

of this the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath". To this Jesus responds, "My Father is working until now and I am working" (5:17). The narrator then informs us that the Jews sought *all the more* to kill Jesus because he not only broke the Sabbath [commandment], he also called God his own father, making himself equal with God (5:18). This controversy reemerges in 10:31-39 where the Jews seek to stone Jesus for blasphemy "because you being a man make yourself God" (10:33). Conflict is concentrated in John 5-10. It continues in John 11 but the seriousness of the charge is reduced and Lazarus, who has been raised from the dead by Jesus, is as much the target of violence as Jesus because the problem now in view is the following produced through the sign of the raising of Lazarus (11:45-53; 12:9-11). This moves back from the seriousness of the charge brought against Jesus in John 5 and 10. It is now an expediency in response to the threat posed by Roman intervention to a popular messianic movement.

In John, Christology confronts the Law because it is the primary Jewish symbol for understanding God. The choice of Wisdom/Torah motifs for the portrayal of Jesus focuses attention on the way Christology encounters the primary Jewish symbol to modify the meaning it conveys. In particular the Jesus of John confronts the law on the matter of Sabbath observance. Two of the great conflict chapters deal with Sabbath controversies (John 5 and 9). In Genesis, the institution of the Sabbath symbolises the completion of the creation. God rested from his works. John 5 not only asserts God's continuing work but the work of Jesus also continues on the Sabbath in order to make the man whole. Thus the first conflict concerns the world which John asserts is in the process of being created and it is not yet whole. Then there is a different view of God. From the perspective of the Law, the dominant characteristic of God is justice but in the light of the Johannine Jesus the dominant characteristic of the Father is love. As a consequence, the appropriate response to God is also transformed. Keeping the law is not enough unless the law is seen to be encompassed in the love command.

*Synology, Controversy and Community
Footnote for David R. Catchpole*

SATAN, DEMONS AND THE ABSENCE OF EXORCISMS IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL

Ronald A. Piper

There are few places in New Testament scholarship where the interaction of Christology, controversy and community is more apparent than in the fourth gospel.¹ It is hardly an exaggeration to claim that everything in the fourth gospel revolves around Christology. The nature of "the Johannine community" and its controversy with the synagogue have also become (despite some recent doubts)² regular features of Johannine study. But there are still some very puzzling aspects of the world depicted by the fourth evangelist and the conflicts he depicts. One of these is Jesus' conflict with Satan. Why, in particular, are there no exorcisms in John's gospel? This essay will try to provide an answer; it will then attempt to follow up some of the implications of that answer.

The Absence of Exorcisms

It is well-known that there are many differences between John and the synoptic gospels, but often the lack of exorcisms in the fourth gospel has been considered a peculiarity which has drawn only cursory comment. Recently, however, discussion of this topic has begun to increase, not least through the studies of G.H. Twelftree³ and E. Plummer.⁴

¹ A version of this paper was presented to the British New Testament Society in Aberdeen, September 1996.

² R.J. Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998), esp. 9-48, 147-71; M. Hengel, *The Johannine Question* (London: SCM/Philadelphia: TPI, 1988) 114-24.

³ *Jesus the Exorcist, A Contribution to the Study of the Historical Jesus* (WUNT 2.54; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr/Paul Siebeck, 1993); idem, *Jesus the Miraculous Worker* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity, 1999); idem, "Demon, Devil, Satan" in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (ed. J.B. Green, S. McKnight; Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity, 1992) 163-72.

⁴ "The Absence of Exorcisms in the Fourth Gospel", *Bib* 78 (1997) 350-68.

Mark's gospel of course shows Jesus performing exorcisms from the very start of his ministry, and in this Mark is followed by the other synoptic writers. Even Q—which has hardly any thaumaturgical narrative—contains an exorcism (Q 11:14). J.P. Meier's study of the historical Jesus devotes over 500 pages to the miracles of Jesus and divides them into four categories: exorcisms, healings, raisings from the dead, and the so-called nature miracles.³ The exorcisms and the healings are the two categories where he seems most confident of genuine activity by the historical Jesus.⁴ While these are modern and perhaps artificial classifications,⁵ it is nonetheless intriguing that John's gospel has examples of all the categories *except* the exorcisms. Why?

