

REVIEWS, VIEWS & RESPONSES

[Good Views](#) [[Home](#)][[Next](#)][[Videos](#)][[Reviews](#)][[Order](#)][[Links](#)][[©](#)]

- [Reviews](#)
[ON BEING: A visual Bible? Matthew](#)
[The Alternative: A VISUAL BIBLE](#)
[Charisma: The Jesus Who Smiles](#)
 - [Views](#)
 - [Responses](#)
-

ON BEING, Australia

A visual Bible? Matthew

The idea of watching four and a half hours of drama where the script follows the exact words of the Bible may sound a bit boring. But [Matthew](#), the debut film in the new Visual Bible, is anything but boring.



Using only the Bible as the script, Visual Bible International, a South African Company, aims to present the entire Bible in a compelling way without losing biblical authority. This video movie of Matthew was filmed in Morocco and is a fantastic start.

Jesus is portrayed by Bruce Marchiano as affectionate and joyful. As the actor himself has said, "*This is a Jesus who smiles, laughs and rolls up his sleeves to work and play with those he loves*". His performance is quite special, as is that of Richard Kiley who plays Matthew the narrator.

This is a powerful, captivating drama that gives great insight into the life of Christ.

I'm sure that just about anyone who watches this film will want their own copy, especially if they have children. Mine were enthralled. The video of Luke narrating the book of [Acts](#) is also available and is similarly excellent.

Stephen Baxter, Managing Editor
November 1996, Sight & Sound, p 55

ON BEING

PO Box 434, Hawthorn, Victoria 3122 Australia

Phone (03)9819-4755 Fax (03)9818-3515

Subscription Inquiries 1-800-334-054

[E-Mail onbeing@onbeing.com.au](mailto:onbeing@onbeing.com.au)

The Alternative, Australia

A VISUAL BIBLE

Using only the Bible as a script, Visual International Ltd, a South African company, has set out on an ambitious project of presenting the entire Bible on video.

The first film, "[MATTHEW](#)" was filmed in Morocco. Its South African director Reghardt van den Bergh, who

recently shocked that country's film industry by his Christian conversion. One of the biggest challenges for van den Bergh was finding the right actor to play Jesus. He finally came across Bruce Marchiano.

Marchiano was raised a Catholic by his Italian father and Syrian mother. He has pursued acting from a young age and has appeared in *Murder She Wrote*, *Columbo*, *Days of our Lives* and other series. Like van den Bergh, Marchiano recently experienced a Christian conversion.

In his depiction of Jesus, Marchiano portrays someone who is affectionate and joyful. As the actor himself has said, *"This is a Jesus who smiles, laughs and rolls up his sleeves to work and play with those who he loves."*

"[ACTS](#)", the second film in the series dramatizes the lives of Jesus' disciples as they turned the world upside down following the resurrection of Jesus. This account enables the viewer, for example, to relive Paul's remarkable travels including that famous storm and shipwreck.

Reviewers have found the Visual Bible enthralling viewing with the capacity to inspire people of all ages, young and old. These 7 hours of interesting and wholesome viewing could serve as the ideal Christmas gift. Both video sets are available from [Good Views Media](#)

Derek Brown, Editor
Canberra December 1996 p8

[The Alternative](#)

PO Box 347, Curtin ACT 2605 Australia

Phone (06)292-8229; Fax (06)292-8438; Australia Prefix +61

[Web: http://www.pastornet.net.au/alt/](http://www.pastornet.net.au/alt/) / [Email: alternative@pastornet.net.au](mailto:alternative@pastornet.net.au)

Prayer before filming

The South African director of *Matthew* is Reghardt van den Bergh, who shocked the country's film industry by his Christian conversion. He had received a prophecy that he would one day make a movie which would make people fall in love with Jesus, and he had also been told by God that the role of Jesus was to be played by a Spirit-filled Christian.

It was a challenge to find the right actor for that role, but finally he came across Bruce Marchiano, who was the last person to walk through the door for an audition.

