

Chapter 24

THE NEW JESUS OF THE FOURTH CENTURY

Christian people in the fourth century began to portray Jesus very differently from what earlier Christians believed. Not only did they start to make him *handsome* and *healthy* during his term of preaching, they also changed his actual appearance by putting long hair and a beard on him. And the image they chose closely resembled those of the pagan gods and the early Greek philosophers. The real interest in pictures and paintings of Jesus began in earnest in the early part of the fourth century. Before that time, it was very uncommon in orthodox circles to find any Christian having a picture, painting (and certainly not an idol or statue) of Jesus, the apostles or some of the early prophets or leaders. But early in the fourth century, the trend began to change. Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, whom we have mentioned in earlier chapters, was not pleased with Constantia Augusta (the daughter of Constantine and wife of Caesar Gallus) when she wanted Eusebius to provide her with a portrait of Jesus. Indignantly, he wrote:

“Since you have written about some image, it seems of Christ, wishing the said image to be sent to you by us, what, and of what kind, is this image which you call that of Christ?... Has this scrip-

ture alone escaped you, in which God by law forbids to make the likeness of anything in heaven, or on earth beneath? Have you ever seen such a thing in a church yourself or heard it from another? Have not such things been banished throughout the whole world, and driven off out of the churches; and has it been proclaimed to us alone among all men that it is not lawful to do such a thing” (quoted in Smith’s, *Dictionary of Christian Antiquities*. vol.I, p.814).

The Invention of the Long Haired Jesus

The *Dictionary of Christian Antiquities* (vol.I,p.875) provides evidence that it was during the fourth century that the depiction of the Jesus we are accustomed to today had its invention. This is when the *handsome*, bearded, long-haired Jesus came into existence. Earlier portraits showed him to be beardless and short-haired which answered more closely to what was his true appearance. But whether shown as beardless and short-haired (as in pre-Constantine times) or with a beard and long haired (after Constantine), theologians even in the fourth/fifth centuries knew that the Holy Scriptures forbade any such depictions of deity. Augustine in the early fifth century showed how unlawful this was.

“It is not to be thought that God the Father is circumscribed by human form.... It is unlawful to set up such an image to God in a Christian temple. Much more is it wicked to set it up in the heart where the temple of God truly is” (quoted in *the Dictionary of Christian Antiquities*, vol.I, p.875).

Actually, it is easy to show that Jesus did not have the long hair that many in the fourth century began to imagine he had while he taught in Judaea. The apostle Paul said the male was head of the wife as Jesus is head of the Church (I Corinthians 11:3) and that the human male resembles God in shape and form (verse 7). Paul then went on to state that it was a shame for any male person to have long hair since he was in the image of God (verse 14). He noted that it was custom in all the Churches of God (whether in Judaea or in Gentile lands) for men to have short hair and women to have their

hair long (verse 16). In the Book of Revelation women's hair in the first century is shown to have been quite distinct from men's (Revelation 9:8). If Jesus himself would have had long hair, Judas (at the time of his arrest) would only have needed to point out "the man with the long hair" rather than singling him out with a kiss (Luke 22:48) because it was quite out of the ordinary for normal Jewish men to have long hair.

Jewish Priests Required to Wear their Hair Short

There was a definite reason why Jewish men (especially in the time of Jesus) wore their hair short as common custom. The people knew that the Aaronic priests in the Temple at Jerusalem had the role of being mediators between the ordinary people of Israel and God. Sometimes the priests took the place of the people in petitioning God, while at other times the priests became a substitute for God in instructing the people. In the time of Jesus most of the Sadducees were priests, while the majority of the remainder of the Jews were Pharisees. The Pharisees applied the Scripture that the whole nation of Israel should be reckoned as priests (Exodus 19:6) and they invented some strict customs even for themselves and the common people that were actually designed for priests. And what was a principal custom (indeed, it was a command from God) that characterized the priests because of their roles in being like God to the people and the rest of the world? God commanded all His priests to have **SHORT HAIR**. That's right. The priests who administered in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple at Jerusalem were required by God to have short hair, not long hair in the manner that women adorned themselves.