It is not initially clear whether this question can lead to anything beyond speculation. So at the start we should probably ask: how likely is it that John's silence about exorcisms is significant in terms of his purposes, situation or world view? To answer this, perhaps we need to consider the alternative. How might it *not* be significant in these terms?

One possibility is that it is simply an "accident" that John lacks an exorcism, not due to any theological motive or source deficiency. The fourth gospel cannot include everything. Nothing further of significance can be said.⁶ This becomes less probable, however, if interest in the actions of Satan and the vocabulary of the demonic are not entirely absent in John and if the fame of Jesus as an exorcist was quite widespread in early Christian tradition.

Moreover, while many scholars continue to support the independence of the fourth gospel from the synoptic gospels, it is often accepted that John's gospel (at some stage) shows knowledge of synoptic traditions. Indeed, the pendulum now seems to be swinging increasingly in favour of Johannine knowledge of at least some of the other gospels.⁷ It is difficult to believe that the evangelist would

³ J.P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, Vol. 2: *Mentor, Message, and Miracles* (Anchor Bible Reference Library; New York, etc.: Doubleday, 1994) 509–1038.

⁴ Meier, *Marginal Jew* 2.61, 727, 969–70.

⁵ See, for example, D.E. Aune, "Vlage in Early Christianity," in *ANRW* II.23.2 (ed. W. Haase; Berlin/New York: W. de Gruyter, 1980) 1329; "A closer analysis of the healing narratives, however, reveals that they stand in a more fluid relationship to exorcism stories than first appears."

⁶ See the discussion and rejection of this view by M. Labahn, *Jesus als Lebensspender. Untersuchungen zu einer Geschichte der johanneischen Tradition anhand ihrer Wundheilwörter* (BZNW 98; Berlin/New York: W. de Gruyter, 1999) 483.

⁷ See discussion in D.M. Smith, *John Among the Gospels: The Relationship in Textual-*

have been totally unaware of traditions of Jesus' exorcisms while at the same time being familiar with all the other aspects of Jesus' wonderworking.⁸ If he relied exclusively upon a Signs Source,⁹ then the question might effectively be pushed back a stage—why did the *synkrisis* source omit this category of wonders? There is no reason, however, to think that the author's knowledge of the tradition of Jesus' wonderworking was so restricted.¹²

Doubts about an absence of knowledge of exorcisms in the Johannine tradition are increased by other factors:

1. John certainly knew and used the vocabulary pertaining to demons and possession (John 7:20, 8:48, 52; 10:20). Judas is labelled as a *diabolos* in 6:70. There are also references to Satan (John 13:27), the Devil (John 8:44; 13:2; cf. 1 John 3:8–10), the Evil One (John 17:15; cf. 1 John 2:13–14; 3:12; 5:18–19) and the Ruler of this World (cf. John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11, cf. 16:33).¹³ Therefore even though John's accounts of signs are restricted in number, it is unlikely that one can claim that he recorded no exorcism simply because he

Century Research (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992); and E. Neyrey, "John and the Synoptics: 1973–1990," in *John and the Synoptics* (ed. A. Demaree; BETL 101; Leuven: Leuven University, 1992) 3–62.

¹⁰ See Plummer, "Absence," 350–4. Plummer concludes: "the possibility that St. John knew nothing of Jesus' exorcisms (or that he knew them but regarded them as unimportant) seems so remote as to be negligible" (p. 354). So also E.P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Allen Lane Penguin, 1993) 134: "I think that we may be fairly certain that initially Jesus' *Jesus* came as a result of healing, especially, exorcism."

¹¹ See G. van Belle, *The Signs Source in the Fourth Gospel: Historical Survey and Critical Evaluation of the Semitic Hypothesis* (BETL 116; Leuven: Leuven University, 1994). R.T. Fortna (*The Gospel of Signs: A Reconstruction of the Narrative Source Underlying the Fourth Gospel* [SNTSMS 11; Cambridge: CUP, 1970] 100) considers the lack of an exorcism to be hardly accidental, "but whether it is due to conscious intent on the part of John cannot be known; it may be merely that the author of the source, or the tradition he relied on, took no interest in demons or their overthrow." Later Fortna (pp. 228–31) relates the absence of exorcism in the signs source to the absence of interest in eschatology and thus of "the victory over demons represented by Jesus' exorcism" (p. 229). See similarly J. Becker, "Wunder und Christologie. Zum literarisch-kritischen und christologischen Problem der Wunder im Johannevangelium," *NTS* 16 (1969–70) 443. Nevertheless, the evangelist is credited by Becker with polemically arguing against the Christology of the Signs Source (p. 459), so that one still is left asking why—even in summary statements—the *evangelist* maintains a silence about exorcisms.

