We went to incredible lengths to meticulously recreate that period,” Drabinsky said. With filming in Israel difficult because of Middle East unrest, the creators shot the movie in southern Spain, in the same area where famed British director David Lean shot portions of his 1962 epic, “Lawrence of Arabia.”

Although well-known Christopher Plummer narrates the movie, other cast members are less familiar to moviegoers, reflecting the producers' focus on talent from stage rather than screen. Henry Ian Cusick, who plays Jesus, performs with the Royal Shakespeare Company. Actors Stuart Bruce (John) and Daniel Kash (Peter) also have done Shakespeare.

Drabinsky also said the filmmakers sought stage performers free of the “baggage” likely to be carried by big-name Hollywood personalities.

“The Gospel of John” premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in mid-September to sell-out crowds, prompting Canadian columnist Jay Stone to dub the movie the event's “toughest ticket” because of the demand. Stone said the movie sold out both its opening 1,500-seat showing and a 650-seat screening the next day.

Jesus, played by Henry Ian Cusick, appears before Pilate under the watchful eye of Roman guards in the new motion picture “The Gospel of John,” currently playing nationwide.

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