Such a command had been in effect since the time of Moses. Whereas the King James Version translates Leviticus 10:6 as "uncover not your heads," the Jewish authorities always knew that this should be rendered "Let the hair of your heads **NOT** grow long" (see Rashi on Leviticus 10:6; and it is so translated in *The Jerusalem Bible*, Koren ed.).

This command of God was given again in the time of the prophet Ezekiel. “They [the priests] shall not shave their heads [that is, to be made bald], or let their locks grow LONG; they shall only trim the hair of their heads” (Ezekiel 44:20 RSV).

This shows that the priests of God (who represented God before the people) were forbidden by God to have long hair. In fact, if a priest let his hair grow more than thirty days without cutting it, it was reckoned as being as guilty as being intoxicated if they entered the Temple and the consequence of their infraction was *death* (*Sanhedrin* 22b, 36b). The ideal length was called “the Julian” which was a reference to the hair style of the Roman Emperors from Julius Caesar on through to Nero, who had their hair very short as their statues to this day show. It was the type of haircut on men that was in fashion in the 1950’s.

The priests were required to keep their hair trimmed short in order to do the divine administrations in the Temple. This is because they were looked on by the common Jewish people as substitutes for God. This was unlike some heathen priests, however, who wore long hair to mimic the gods they worshipped. But Jewish men in the first century followed the example of their priests who were required by God to wear their hair short. After all, the ordinary men wanted to be groomed like God, not like pagan gods, or the heathen philosophers or some alien Gentile priests whom they usually considered vile.

Long Haired Persons could Not Enter the Temple

While it can easily be shown that ordinary Jewish men wore their hair short, did not a special group known as Nazarites among the Jews let their hair grow without cutting it? Only when Jewish men were under a Nazarite vow which normally lasted for 30 days, and rarely beyond 100 days (see M’Clintock and Strong, *Cyclopaedia*, vol.VI, pp.881,882) or when in short periods of mourning (see early Jewish commentaries on Leviticus 10:6) did

Jewish men refrain from going to a barber. And interestingly, during the time Jewish men would let their hair grow (not to long lengths like the hair of women), they were forbidden by God to enter his Temple. The Hebrew word from which the term Nazarite gets its origin means “separation”. While these men under a Nazarite vow devoted themselves to contrition and humility (even shame for some of their actions), they were required to stay out of God’s Temple during their period of vow (that is, they were to stay away from God’s own home).

The teaching of the Holy Scriptures would not allow such men letting their hair grow to come before Him in the Temple. That is why they were called Nazarites (*separated ones*). While undergoing the period of their vow, these men were separated from the physical presence of God. But when their period of shame and contrition was over, the Scriptures permitted them to cut their hair at the threshold of the Temple and then, with the sacrifice of an animal and other purification rites, they could re-enter the Temple. But God wanted no long haired men in His presence in His Holy House.

Jesus Taught Openly in the Temple

This fact has some interesting bearing on the appearance of Jesus. Since we know that Jesus drank wine, and this shows He was not a Nazarite (Numbers 6:3), Jesus also taught openly in the Temple and the authorities in the time of Jesus would not allow long haired men to enter the Temple enclosure. Such men had to be separated from God.

As for lifetime Nazarites, it was common for them to braid the hair, like the seven braids on Samson (Judges 16:13) and to wind the braids around the head under a turban or other headgear. Samson was a warrior and he would never have allowed his braids to reach below his neck lest they be grasped by his enemies and cut off. Samson knew that cutting off his braided hair meant his strength was gone. This is why Samson would have wanted to

secure his braids as close to his head as possible. But even with long hair, lifetime Nazarites among the Israelites (and they were rare) did not let their hair hang down like the hair of women in the pagan style that Christians of the fourth century began to portray Jesus. In the Bible, it is evil spirits who are masculine but have long hair like women, and like the modern Jesus (Revelation 9:8). The teaching of the Holy Scriptures prohibits long haired men from coming into His presence. The Jewish people were well aware of this common trait that was demanded for the men to enter the Temple, and they kept their hair short because of it. And so did the *real* Jesus.