¹² In addition to John 20:30, Plummer ("Absence", 352) rightly notes John 7:31: 10:32; 11:47; 12:37. In these cases the evangelist stresses the abundance of Jesus' miracles.

¹³ Cf. also the interest of 1 John in antichrists (2:18), false prophets (4:1), and deceiving spirits (4:6).

gives a low priority to the sphere of Satan and the demonic. The fourth gospel on the contrary shows some significant interest in this area. This makes the omission of the exorcisms all the more striking.

2. Some scholars (such as E.K. Broadhead¹⁴) also find vestiges of exorcistic traditions in other parts of the fourth gospel.¹⁵ It is not possible to consider these in detail here, but they do suggest that the evidence cited above might be extended. Most interesting is a possible reminiscence of the synoptic Beelzebul controversy in the accusations of John 7:20, 8:48, 52 and 10:20.¹⁶

3. More speculatively perhaps, one of Barnabas Lindars' last published works on John¹⁷ argued that John actually knew an exorcism story quite similar to the cure of a demon-possessed boy in Mark 9:14-29. Lindars argued that the Mark 9 account had already been partially adapted to illustrate Christian teaching on death and resurrection and that the fourth evangelist took this further, changing it from the cure of a demon-possessed boy to the raising of a dead man, Lazarus (John 11:38-44). Moreover, Lindars declares: "It is not necessary to assume that he disapproved of attributing exorcism to Jesus, for he uses the language of demon possession without difficulty in 8:48, and Jesus' own death and resurrection win the victory over Satan (12:31)."¹⁸

4. G. Twelftree¹⁹ builds upon the argument of R. Bauckham that John was written for Christian readers at large and not solely for a single community or particular audience. If this is so, he argues, then in view of the wide popular knowledge of Jesus as an exorcist, it is unlikely that the evangelist omitted exorcisms simply because of

¹⁴ E.K. Broadhead ("Echoes of an Exorcism in the Fourth Gospel?", *ZNTW* 86 [1995] 111-19) with regard to John 6:56-71.

¹⁵ Note, however, that some terms associated with exorcism are absent in the fourth gospel, such as *ἐκτρίψω*, *φύσσω*, *ἐξουσιάζω* (see Anne, "Magic", 1330-2). For the use of *ἐκβάλλω*, see below.

¹⁶ Cf. Plumer, "Absence", 353, 359-61. Although he shows reserve about some of the evidence often cited to demonstrate John's knowledge of the synoptic controversy story, he thinks that the "underlying tradition" leads ultimately to the conclusion that "this parallelism is not fortuitous but betrays St. John's knowledge of the Beelzebul controversy", albeit "seen through a glass, darkly" (p. 360).

¹⁷ B. Lindars, "Rebuking the Spirit: A New Analysis of the Lazarus Story of John 11", *NTS* 38 (1992) 89-104.

¹⁸ Lindars, "Rebuking", 101.

¹⁹ *Miracle Worker*, 222. Twelftree (pp. 282-3) also cites evidence outside the New Testament that "Jesus was remembered as a powerful exorcist" (p. 282). See below nn. 58 and 61.

an alleged disinterest within a particular community. Similarly, it would be unlikely that a localised lack of knowledge of Jesus' exorcisms can be reasonably argued.

If therefore one is prepared to grant for at least one of the reasons given above that it is highly improbable that the Johannine evangelist simply did not know that Jesus performed exorcisms,²⁰ then how else might one explain their absence—and not only the absence of an exorcism narrative but even of a *passing reference* to Jesus performing exorcisms?²¹

Many suggestions can be offered, and a very diverse set of answers has recently begun to emerge. One possibility is to suggest that the evangelist knew the synoptic traditions but was seeking to supplement rather than reproduce those traditions.²² Yet with regard to the issue of the absence of exorcisms, such an explanation would hardly be more satisfactory than claiming that he did not know the traditions at all. Not only does the fourth gospel record healings, a raising from the dead and nature miracles, but it also records some incidents which are strikingly similar to those in the synoptic tradition—such as the feeding miracle (John 6:1-15; cf. Mark 6:32-44), the walking on the sea (John 6:16-21, cf. Mark 6:45-52; 4:35-41), the healing of the official's son (John 4:46-53; cf. Matt 8:5-13 par. Luke 7:1-10), and possibly the cure of the sick man at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-9; cf. Mark 2:1-12) and the large catch of fish (John 21:4-14; cf. Luke 5:1-11). If the fourth gospel provides versions of these stories, it is difficult to believe that the *main* reason for not including exorcisms is that they were already known from the synoptic tradition.