Marchiano was raised Catholic by his Italian father and Syrian mother, and had a love of acting from a young age. He has appeared in *Murder, She Wrote*, *Colombo*, *Days of Our Lives* and other series, but says he became emotionally wrecked when his girlfriend left him and couldn't concentrate on his career. It was during this time that he turned his life over to Jesus and started attending The Church on the Way in Van Nuys.

Marchiano had only six weeks to prepare for the role before the filming of *Matthew* began. His greatest challenge was *"to do in six weeks what the Lord had been calling me to do through all my Christian walk - to become as Christ like as possible."*

Stephen Baxter

Charisma Cover Story September 1995

THE JESUS WHO SMILES

Hollywood actor Bruce Marchiano learned a lot about the human side of the Son of God when he depicted the Savior on the screen.

By Tessie Güell

Loving Jesus is one thing. But falling in love with Jesus is completely different. Ask Bruce Marchiano - he'll talk about it for hours.

For Marchiano, it began in 1993 when he landed the role of Jesus in the video movie [Matthew](#), a role that has changed forever the actor's perception of his Savior. The movie which presents a word-for word account of the Gospel of Matthew, was produced by Visual Bible International, a South African company with a goal to put the entire Bible on film using only Scripture to tell the story.

According to industry sources, Marchiano is the first Spirit-filled believer to play the role of Jesus in a major feature film. The difference - whatever the viewer may attribute it to - shows on screen.

"This is a Jesus who smiles, laughs and rolls up His sleeves to work and play with those He loves," says Marchiano.

Portraying a joyful Jesus was mostly the idea of director Reghardt van den Bergh. A well-known South African director whose Christian conversion shocked the country's film industry, van den Bergh had a clear vision of what the Lord wanted him to do with the *Matthew* project.

"Reghardt received a prophecy that one day he would direct a movie that would make people fall in love with Jesus," explains Marchiano. The director also knew the Lord had specifically told him the role of Jesus was to be played by a Spirit-filled Christian.

But finding a Christian actor who fit the bill was not as easy as he expected. Van den Bergh searched South Africa, Europe and the United States. His last stop was Los Angeles, and Marchiano was the last man to walk through the doors - only six weeks before filming was scheduled to begin.

"During the first meeting Reghardt and I had after he hired me, he looked across the table and said, 'I have one word for you: *joy*.' He quoted Hebrews 1:9 and said he believed it was that *joy* which set Jesus apart from everyone else."

It did not take long for Marchiano to agree this was the primary characteristic of Christ that he should portray in *Matthew*.

A Puppet on God's Strings

After accepting the role, Marchiano centered on one question: *How do I prepare to play Jesus, the Savior of mankind, in only six weeks?*

The most time-consuming task - requiring almost eight hours a day - was memorizing all the words of Jesus. The unique requirements of the film meant that no word could be missed or added. Marchiano also had to research the Gospel and understand the events of Christ's day.

The biggest hurdle, however, was inward.

"The camera comes right in on your face, and you can't lie to it," Marchiano explains. "I knew my greatest challenge was to do in six weeks what the Lord had been calling me to do through all my Christian walk - to become as Christ-like as possible."

Ninety-nine percent of his preparation, he says, was getting on his knees and devouring the Word.

"I asked the Lord time and time again to fill me with His love, compassion and point of view. My constant prayer was: 'Lord, make me a puppet on Your strings.'"

"This is a Jesus who smiles, laughs and rolls up His sleeves to work and play."

A the actual filming was bathed in prayer. "The crew would pray before every-thing they did," Marchiano remembers. "The director's style was to turn on the cameras and let them roll in order to allow the Holy Spirit to do what He wanted to do."

Those involved in the project say the Holy Spirit's presence was evident on the set. One instance occurred during the filming of Matthew 23, when Jesus speaks the "seven woes" to the Pharisees.

It was the last week of shooting, and Marchiano was exhausted. He was too weary, he says, to put even five lines together. He walked away and prayed, wondering how he could lovingly call someone a "snake" and a "viper."