The truth is, the real Jesus of the Bible did *not* have long hair. Nor was he handsome in his outward form. According to the writers of the New Testament, he came into the world to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy of the Suffering Servant and they believed that Jesus performed the role perfectly. This means that the real Jesus who was crucified (and stoned to death) at Golgotha on the Mount of Olives was in actual fact continually frail and sickly in body and was bordering on what the world would call ugliness in appearance. The simple truth is, Jesus while teaching on earth had short hair and all the early portraits of him made in the hundred or so years before the time of Constantine show him also as beardless.

First Century Men Commonly wore their Hair Short

It was common custom throughout the Roman Empire in the first century for men to have their hair short. They followed the examples of the Caesars of Rome who always wore short hair. As far as males were concerned, Paul demanded that they keep their hair short. Indeed, even with the Greeks it was customary for men to wear their hair short except, as the Jews, for short periods of mourning. Charles Goodwin of Pusan, Korea supplied me with this quotation from the Loeb edition of Plutarch's *Moralia* on "The Roman Questions" 267B. "In Greece, whenever any misfortune comes, the women cut off their hair and the men let it grow, for it

is usual for men to have their hair cut and for women to let it grow” (emphasis mine, and note that short hair on men was normal).

Paul reminded his Greek readers in Corinth of this custom which he called the way of nature [instinct] among the Greeks. So, both Jewish and Greek men normally wore their hair short. It was even a religious duty for Jewish men. “Does not nature [instinct] itself teach you, that if a man have long hair it is a shame to him?” (I Corinthians 11:14).

Gentile Philosophers were Different

Most philosophers and most of the pagan gods were depicted with long hair. Dio Chrysostom, the practical philosopher who lived in the first century, told his readers that he and other philosophers wore their *hair long* (*Oration Thirty-Five*, vol.III. pp.391,401 Loeb ed.). Epictetus in his *Discourses* (Chapter 8) urged people not to adopt quickly the grooming habits of the professionals such as wearing the cloak, *wearing long hair and beard of the philosophers*. In Epictetus’ opinion only those who were true philosophers should adopt such grooming habits. Since Epictetus lived about 50 years after the apostle Paul, this is again proof that ordinary Greek men wore their hair short. But by the fourth century, some Christians began to teach that Jesus should be depicted like the heathen gods — with a beard and long hair.

The following excerpts from early historical documents can show the opposition by several Christian theologians during and soon after the time of Constantine to the pagan portrayals of Jesus that were then beginning to be adopted. This is when the long-haired Jesus with a beard first appeared. It is a major error.

The Opinion of Eusebius

The following quote (abridged) is from Eusebius’ “Letter to Constantia” (the sister of Constantine the Great). It shows the utter disdain of Eusebius for what was then occurring among some

Christians who wanted to portray Jesus as some were guessing that he appeared in his human flesh. All words in brackets are my explanations:

“You also wrote me about some supposed image of Christ, which image you wished me to send to you. Now what kind of thing is that you refer to as the image of Christ? I do not know what compelled you to request that an image of Our Savior should be shown. What kind of image of Christ are you seeking? Is it the true and unadulterated one which bears His essential characteristics [His divine image], or the one which He assumed for our sake when He took up the form of a servant [His human form]?... Granted, He has two forms, and even I do not think that your petition has to do with His divine form....

“Surely then, you are seeking His image as a servant, that of the flesh which He assumed for our sake.... How can one paint an image so unattainable...unless, as so the unbelieving pagans, one is to represent things that have no possible resemblance to anything...? For they [the pagans] make such idols when they wish to form the likeness of what they think to be a god or, as they might say, one of the heroes or anything else of like nature, yet they are unable even to approach a likeness, and accurately represent some strange human forms. Surely, even you will agree with me that such practices are illegal for us. [Eusebius believed, accurately so, that even a *true* likeness of Jesus — if one were available — was still not allowed to be displayed by biblical teaching.] Have you ever heard of such a resemblance yourself in church or from another person? Are not such things excluded and banished from churches all over the world, and does not everyone know that such practices are not permitted to us alone?