Is it a matter of the fourth gospel having a world view which has effectively "demythologised" such concepts as "exorcism" or "demons" of "Satan"?²³ Certainly the evangelist can re-work motifs found in

²⁰ Plumer ("Absence", 353-4) also notes the attention given in the fourth gospel to Mary Magdalene, who elsewhere in Christian tradition is known as one from whom seven demons were cast out (Luke 8:2).

²¹ The significance of the absence of reference from the signs summaries should not be underestimated. See also Labahn, *Lebensspätere*, 482-3, on John 20:30 as a rhetorical convention.

²² Bauckham (*Gospels*, esp. 170) rejects this formulation of the view in favour of arguing that the fourth gospel has a narrative integrity of its own. More precisely, it can be read by those who knew Mark's gospel as "complementing" Mark.

²³ See further below, esp. n. 81.

the synoptics. Some themes he can reinterpret without omission, such as Son of man. Others he omits, either entirely or almost entirely, such as the phrase "the kingdom of God".²⁴ Parables, narrative metaphors (often related to the challenge of the kingdom proclamation in the synoptic gospels), are effectively replaced in the fourth gospel by non-narrative metaphors which are mainly christological (Light, Way, Truth, Good Shepherd, Vine, Bread of Life). Has then the fourth gospel reinterpreted or even de-mythologised exorcisms?²⁵

E. Plummer offers one such explanation (amongst many other suggestions he makes for the absence of exorcisms) which borders upon these ideas. Probably rightly, Plummer rejects as speculative the hypotheses of R.H. Strachan, D.E.H. Whiteley and others that the evangelist was a former Sadducee who thus came to Christianity not believing in angels or spirits. He also resists the idea attributed to G.H.C. MacGregor and others that the evangelist avoids exorcism accounts in order to distance himself from gnostic speculation about spiritual intermediaries. It is difficult to reconcile a theory of an anti-intermediary bias with texts like John 1:51 and 20:12. Yet these very texts seem to pose difficulties for Plummer's own explanation. Whilst most of his article is based on the premise that the evangelist was "decisively shaped by hostilities existing between the Johannine community and the Jewish synagogue",²⁶ he nevertheless wishes to argue that the evangelist "sought to give his Gospel a timeless and universal appeal".²⁷ The evangelist was colliding with many different forms of "religious and philosophical thought" which "called for the presentation of Christianity as the fulfilment not merely of Judaism but of the whole spiritual quest of mankind".²⁸ Demonology is considered distracting, which is why the evangelist concentrates on Satan as the main representative of evil in the world.²⁹ But if angelic intermediaries still have a place in the cosmology of the fourth evangelist, why not demonic ones? Does this really detract from the dualism of the fourth gospel? And the question is all the more relevant since

the evangelist can refer to Judas as a *διάβολος* and to charges of Jesus having a "demon", as noted above. Why does such language persist if it is counter to the world view of the evangelist? These questions press for answers, not to mention more fundamental observations about the pervasiveness of such beliefs in ancient Mediterranean culture. John may well have a distinctive emphasis with respect both to "signs" and to demon possession, but it is not at all obvious that it takes the form of a de-mythologising of or even reduction of interest in intermediary spirits.³⁰