When the director finally called "Action!" Marchiano went through the entire scene without stopping. Some cameras ran out of film. Everyone stood in awe of his moving portrayal, in which he weeps as he rebukes the hypocritical Jewish leaders.

"I don't remember anything I said or did; the Holy Spirit just took over," the actor says. "All I know is that suddenly I was on my knees crying, and I looked up to see 700 faces staring at me, mouths wide open."

When Marchiano looked at the footage taken that day, he understood how Jesus could lovingly call someone a "snake."

"It was not anger spewing at people," he explains. "It was the heart cry of a broken hearted lover. Even then, He was still reaching out to them; even then, He wanted them to know that it was not too late."

The Way It Was

Marchiano had a similar experience during the scene in which Jesus and Peter walked on water. He remembers that as he watched the actor who played Peter walk toward him, a deep love grew in his heart.

"He looked so clumsy in such a good way," Marchiano recalls. "He was trying so hard to be good. When Jesus said, 'You of little faith,' can't you read between the lines and hear Him say, 'O you of little faith - you lovable and beautiful man!'"

"I believe Jesus was thinking, *What a pleasure to have this man love Me so much!* Jesus loved these men. He would never do anything to push them away."

The scene is portrayed in such a way that after Peter starts sinking, Jesus laughs and embraces him.

"I remember sitting with my pastor, Jack Hayford, watching this scene," Marchiano says. "When Jesus embraces Peter, Pastor Jack got up from his chair and yelled, 'Yes! I knew that's the way it was!'"

Learning how things were for Jesus was not always easy for Marchiano. His most grueling experience was filming the crucifixion.

"I can't describe the panic that goes through a man's heart when you see a nail fixed on your hand."

"The cross has been romanticized and glamorized," he says. "Yes the cross is an awesome reminder of what our Savior did for us, but there was a lot of pain involved. The day we filmed that scene was absolutely horrible for me."

[It was heart-wrenching. I was literally lived through hell."](#)

The filming of the crucifixion scene took nine hours. Marchiano, who works out regularly and is in excellent physical condition, could stay on the cross for only 10- to 30- minute intervals because the depiction was so strenuous.

He endured the longest session by standing on a ladder for support. But to capture on film as much of the physical strain as possible, Marchiano literally dangled on the cross much of the time. He was in severe pain during the days that followed.

Marchiano's most vivid memory? It occurred when an actor playing a Roman soldier grabbed his wrist and prepared to nail it to the cross. ["I can't describe the panic that goes through a man's heart when you see a nail fixed on your hand,"](#) Marchiano says.

The night of the filming of the crucifixion scene, Marchiano wrote in his journal: ["I believe every Christian should hang on a cross for at least 30 seconds. Their lives will never be the same."](#)

From the Courtroom to the Stage

Born in Los Angeles to an Italian father and a Syrian mother, Marchiano was raised Catholic. His first taste of acting came at age 13 when he landed a part in his school's production of *Oliver*.

He entered college as a drama major but switched to economics, feeling the pressured to pursue a "real profession." He graduated with a degree in economics from California State University at Fullerton and went on to get his law degree.

After practicing criminal law for two years and feeling like a misfit, Marchiano decided to leave the courtroom and return to his original passion - acting.

He landed parts in TV shows such as *Murder, She Wrote, Columbo, Days of Our Lives* and *General Hospital*.

["My career was cooking, and I had a girlfriend everyone else wanted. Then, in less than two months, everything was gone. The girl left me for a director,"](#) he says. ["I was so emotionally wrecked I could not get a part to save my life."](#)

Marchiano says he knew about the Lord because many people had witnessed to him. One day, alone in a park, he turned his life over to Jesus and began attending The Church on the Way in Van Nuys.

A few years later when the church sponsored a missions trip to Australia, the Lord prompted him to sign up. But Marchiano resisted, knowing that an actor who gets too far from Hollywood for too long is committing career suicide. Despite his fear, he obeyed. It was the missions-team director who later informed him of the auditions for *Matthew*.

The movie, which runs 4.5 hours on four video cassettes, released in South Africa in October 1993. Marchiano was scheduled for five weeks of publicity appearances throughout South Africa.

