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'King of Kings' Sheds Odd Light on Theme

By JAY CARMODY
Drama Critic of The Star

Hollywood has another go at reducing the divine to the merely human in "King of Kings" at the Warner Theater and as usual, both emerge unrecognizable at the end.

Naturally, the Samuel Bronson production is huge and colorful, which meets the basic cinema necessities. Uncomfortably, it is also brash or worse in its treatment of Christ as a film hero and in the liberties it takes with the Gospels to make him in the image and likeness of Jeffrey Hunter.

The Gospels are not merely adapted but amplified to make the New Testament accounts of Christ's life and ministry fit Producer Bronson's concept of a suitable screenplay.

Some of the effects of this are positively startling whatever their bearing, or lack of it, upon the picture's boxoffice popularity.

For one of these, Philip Yordan's screenplay insists that it was those posturing, scoundrelly Romans who were really guilty of the Crucifixion. As everyone knows the Romans were no better than they should be, but history suggests that in this instance they were no more than accessories.

Another novel idea advanced in "King of Kings" absolves Judas Iscariot of history's immortal act of betrayal. Bronson's Judas is merely a Judean patriot whose motive is to maneuver Jesus into a climactic miracle: namely invoking a Heavenly host to rid Judea of the Roman yoke and to save His own life.

Unwittingly, there is even a spot of macabre comedy in the film, this centering in Brigid Bazlen's Salome dance, the aftermath of which should be the presentation of her head to John The Baptist.

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As biblical spectacles must be, "King of Kings" teems with action, a major portion of

"KING OF KINGS," an MGM release of a Samuel Bronson production, directed by Nicholas Ray, screenplay by Philip Yordan, music by Miklos Rozsa, in Technicolor. At the Warner Theater.

The Cast

Jesus Christ	Jeffrey Hunter
Mary	Siobhan McKenna
Pontius Pilate	Hurd Hatfield
Lucius	Ron Randall
Claudia	Viveca Lindfors
Herodias	Rita Gam
Mary Magdalene	Carmen Sevilla
Salome	Brigid Bazlen
Barabbas	Harry Guardino
Judas	Rip Torn
Herod Antipas	Frank Thring
Caiphas	Guy Rolfe
Nicodemus	Maurice Marsac
Herod	Gregoire Aslan
Peter	Royal Dano
Balthazar	Edric Connor
John the Baptist	Robert Ryan
Camel Driver	George Coulouris
Gen. Pompey	Conrado San Martin
Joseph	Gerard Tichy
Young John	Jose Antonio
Good Thief	Luis Prendes
Burly Man	David Davies
Caspar	Jose Nieto
Matthew	Ruben Rojo
Madman	Fernando Sancho
Thomas	Michael Wager
Joseph of Arimathea	Felix de Powes
Melchior	Andriano Rimoldi
Bad Thief	Barry Keegan
Simon of Cyrene	Rafael Luis Calvo
Andrew	Tino Barrero
Blind Man	Francisco Moran

which will surprise those familiar with the pre-Bronson-Yordan version. This is a resistance movement led by Barabbas, which presents a challenge to the Roman occupation forces second only to the doctrine of Christianity being preached by Jesus. This activity provides "King of Kings" with some of its goriest sequences, one of which litters what seems to be the entire acreage of Judea with the shattered victims of Roman tyranny.

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The artistically most questionable passages are those which are concerned with the years of Christ's ministry as portrayed by the blue-eyed young Mr. Hunter.

To his personal credit, and perhaps that of Director Nicholas Ray, Hunter's acting suggests that he knows he is involved in an unactable role.

This is most evident in his mild response to the challenge of the Sermon on the Mount, the simple quintessence of Christianity which he recites with an embarrassment that is not alien at least to the humility of the character he plays.

Another difficult scene which even a stronger, surer actor might find too much is the pre-trial agony in Gethsemane, including the tortured "not my will but thine be done."

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As in so many biblical epics, the ones who come off best as human beings are those awful Romans. They are both sophis-

highly flammable dwellings of their colonial peoples.

Theirs is the hauteur, the arrogance, and the violent disdain of conquerors. The horrible glamour of these debauchees is most forcefully expressed in the assured performance of Hurd Hatfield as the elegantly aloof Pilate; of Viveca Lindfors as his regal, but ultimately vulnerable, wife Claudia.

Most solid of the entire lot of performances in "King of Kings" is that of Ron Randall as Lucius, the Roman troop commander, with a heart for the suffering Jews and an open mind for the handsome, bearded Stranger preaching the doctrine that is to be called Christian. A matching gustiness, if not calm purpose, is to be

found in Harry Guardino's Barabbas. As for Rip Torn's Judas, the sacrificial idealist, it is interesting in its concealment of the actor's sense that this is not the way he heard the story of the character.

This may well be the sentiment of a significant proportion of those who see "King of Kings."