So let us probe a little further. In the synoptic exorcism stories, a victim is typically presented whose misfortune is explained as possession by malevolent spirits outside himself. Jesus is then presented as one who can control these spirits. Such control over spirits, though, leaves Jesus himself sometimes open to suspicion and accusations, as we see in Mark 3 or Q 11:15-23. In these controversies Jesus' opponents accuse him of being in the power of Beelzebul. Indeed persons who had the capacity to perform exorcisms or control spirits in other ways were quite liable to be suspected of sorcery and were feared as having the capacity to harm others by their magical techniques. One then has the paradox of "a possessed exorcist". This is known not just from the synoptic accounts cited above, but also from anthropological studies such as that of I.M. Lewis³¹ on shamanism and spirit possession and from studies of magic in early Christianity and the Graeco-Roman world such as that by D.E. Aune.³² This has now been taken up by many other scholars. Regarding the prevalence of "magic" in the gospel tradition, J.D. Crossan suggests that Jesus' work as a magician or wonderworker was a controversial phenomenon *for his friends* as well as for his enemies and thus was a cause of embarrassment. Following the work of John Hull, Crossan suggests that miracles "were, at a very early stage, being washed out of the tradition and, when retained, were being very carefully interpreted".³³ Thus, he writes, one should not be surprised that fewer

²⁴ Of course the idea is also re-worked into the more christologically-focused kingship of Jesus: John 1:49; 6:15; 12:13, 15; 18:33, 36-7, 39; 19:3, 12, 14-15, 19, 21.

²⁵ Becker ("Wunder", 436) notes how Bullmann saw *all* wonders in the fourth gospel not as events but only as revelatory images or symbols (thus "signs").

²⁶ "Absence", 367.

²⁷ "Absence", 367.

²⁸ "Absence", 367.

²⁹ "Absence", 368.

³⁰ Note, however, that the term "unclean spirit" is never used in John.

³¹ *Exotic Religions, A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession* (2nd ed., London/New York: Routledge, 1989).

³² "Magic", 1522-3, 1533, where Aune relates this to Jesus working within the framework of a socially deviant millennial movement.

³³ J.D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991) 310. He does note however that "one might almost conclude that miracles come into the tradition later rather than earlier".

miracles appear in the latest gospel, John's gospel, than appear in the earliest, Mark. Presumably even more embarrassing than healings or nature miracles would be exorcisms.³¹

Another approach to Johannine embarrassment with exorcisms can be found in the work of Dale Martin. Building on Lock and Dubos,³² Martin looks at illness in the ancient Mediterranean world and argues that there were two main explanations of the mechanism by which illness or disease³³ occurred: invasion (or pollution) from the outside, and imbalance within. In invasion, illness is caused by alien forces (such as demons) which attack the body from outside and against which one needs protection. Healing requires expulsion of the harmful agent or pollutant from the body or the binding, its influence.³⁴ In imbalance, illness results when the ecosystem of the body is out of equilibrium by some of its *natural* elements becoming too dominant or too passive. Healing comes through moderation and re-balancing, pollution from outside was not a paramount fear. Martin suggests the educated classes in the early Roman period tended to conceptualise illness along the lines of imbalance; the more *popular* understanding was of invasion. Thus when he turns to the New Testament, Martin suggests that the synoptic gospels and *most early Christians* viewed illness as the invasion of hostile, cosmic, personal agents—corresponding to the popular view in society at large. And indeed a pervasive anxiety about demons was prevalent during the early Christian era and Second Temple Period, as has been carefully documented by Todd Klutz. Klutz affirms that we should not underestimate the extent to which demons were believed to

(p. 310), because there is a relative paucity of multiple independent attestation in the primary stratum. But he considers the opposite tendency more likely.

³¹ As will be noted below, however, status enhancement may also accompany magic and sorcery.

³² D.B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1995) 143.

³³ "Illness" may be distinguished from "disease"; see J. Plicht, "Sickness and Healing in Luke-Acts", in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* (ed. J.H. Neyrey; Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1991) 191–2.

³⁴ G. Treissen (*The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983] 85–7) notes a distinction in the ways that demons are related to illness. *Demonological aetiology* of illness explain how a demon may have caused a illness without necessarily implying "possession". Healing takes the form of binding or fettering Satan or the harmful demon, but not the form of exorcism. *Possession* involves the loss of a victim's autonomy to a demon and thus requires exorcism.

cause a wide assortment of evils, ranging from moral, physiological, and social disorders to meteorological disasters. To share a universe with beings such as these, moreover, is to live, if not in perpetual fear, then at least with the dreadful realisation that the dark forces that control human life might at any moment unfold their arbitrary hatred.³⁵

Exorcisms had a part in that understanding, expressing a belief that some individuals possessed both the power and willingness to protect others from the influence of these spirits. But in contrast, the fourth gospel never attributes illness to a demon or spirit.³⁶ Martin does not explicitly say so, but is this due to a more educated, philosophical approach in the fourth gospel? This is not far removed from the argument of H. von Lips that in the fourth gospel humankind is not defined by outside powers. John did not share, it is argued, the popular anthropology found in the synoptic gospels.³⁷

