

Eusebius Pamphili of Caesarea
Demonstratio evangelica

BOOK III

CHAPTER 6 Against Those who think that the Christ of God was a Sorcerer.



Link to concordances: **Standard** Highlight

Link to concordances are always highlighted on mouse hover

[- 144 -]

CHAPTER 6

Against Those who think that the Christ of God was a Sorcerer.

OF course, such opponents must first of all be asked how they would reply to what has been already said. The question is about the possibility of a teacher of a noble and virtuous way of life, and of sane and reasonable doctrines, such as I have described, being a mere sorcerer in character. And supposing He was a magician and (c) enchanter, a charlatan and a sorcerer, how could He have become the source to all the nations of such teaching, as we ourselves see with our eyes, and hear even now with our ears? What sort of a person was He Who undertook to unite things which have never before been united? For a sorcerer being truly unholy and vile in his nature, dealing with things forbidden and unholy, always acts for the sake of base and sordid gain. Our Lord and Saviour Jesus, the Christ of God, was surely not open to such a charge. In (d) what sense could such a thing be said of One Who said to His disciples, according to their written record: " Provide neither gold nor silver in your girdles, nor a staff for the Matt.x.10. road, nor shoes"? How could they have heeded His sayings, and thought fit to hand them down recorded in

- 145 -

writing, if they had seen their Master bent on making money, and Himself doing the opposite of what He taught others? They would soon have ridiculed Him and His words and left their discipleship in natural disgust, if they had seen Him laying down such noble laws for them, and Himself the Lawgiver in no way following His own words. Once more, sorcerers and real charlatans devote themselves (126) to the forbidden and the unholy in order to pursue vile and unlawful pleasures, with the object of ruining women by magic, and seducing them to their own desires. But our Lord and Saviour is devoted to purity beyond the power of words to say, for His disciples record that He forbade them to look on a woman with unbridled lust, saying:

" It was said to them of old time, Thou shall not commit adultery: but I say unto you, that every one that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." [[Matt. v.27]]

And on one occasion when they saw Him conversing with (b) a woman of Samaria when it was the only possible way to aid and save many, they wondered that He spoke with the woman, thinking they saw something marvellous, such as they had never before seen. And surely our Saviour's words commend a serious and severe tone of behaviour: while of His purity the great evidence is that teaching of His, in which He taught men to attain purity by cutting away from the depth of the heart the lustful desires:

"There are some eunuchs who so were born, and there are eunuchs who we're made eunuchs of men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake." [[Matt, xii.19.]]

The sorcerer again and the true charlatan courts notoriety (c) and ostentation in all his enterprises and actions, and always makes a boast of knowing more and having more than other people. But that our Lord and Saviour was not thirsty for notoriety, or a braggart or ostentatious, is shewn by His bidding those He cured to tell no one, and not to reveal Him to the crowd, so that He might escape notice, and also from His seeking periods of retirement in

- 146 -

(d) the mountains, and shunning the vicious society of the crowd in cities. If then He neither devoted Himself to teaching for glory, nor money, nor pleasure, what ground of suspicion remains for considering Him a charlatan and a sorcerer? But once more think of this point. A sorcerer, when he shares the fruits of his wickedness with others, makes men resemble himself: how can he help making sorcerers and charlatans and enchanters in all ways like himself? But who has ever so far found the whole body of Christians from His teaching given to sorcery or enchantment? (127) No one would suggest that, but rather that it has been concerned with philosophic words, as we have shewn. What, then, could you rightly call One Who was the source to others of a noble and pure life and of the highest holiness, but the prince of philosophers and the teacher of holy men? And I suppose so far as every master is better than his pupils, our Lord and Saviour must be considered, so far from being a charlatan and a sorcerer, but philosophic and truly holy (b) If, then, He was such, He could only have attempted His miracles by divine and unspeakable power and by the highest piety towards the Supreme God, Whom He is proved to have honoured and worshipped as His Father in the highest degree, from the accounts of Him. And the disciples, who were with Him from the beginning, with those who inherited their mode of life afterwards, are to such an incalculable extent removed from base and evil suspicion (of sorcery), that they will not allow their sick (c) even to do what is exceedingly common with non-Christians, to make use of charms written on leaves or amulets, or to pay attention to those promising to soothe them with songs of enchantment, or to procure ease for their pains by burning incense made of roots and herbs, or anything else of the kind.