“Once there was a woman, I do not know how, brought me in her hands a picture of two men in the demeanor of philosophers [Dio Chrysostom, “Oration Thirty-Five,” vol.III,pp.391,401, Loeb ed., stated that Gentile philosophers generally wore *long hair*] and the woman mentioned that they were Paul and the Savior. I have no way of knowing where she got this information or where she learned it. But in order that neither she nor others might receive offense, I took the picture away from her and kept it in my house, as I thought it was improper for such things to be displayed to others, lest we appear, like idol worshippers, to carry our God around

in an image. I note that Paul informs all of us not to hold any more to things of the flesh; because he tells us that though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet from now on we know Him no more.”

The Warning of Epiphanius

The following quotation is from Epiphanius of Salamis in his “Letter to the Emperor Theodosius” (written somewhere between A.D.379-395).

“Which of the earlier Fathers ever painted an image of Christ and put it in a church or a private home? [None of them ever did such a thing.] Which early bishop ever dishonored Christ by portraying Him on door curtains?... Moreover, they are deceiving who represent the likeness of [biblical] saints in various forms according to their fancy, sometimes showing the same persons as old men, sometimes as youths, intruding into things which they have not seen. For they paint the Savior *with long hair*, and this by guessing because He is called a Nazarene, and Nazarenes wear long hair. They are in error if they try to attach stereotypes to Him, because the Savior drank wine, whereas the Nazarenes [the Nazarites] did not.

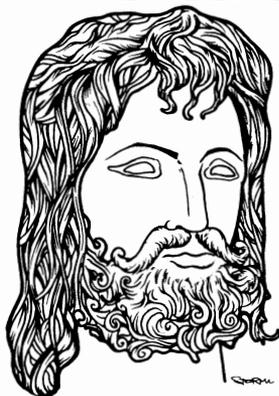
“They also show forth deception by inventing things according to their fancies. These impostors represent the holy apostle Peter as an elderly man with hair and beard cut short; some represent holy Paul as a man with receding hair, others as being bald and bearded, and the other apostles are shown having their hair closely cropped. If then the Savior *had long hair* while his apostles were cropped, and since by not being cropped, He was unlike them in appearance, for what reason did the Pharisees and scribes give a fee of thirty silver pieces to Judas that he might kiss Him and show them that He was the one they looked for, when they might themselves or by means of others have determined by reason of *His [long] hair* Him whom they were seeking to find, and thereby without paying a fee?....

“Can you not see, O most God-loving emperor, that this state of things is not agreeable to God? [Which trend was then sweeping the Christian world.] Wherefore I beg of you...that the curtains which may be found that have such false depictions of the apostles

or prophets or of the Lord Christ Himself should be collected from churches, baptisteries, houses and martyria [sites where martyrs were buried or honored] and that you should give them over for the burial of the poor, and as [concerning the depictions] on walls, that they should be whitewashed. As for those that have already been represented in mosaics, realizing that their removal is difficult you know what to command in the wisdom that God has given you. If it be possible to remove them [the mosaics], well and good; but if it proves impossible, let that which has already been accomplished be sufficient, and let no one paint in this fashion from now on.”

Not only did the early Christian authorities believe it was wrong to display even a true image of Jesus, but now the artists in the time of Constantine began to show Jesus with *long hair* and a *beard* like we see Him predominantly depicted today. In the fourth century it became common for many Gentile peoples throughout the Roman Empire (who had long worshipped pagan gods and goddesses) to begin identifying their deities of old with the newly honored “Jesus,” “Mary,” and the “twelve apostles” (plus other saints of the Old and New Testaments). One particular deity that seemed to blend together the attributes of several gods into a unified portrayal of deity was the Egyptian god “Sarapis.” This god had been famous for 600 years in Egypt and now his worship was found all over the Roman Empire. He was equated with the Greek Zeus (the chief god over all other gods) along with Asclepius (the god of healing). Professor Everett Ferguson in his excellent work titled *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (page 174) shows an example that the statues of Asclepius (the pagan god of healing) were images “that imitated Zeus... and that his portraiture influenced artists in depicting both Sarapis [the Egyptian Zeus] and Christ.”

