

## The Gospel of Caesar

2007 / NL / 115 min.

Regie Jan van Friesland  
Distributie Van Friesland Film  
Taal Nederlands, Duits, Engels, Spaans, Italiaans (NL ondertiteling)

De Italiaanse taalkundige, filosoof en schrijver Francesco Carotta publiceerde in 2002 het boek *Was Jezus Caesar?* Hierin zet hij heel nauwkeurig zijn theorie uiteen dat de teksten over Jesus Christus gebaseerd zijn op het leven van Julius Caesar. Hij betoogt, met overwegend linguïstische argumenten, dat de bronnen die het leven van Julius Caesar beschrijven sterke overeenkomsten vertonen met onder andere het evangelie van Markus. Als Carotta gelijk heeft, zou deze ontdekking een omwenteling in de westerse beschaving betekenen vergelijkbaar met de ontdekking van Galileo, aldus de filosoof Paul Cliteur destijds naar aanleiding van het boek. Niet iedereen was echter overtuigd door deze theorie van Carotta. Zelf gelooft de Italiaans-Duitse taalkundige wél heilig in zijn theorie dat Jezus Christus als historische figuur in feite Julius Caesar is, aangezien hij zó veel overeenkomsten vond dat volgens hem niet meer van toeval gesproken mag worden.

Het boek van Carotta zorgde voor veel ophef maar is daarna al vrij snel in vergetelheid geraakt. Echter niet voor Jan van Friesland die een documentaire maakte over de zoektocht van Carotta en zijn volgelingen. In deze controversiële documentaire volgt hij Carotta tijdens zijn onderzoek in diverse landen. De film vuurt veel informatie af op de kijker over het intrigerende en zeer opmerkelijk verhaal van Carotta. Het is alsof je in een historische thriller bent beland, dus kijk zelf en laat je overtuigen.

Het *Evangelie van Caesar* beleeft in Leiden zijn festivalpremière om daarna op reis te gaan naar andere internationale festivals.

**Na afloop van de film is er een Q & A met de filmmaker Jan van Friesland.**

## INTERVIEW

Francesco Carotta, is de schrijver van het boek "*Was Jezus Caesar?*". Het Leids Film Festival heeft een kort interview gehouden met Carotta naar aanleiding van de vertoning van de documentaire van Jan van Friesland in Leiden.

### What was the origin of your research?

Curiosity. By chance, one day, reading a book about Caesar, I saw this image which is supposed to depict him: I was astonished, thinking this cannot be Caesar, whom I pictured as a warrior. I was not aware of the fact that he had pardoned his enemies. You are not taught this in school, only that he conquered Gallia, waged a civil war and was a ruthless dictator, for which he was assassinated. And here I suddenly saw a merciful face I knew from my childhood as an altar boy in the church, which I would have incensed during Liturgy: the visage of Christ. And because I thought it is impossible, it doesn't fit, something is wrong here, I began to enquire.



### What do you think is the main reason for the skeptic reaction on your discoveries?

Paradoxically the same that drove me to my research: the idea people have in their mind of Caesar and Jesus respectively. They also think it is impossible. If you ask people on the street, who said this: 'I did not come to bring peace, but the sword', they will probably answer "Caesar" or maybe "Mohammed", instead of "Jesus", which would be correct (Matthew 10:34).

Nobody knows that Caesar was elevated to the gods, and if someone knows it, they believe he was a false god and not the one of the official cult of the empire. That is the reason why they feel comparing both figures to be a blasphemy.

Another reason is that the believers fear that if he was Caesar, then Jesus would not have existed, while the atheists on the contrary fear that being Caesar,

## FRANCESCO CAROTTA

Jesus then was not a myth—both parties agreeing that it would be better for them if Jesus were not Caesar. Furthermore, if Jesus was Caesar, we are led back to a time, in ancient Rome, where there was no separation between religion and politics, church and state. Something most people are not prepared to accept, in our laical societies.

### Do you think film, or more specific a documentary, is a good medium to clarify your theory?

It is a challenge of course, to document a research. There is the danger to make merely a report about researchers. It depends on how it is done. Jan van Friesland tried it his way. The audience will judge whether he was successful in his attempt.

### What is your favorite part in the documentary made by Jan van Friesland?

The parts where you see the old Christian traditions: the sequences of Epiphany in Cyprus, or of Good Friday in Spain, I mean the liturgical ritual in Bercianos de Aliste. And the music of Arne Eickenberg.

### Would you mind if a fiction film was produced based on your discoveries?

I do not like the mixing up of history and fiction. But here, too, it depends on how it is done. It would be difficult, maybe impossible. One should show less, be modest, humble. One would have to take into account one's own inadequacy, and to accept it, to understand, that all you can add of your own, is only improvement for the worse. Then, if you understand this, then perhaps it could be possible.

### What is your favorite film in which Jesus and/or Caesar are portrayed?

None. Until now they have produced only miserable results, falsifying both, religion and history, belittling Jesus and Caesar, injuring the religious feelings of the people and insulting the intelligence of the audience.