- 147 -

All these things at any rate are forbidden by Christian teaching, neither is it ever possible to see a Christian using an amulet, or incantations, or charms written on curious leaves, or other things which the crowd consider quite permissible. What argument, then, can rank the disciples of such a Master with the disciples of a sorcerer and charlatan?

And yet the one great proof of the worth of any one who (d) promises to effect anything is found in the circle of his pupils. In the arts and sciences it is so, men always claim him who was the source of their skill to be greater than themselves; so medical students would witness to the excellence of their instructor in their own subject, geometers will not regard any other as their master but a geometer, and arithmeticians any but one skilled in arithmetic. In the same way, also, the best witnesses to a sorcerer are his pupils, who it may be presumed will themselves share in the character of their master. And yet through all these (128) years no disciple of Jesus has been proved a sorcerer, although rulers and kings from time to time have attempted by means of torture to extract the exactest information about our religion. No, in spite of all, none has admitted himself to be a sorcerer, though had he done so he might have gone free, and without any danger, only being compelled by them to offer sacrifice. And if not one of our own people has ever been convicted of sorcery, nor any of those ancient disciples of Jesus, it follows that their Master could not have been a sorcerer.

But that my argument may not be based solely on the (b) unwritten, hear the proofs also that I draw from the written record. The first disciples of Jesus in the Book of their own Acts, describe without doubt how the Gentiles thronging to their teaching (were so impressed), that many of those

- 148 -

with a bad reputation for sorcery, changed their ways to such an extent that they had the courage to bring the forbidden books into the midst, and commit them to the fire in the sight of all. Hear how the Scripture describes it:

"And many of those who used curious arts, brought their books, and burned them before all, and they reckoned the price of the books, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver." [[Acts xix 19]]

It shews what our Saviour's disciples were, it shews the extraordinary influence of their words when they addressed their audience, that they so touched the depths of their souls, caught hold of and pierced the individual conscience, that men no longer hid anything away in concealment, but brought their forbidden things to light, and (d) themselves completed the indictment of themselves and their own former wickedness. It shews what their pupils were like, how pure and honourable in disposition, determined that nothing evil in them should lurk below the surface, and how boldly they prided themselves on their change from the worse to the better. Yes, they who gave their magic books to the flames, and voted for their complete destruction, left no one in any doubt that they would never again have anything to do with sorcery, and from that day forth were pure from the slightest suspicion of it.

If, then, our Saviour's disciples are seen to have been like this, must not their Master have been so long before them?

(129) And if in the widest sense you wish to deduce from the character of His followers the character of their Head, you have to-day a myriad disciples of the teaching of Jesus, great numbers of whom have declared war against the natural pleasures of the body, and guard their minds from the stroke of every base passion, and when they grow old in temperance provide bright evidence of the nurture of His words. And not men only live the life of wisdom in this wise for His sake, but innumerable myriads of women, too, throughout the world, like priestesses of the Supreme God, embracing the highest wisdom, enraptured with the love of (b) heavenly wisdom, have lost all joy of bodily progeny, and spending all their care on the soul, have devoted themselves entirely body and soul alike to the King of kings, the Supreme God, practising complete purity and virginity.

- 149 -

Of one shepherd, we know, who left his own country for the sake of philosophy the sons of Greece are ever carrying the story hither and thither. This was their Democritus. And Krates is the second man who is a miracle among (b) them, because, forsooth! he resigned his property to the citizens, and boasted that "Krates himself had freed himself." But the zealots of the teaching of Jesus are myriads in number, not one or two, who have sold their goods and given them to the poor and needy, a fact to which I can witness, as I am specially concerned in such matters, and can see the results of the discipleship of Jesus not only in their words, but in their works as well.