Remarkably, the pagan god Sarapis of the fourth century appeared very much like what Christians (from the time of Constantine onwards) began to depict as their “Jesus.” At that time the people began to abandon all of the early depictions of Jesus made in the previous hundred years or so (which showed “Jesus”



With the time of Constantine a new type of JESUS began to be portrayed among the Christian population of the Roman Empire. They took the style of grooming which was typical of the pagan gods and adopted it as their "JESUS." The above drawing is from a bust in the British Museum of Sarapis, the Egyptian version of Zeus (the chief of the Gentile gods). See reference Harper's "Dictionary of Classical Literature and Antiquities," article "Coma."



Though Eusebius said that making any depiction of Christ was contrary to the Second Commandment, in the pre-Constantine period we find people in some quarters making Jesus to appear as the Good Shepherd, youthful, beardless and with short hair. From Didron's "Christian Iconography," vol.I, p.339.

normally as young, beardless and with hair like ordinary men — not with long flowing feminine type of hair). But now, with Constantine, the people began to want “Jesus” to appear like the pagan gods, so they selected the model of Zeus after the Egyptian rendition of Sarapis (the Egyptian Zeus) to be their new “Jesus.” What they actually did was to change the name of “Zeus” (Sarapis) into “Jesus.” The people kept on worshipping Zeus (Sarapis) but they now called him “Jesus.” This is the kind of “another Jesus” that the apostle Paul talked about (II Corinthians 11:4).

The *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, has a relevant comment about the proliferation of the practice of idolatry among Christians since the fourth century.

“No religion can rival Christianity in the multiplicity of its images. In some large churches, such as the French cathedrals of Paris, Chartres, Reims, and Amiens, there are as many as two, three, or four thousand statues; and in the cathedrals of Chartres, Bourges, and Le Mans, three, four, or five thousand figures on stained-glass. Although quite a number of these are figures of unimportant personages, nevertheless we have here what has been called a whole bible for use of the unlettered. Next to Christianity comes Buddhism, which has covered India, Ceylon, and the Malay Archipelago with its bas-reliefs, and flooded Tibet, China, and Japan with its painted images; in this it has been imitated by the other religions of the Far East, including Hinduism. It is superfluous to mention here the service rendered to art by the mythological compositions of Graeco-Roman sculpture. Of less importance from an aesthetic point of view, but nonetheless interesting, are the bas-reliefs and paintings of Egypt, and the sculptures of Mesopotamia and Asia Minor. It may be said that the region where religious images are found forms a belt on the surface of the globe which includes the northern hemisphere from Japan to Mexico, while in the southern hemisphere there are only some rudiments of art” (vol. VII. p.111).

Is it not interesting that Christianity out performs all of Buddhism and Hinduism in the use of religious images in their worship services today? Not only that, modern Christianity also far

out performs ancient Egypt in heeding images, and even more revealing is the fact that Christendom even out produces ancient Mesopotamia in idolatry (which was the very heartland of idolatry and image usage that the biblical prophets condemned the most). And yes, our indulgence in the western world to the use of images in religious services or for reminders in our homes of deity and saints is even greater than that of early Greece and Rome.

This is one of the main reasons that people of Judaism and those in Islam have shunned the “Jesus” of Christian tradition. The Jewish people see modern Christianity as indulging in the principles of rank idolatry. And this opinion equally applies to people today who practice Islam. These people are very well aware of what constitutes idolatry in the classical sense, and it is easy to see that Christendom today is firmly engaged in its practice.

It is no use saying to those in Judaism and Islam that Christians really are not idolaters because Christians do not worship statues and images but they are only utilizing them to remind them of God and the saints. That theory will go over like a lead balloon among Jews, Muslims and any scholar of history. It is evident from the historical records that, in the main, that theory is precisely what the ancient idolaters of Babylon, Greece and Rome would have said to any inquisitive person some two thousand years ago. The truth is, by any standard of judgment that is historically legitimate, the world’s main idolaters today are those of mainline Christendom with their pictures of a long haired Zeus (whom they call “Jesus”) and their statues and images of dead people they call “saints.”

It is no wonder that the Jewish people today do not want to call the modern “Jesus” as their Messiah. The world since the time of Constantine have adopted the appearance of the pagan gods (not the real Jesus of the New Testament) as their Jesus they wish to worship.