

MAGNOLIA MINDS: What does the picture of Christ mean to you?

*By Rex Yancey
Correspondent*



Yancey

In 1940, artist Warner Sallman painted a portrait depicting his image of Jesus. This rendering, which Sallman reproduced in such famous paintings as the one of Jesus knocking at the heart's door, remains the single most popular picture of the Savior ever created.

This painting has been reproduced over one billion times, appearing on posters, clocks, pins, and stickers. It has crossed denominational lines, being used in the 40's, 50's, and 60's by Methodists, Baptists, Lutherans, and others to promote various events.

During World War II, the Salvation Army and the YMCA distributed millions of wallet-sized copies to American GIs, who treasured the prints on the battle fields of Europe, Africa, and the Pacific.

"Rev." Sun Myung Moon, founder of the heretical Unification Church, was on trial in the U.S. for tax evasion in 1982. He testified that Jesus appeared to him on a mountain in South Korea. Asked how he recognized the Son of God, Moon replied

without blinking, "From his pictures."



Sallman

Yet for all this popularity, there is some question whether Sallman got it right. His Jesus has blue eyes and looks Caucasian. There are those who think Jesus looked wimpy, and some parents in the 60's and 70's complained about his long hair and beard. Imagine determining the world's concept of Christ and not getting it right.

I heard about one teenager who came to his dad during the 60's and asked him for a car. His dad said, "Son, pull up your grades, read your Bible, get a haircut, and then come back to see me." Nine weeks later the young man came back and once again asked for a car. He said, "I've pulled my grades up and read my Bible every day."

His dad asked, "Why didn't you get a haircut?" The young man said, "I read in the Bible where Jesus had long hair." His dad replied, "Yes, and He walked everywhere he went!"

I once preached a series of messages on the features of Christ. I spoke about his hands, his eyes, his face, and his feet.

God made Jesus incarnate so we could relate to Him. He had carpenter's hands. I am learning that carpenters' hands have nicks, cuts, and bruises. However, the Bible indicates that He had gentle hands. He had eyes of compassion and mercy. He could investigate a crowd and see an individual.

Isaiah speaks about his face: "He has no stately form or

majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him" (Isaiah 53:2). His feet were beautiful because He came preaching the Gospel of peace.

When the Corinthians wanted to know what Christ looked like, the Apostle Paul said that Jesus looked like him. "Be imitators of me," Paul wrote, "Just as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). Paul was not bragging. He just realized that Christ never sat for a portrait and that if He is to be seen in our world at all, it will be in the lives of those who claim to follow Him.

I think this story illustrates what Paul was saying to the Corinthians. One of my friends was on his way to an evangelistic conference in Texas several years ago. He sat down beside a gray-haired woman wearing a large corsage. "Who are you, and where are you from?" she asked. "I'm a pastor from Atlanta," he answered. "A pastor!" she exclaimed. "Then you will appreciate my purpose for making this flight. I have to visit this family before God calls me home.

"Many years ago, I had an unusual and profound experience in my life. I was a Sunday school teacher for a class of girls. I made myself available to them on days other than Sunday. One day as I busied myself with household chores, I heard a knock on the door. My hands were in dishwater and my day already had many interruptions, so I tried to ignore the knock.

"Again it came, louder and with more persistence. I opened the door and saw a little girl standing there. Her hair was uncombed, her dress was dirty and torn, and she had no shoes on her feet. 'What is it?' I asked, rather peevishly. She just stood there and looked at me with big brown eyes.

"I realized I had spoken rather sharply to her, and by this time I recognized her as one of the girls who had occasionally attended my class. I softened my tone and said, 'Honey, I'm very busy, but is there something I can do for you?'

“‘Mrs. Lerner, I know you love me,’ she said in a very soft voice. ‘My mother died an hour ago and I’ve come to let you cry with me.’

“‘You know what I did?’” Mrs. Lerner asked me as she continued the story. ‘I took that little girl in my arms and into my home. I combed her hair and washed her face, and I sat down and cried with her.’”

You – yes, you – are someone’s Walter Sallman. You are someone’s portrait of Christ. Some young Christian or unsaved friend is forming his image of Christ by watching your life.

Let me ask you this question: Are you getting it right?

Yancey is a retired Mississippi Baptist pastor living in Brandon. He may be contacted at rexyancey@dixie-net.com.

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