But why need I tell how many myriads of actual barbarians, and not Greeks only, learning from the teaching of Jesus to despise every form of polytheistic error, have borne witness to their knowledge of the one God as Saviour and Creator of the Universe? Whom long ago, Plato was the only philosopher who knew, but confessed that he dare not carry His Name to all, saying in so many words: "To discover the Father and Creator of the Universe is a hard matter, and when He is found it is impossible to tell of Him to all." [[Timaeus p. 28]] Yes, to him the discovery seemed a

- 150 -

hard matter, for it is indeed the greatest thing of all, and it seemed to him impossible to speak of Him to all, because he did not possess so great a power of holiness as the (130) disciples of Jesus, to whom it has become easy by the cooperation of their Master to discover and to know the Father and Creator of all, and having discovered Him to bear forth that knowledge, to unveil it, to supply it, and to preach it to all men among all races of the world, with the result that even now at the present time owing to the instruction given by these men there are among all the nations of the earth many multitudes not only of men, but of women and children, slaves and country-folk, who are so far away from fulfilling Plato's dictum, that they know (b) the One God to be the Maker and Creator of the Universe, worship Him only, and base their whole theology on Christ. This, then, is the success of the new modern sorcerer; such are the sorcerers who spring from Him Who is reckoned a charlatan; and such are the disciples of Jesus, from whose character we may deduce that of their Master.

But once more, let us follow the argument in this direction: You say, my friend, that He was a sorcerer, and dub Him a clever enchanter and deceiver. Would you say, then, that He was the first and only discoverer of the (c) business, or that we must not, as would be done in similar cases, look for the original source of His work directly in His own teaching? For if nobody taught Him, and He was Himself the first and only discoverer of the enterprise, if He had no benefit at all from the teaching of others, if he did not share in the feast of the ancients, we ought surely to ascribe divinity to Him, as One Who (d) without books, or education, or teachers, self-taught, self-educated, is assumed to have discovered such a new world. We know that it is impossible to acquire the knowledge of a lower-class trade, or of the art of reasoning, or indeed of the elements of knowledge without the help of a guide or teacher, unless the learner transcends the powers of ordinary people. I am sure we have not yet had a teacher of literature who was self-taught, nor an orator who had not been to school, nor a physician "born and not made," nor a carpenter, nor any other kind of craftsman; and these

- 151 -

things are relatively insignificant and human; what does it mean, then, to suggest that the Teacher of true religion to men, Who worked such miracles in the period of His earthly life, and did the extraordinary prodigies which I have lately described, was born actually endowed with (131) such power, and had not to share the feast of the ancients, nor to take advantage of the instruction of modern teachers, who had done like things before Him? What is it but to witness and confess that He was indeed divine, and that He altogether transcended humanity?

And supposing you say that He had foregathered with masters of deceit, and was acquainted with the wisdom of the Egyptians, and the secret knowledge of their ancient teachers, and that collecting His equipment from them, He appeared in the character that His story exhibits. (b) How is it, then, I reply, that no others have appeared greater than He, and no teachers antecedent to Him in time, either in Egypt, or anywhere else? Why has not their fame among all men preceded this accusation of Him, and why is not their glory even now celebrated in strains like ours? And what enchanter from the remotest age, either Greek or Barbarian, has ever been the Master of so many pupils, the prime mover of such laws and (c) teaching, as the power of our Saviour has shewn forth, or is recorded to have worked such cures, and bestowed such marvellous blessings, as our Saviour is reported to have done? Who has had friends and eye-witnesses of his deeds, ready to guarantee by the proof of fire and sword the truth of their witness, like the disciples of our Saviour, who have borne all insults, submitted to all forms of torture, and at last have sealed their witness about Him with their very blood?

Then, moreover, let him who supports the contention opposed to mine, inform me if any enchanter that ever existed has ever even taken it into his head to institute a new nation called after his own name? To go beyond the (d) mere conception, and to succeed in effecting it, is surely beyond the power of humanity.

What sorcerer has ever thought of establishing laws against idolatry in direct opposition to the decrees of kings,

- 152 -

ancient legislators, poets, philosophers, and theologians, and of giving them power, and of promulgating them so that they should last on unconquered and invincible for long ages? But our Lord and Saviour did not conceive and not dare to attempt, neither did he attempt and not succeed.