However what began as promotion ended in spiritual awakening. As the word got out about the film and the "joyful" Jesus, invitations started to pour in. Marchiano was invited to schools, churches, prisons and conferences to share his testimony.

The five weeks of publicity turned into six months of ministry during which almost 9,000 people gave their lives to the Lord.

It was a mountain-top experience that left Marchiano both blessed and perplexed. Fellow actor and spiritual father Dean Jones helped him realize that after the mountaintop, it would be time to move on with God.

"I was a goal-setting, ambitious actor," Marchiano admits. "Now I look at most movies and TV shows, and they don't do anything for me. After playing the role of Jesus, what can I possibly do?"

"My priorities have changed. Now people are getting saved and set free. That is my real purpose," he says.

For now, Marchiano continues to pursue his acting career. He also plans to return to South Africa at the end of this year for three more months of ministry.

And he continues to smile.

"Looking back, I know my whole life has been about *Matthew*," he says. "I can see how every stop was leading me to do this movie - and to fall in love with a real Jesus."

Tessie Güell is book and music editor for Charisma and Editor of Charisma International, a Spanish-language magazine published by Strang Communications.

Charisma & Christian Life

Editorial and Advertising office

600 Rinehart Road

Lake Mary, FL 32746 USA

Phone +1(407)333-0600; Fax +1(407)333-7100

Email: charisma@strang.com OR webmaster@strang.com

Internet: <http://www.charismamag.com/>

For information on Bruce Marchiano's ministry, write

Box 171, 11333 Moorpark St., Studio City, CA 91602 USA

Reprinted with permission from *Charisma*. September 1995
Strang Communications Co., USA

VIEWS, ACCOLADES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

"The Bible is my favorite book and has been since I was a little boy. Beyond a shadow of doubt, it is God's Book. Now, the Bible has come to video, word for word. How thrilling! How wonderful! It is a witness to Him - His life, His hopes, and His dreams! Here we see God's Word spring to living color. The parables of Jesus dance before our eyes. The music moves us into the words, stories, and lives of Bible characters. The stories speak to children and adults, from every walk of life. Thank you, Visual Entertainment, for seeing the possibilities and creating this dynamic presentation of Scripture!"

Dr. Robert H. Schuller, Senior Pastor, Crystal Cathedral, California

*"My initial interest in **The Visual Bible** was for the sake of my kids. My continued interest in **The Visual Bible** has been for the sake of my heart. Simply stated, it does my heart good to watch the videos. Before preaching on Sunday, I view the text on Saturday night. It helps me to teach like Jesus taught."*

Max Lucado, Author Pulpit Minister of Oak Hills Church of Christ

"I found myself absorbed and awed at the power of this dramatic presentation of God's Word. I have never seen anything like it! I was way into Chapter Eight of Matthew before I gathered my wits about me and realized I had been sitting spellbound for some time! I highly recommend this product! It will make a great difference in the lives of all who view it."

Elisa Morgan, President Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPS)

"Call it the biblical epic to end all biblical epics."

David Briggs, Associated Press Religion Writer

"The Scripture comes alive when we see it on video. What a wonderful way to implant God's truth into our hearts and minds!"

Beverly LaHaye, Concerned Women for America

*"The cause of Christ is greatly served by the production of **The Visual Bible**. The positive effect of this project will be measured in the lives of our children and families."*

Dr. Tony Evans, Senior Pastor, Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship

"The Visual Bible is a long overdue tool in helping families back into the Bible. I pray God will use it to bring a family reformation!"

Dennis Rainey, Executive Director, Family Life

"Have you ever wished that you could have been in Israel when Jesus walked among the people? How did the men and women react to our Lord's preaching on the Beatitudes? What was the response of the people when Christ healed the leper, Peter's mother-in-law, and many others?"

"The Visual Bible brings the events of Scriptures to life and clearly shows that Jesus of Nazareth was the kingly Messiah of Jewish prophecy."