(132) With one word and voice He said to His disciples: "Go, and make disciples of all the nations in My Name, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you," [[Matt. xxviii. 19.]] and He joined the effect to His Word; and in a little while every race of the Greeks and Barbarians was being brought into discipleship, and laws were spread among all nations opposed to the superstition of the ancients, laws inimical to daemons, and to all the deceits of polytheism, laws that have made Scythians, Persians, and the other barbarians temperate, and revolutionized every lawless and uncivilized custom, laws that have overturned the immemorial habits of the Greeks themselves, (b) and heralded a new and real religion. What similar daring has been shewn by the ancient sorcerers before the time of Jesus, or even after Him, which would make it plausible that He was assisted in His sorcery by others? And if the only answer to this is that no one has ever been like Him, for no one was the source of His virtue, surely it is time to confess that a strange and divine Being has sojourned in our humanity, by Whom alone, and for the first time in (c) man's history, things unrecorded before in human annals have been effected.

In such wise I will conclude this part of the subject. But I must again attack my opposer, and inquire if he has ever seen or heard of sorcerers and enchanters doing their sorcery without libations, incense, and the invocation and presence of daemons. But no one surely could venture to cast this aspersion on our Saviour, or on His teaching, or on those even now imitating His life. It must be clear even to the blind that we who follow Jesus are totally opposed to such agencies, and would sooner dare to sacrifice our (d) soul to death than an offering to the dremons, yea, would

- 153 -

sooner depart from life than remain alive under the tyranny of evil daemons. Who does not know how we love by the mere Name of Jesus and the purest prayers to drive away all the work of the daemons? The mere word of Jesus and His teaching has made us all far stronger than this invisible Power, and has trained us to be enemies and foes of daemons, not their friends or associates, and certainly not their slaves and tributaries. And how could He Who (133) has led us on to this, Himself be the slave of the daemons? How could He sacrifice to evil spirits? Or how could He have invoked the daemons to aid Him in His Miracles, when even to-day every daemon and unclean spirit shudders at the Name of Jesus as at something that is likely to punish and torment its own nature, and so departs and yields to the power of His Name alone? So was it of old in the days when He sojourned in this life: they could not bear His Presence, but cried, one from, one side and one from another: "Come, what have we to do with thee, Jesus, (b) Son of God? Art thou come to torment us before the time?" [[Matt. viii.29.]]

And a man whose mind was wholly devoted to sorcery, and in every way involved in the quest of the forbidden, would surely be (would he not?) unholy in his ways; scandalous, base, atheistic, unjust, irreligious. And if He were such, from what source, or by what means, could He teach others about religion, or temperance, or the knowledge of God, or about the tribunal and judgment of Almighty God? Would He not rather commend the (c) opposites of these, and act according to His own wickedness, deny God and God's Providence, and God's Judgment, and revile teaching about virtue and the immortality of the soul? And if one could see such a character in our Lord and Saviour, there would be no more to say. But (d) if instead we see Him calling on God the Father, the Creator of all things, in every act and word, and training His pupils to resemble Him, if He being pure Himself teaches purity, if He is a maker and herald of justice, truth, philanthropy, and every virtue, and the introducer of the worship of God the King of kings, surely it follows from this that He cannot be suspected of working His

- 154 -

miracles by sorcery, and that we must admit that they were the result of unspeakable and truly inspired power. (134)
But if you are so far gone in folly as not to pay any heed to temperate argument and logical consistency of thought, and are not impressed by probable proofs, because you suspect me perhaps to be a special pleader—at least you will hear your own daemons, the gods I mean who give the oracles, hear them bearing witness to our Saviour, not like you of His sorcery, but of His holiness, His wisdom, and His Ascension into Heaven. What could be a more persuasive testimony than that written by our enemy⁸⁰ in the third chapter of his book, *Concerning Philosophy from Oracles*, where he thus speaks in so many words.

p. 154

⁸⁰, ² Porphyry: see notes, pp. 120 and 155. "The Neoplatonists praised Christ while they disparaged Christianity" (Aug., *De Consensu Evang.* i. 15), *D.C.B.* iv. 442. ... Augustine (*De Civ. Dei*, XIX. c. 23, 2).