"I heartily recommend The Visual Bible to all who want a greater ap[preciation of the most influential book in the world."

Dr. John Ankerberg

"As I viewed the video, I found myself praising the Lord that such a project was undertaken. Also, because of the quality and style, I was having a difficult time of turning the video off. When something holds my attention like that, it must be good."

"In a sight and sound generation you are right on target. Also, in a consumer/quality driven culture you have produced a quality product that is an honor to the cause of Christ."

Don Argue, President, National Association of Evangelicals

"The Visual Bible has to be one of the most powerful means of revealing the love of God in Christ to the unevangelized."

Diana Hallas, Youth With A Mission, Canberra, Australia

"I thoroughly enjoyed the Visual Bible tapes. As a Fijian working in PNG, the way Jesus communicates and the responses of the people are so relevant to Islanders. The message comes through in a most natural way."

Wakanesi Toronibau, Youth With A Mission, Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea

"I love reading the Word and I sometimes see it graphically through meditating on it. When I first saw this production of Matthew, it added another dimension. It has also been a useful tool in communicating the gospel to friends who are new Christians or who have a cursory interest. It is powerful, conveys the humanity of Jesus as well as his deity. Every Christian home should have a copy of these productions in their video library."

John Taylor, Businessman, Canberra Australia

RESPONSES AND TESTIMONIALS

Toowoomba Students Speak Out

. **from the Principal**, Toowoomba Christian College

Since my youth, O God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds. Psalm 71:17

THE 'MATTHEW' VIDEOS

As the theme of our Bible work in Year 8 this year is the Life of Christ, Mr. Kitto has been, over several lessons, showing the recently released video series simply entitled "MATTHEW". This is an excellent and straight forward reenactment of the Gospel of Matthew, based solely on the text of the New International Version (NIV). He has been delighted with the reception the students have given to this series and hence to the Gospel itself, and thought that parents might like to read some of the written responses the students have made. Each of the following comments is from a different student:

- *"I now understand why Jesus had to die for our sin and what a horrible way to die it was."*
- *"My Christian life was probably challenged most in the area of faith, as Jesus taught often on the subject."*
- *"The video makes you feel like you are one of the people he talked to and healed."*
- *"The videos were good because the verses were shown in the bottom right hand corner of the screen and we could follow them with our Bibles."*
- *"I thought the video was really good and would recommend it to anyone."*
- *"I would recommend the Matthew video series because I found them encouraging and it inspired me to read and search my Bible more."*
- *"From watching this series and seeing the suffering Jesus went through I feel extremely lucky to know Jesus as my Lord and Saviour."*
- *"The videos to me were very valuable and the sort of thing I won't forget."*

Yours in Christian Education

Richard Brown, Principal

Toowoomba Christian College

c/o Post Office, Highfields, Qld 4352 Australia

Phone (076)308-444; Fax (076)308-670 Country Prefix +61

"Hey guys, this video is incredible!! You have done a wonderful job and I love it. ... Do you have any other books of the Bible yet? I want them all!"

Larry Steele, Oklahoma City, OK USA

"The Matthew video was an incredible blessing!! I've already watched it 5 times and I've also purchased the Acts video as well ... I can't say enough good things about Matthew, especially. After viewing it at my house, my friend (who recently made a commitment to Christ) went and bought it for herself. She couldn't wait to watch it again. I've talked to others online who have watched it and purchased their own copies and I've encouraged others to buy it also - it has been such a blessing. Thank you so much.

I like to add it to the tools I use to draw others to Christ and to rekindle the flame of love in those Christian friends of mine who are mediocre about their faith. This video shows a Jesus that no one can 'meet' and stay mediocre about - He is charismatic, full of life, real."

Debbie Frans, Baltimore, MD USA

Email: LoveTheSon@aol.com

E-Mail scribe@goodviews.com.au; URL <http://www.goodviews.com.au/reviews.html>

[Good Views](#) [[Home](#)][[Top](#)][[Next](#)][[Videos](#)][[Reviews](#)][[Order](#)][[Links](#)][[©](#)] Feb 7, 1998