Does embarrassment—of one kind or the other—then explain why the fourth gospel avoids stories of exorcism? As noted earlier, E. Plummer has recently reiterated the view that embarrassment is the *primary* (even if not exclusive) cause of the evangelist's decision to avoid stories about exorcisms. He reinforces his view by suggesting that it forms part of the fourth gospel's controversy with "official Judaism". Not only do exorcisms fail to show the uniqueness of Jesus (in view of the evidence of Josephus to Jewish expertise in exorcisms),³⁸ but also the evangelist wanted "to obviate any possible misinterpretation of Jesus as a magician or wonderworker".³⁹ In so far as Ephesus was a centre of magic in the Hellenistic world, and magic was regarded with suspicion, it was clear that the Jewish opponents might try to implicate Jesus in evil. Thus exorcism stories would have had

³⁵ T.E. Klutz, "With Authority and Power: A Socioscientific Investigation of Exorcism in Luke-Acts" (PhD diss. Univ. of Sheffield, 1995) 337. See also B.J. Malina & R.L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 79–80, who note that because causality was seen primarily as personal things beyond human control were believed to be controlled by "non-human persons who operated in a cosmic social hierarchy".

³⁶ See, however, John 5:14 and 9:2–3 with regard to sin and illness.

³⁷ H. von Lips, "Anthropologie und Wunder im Johannesevangelium. Die Wunder Jesu im Johannesevangelium im Unterschied zu den synoptischen Evangelien auf dem Hintergrund johanneischen Menschenverständnisses", *EvT* 50 (1990) 300–1. Von Lips does, however, allow that Jesus is in conflict with Satan, even if not with demons. This purported "monism" with regard to the presentation of evil is not, however, actually maintained in John, as has been noted above.

³⁸ "Absence", 336, citing Josephus, *Jdt.* 8.2.5 §46.

³⁹ "Absence", 358.

the potential of embroiling Christians in an acutely embarrassing debate. The evangelist skillfully side-steps this.⁴¹

Even though Plummer correctly identifies many of the ancient anxieties about magic, a number of questions must be put to the thesis that the very possibility of the charge of Jesus as a magician accounts for the evangelist's avoidance of exorcisms. Why then does John record explicit accusations of sorcery against Jesus (John 7:20; 8:48-52; 10:20)?⁴² If the evangelist really was too skilled to become entangled in such a damaging debate, then why do these appear at all? There are no exorcisms to give rise to them, as in the Beelzebul controversy. Moreover, Plummer suggests that not only exorcisms but even "a misinterpretation of Jesus as a magician or wonderworker" is what the evangelist seeks to avoid.⁴³ Is this really consistent with the attention given to Jesus' signs, including healings, found in the fourth gospel?

On the contrary, the evangelist seems to go out of way on *three* occasions to show that Jesus is accused of "having a demon". Jesus comes near to accusing "the Jews" of the same (8:44). And when, at the last supper, Judas is at the point of departing to betray Jesus, John specifically relates "Satan entered into him" (13:27). The fourth gospel may not refer explicitly to *illness* in invasionist terms, but it clearly has not abandoned an invasionist approach to evil forces. There is no intellectual isolation from the popular fears of the day! Far from attempting to *avoid* any embarrassing accusations of sorcery, John effectively *highlights* these more than in the synoptics, because it puts *all* the stress on these!⁴⁴ While the synoptics refer both to victims of demon possession and to a sorcery accusation against Jesus, John puts all the emphasis on the embarrassing accusations,⁴⁵ setting these forth more boldly and frequently than the

other gospels. If the evangelist were specifically embarrassed about the charge of sorcery, he would surely have chosen other means of highlighting the Jewish misunderstanding of Jesus. Moreover, John does not play down the magical elements in Jesus' healings, with healings at a distance (4:46-54) and the use of spittle (9:1-7). There is no sign of embarrassment here either.

This does, however, take one step forward. It suggests that for the fourth gospel one needs to look at the theme of demons more with respect to the accusations. It is not just what is *not* present in the fourth gospel (exorcisms); it is what *is* present (demonising accusations).

The Presence of Demonising Charges

Recent study of gospel exorcisms by G. H. Twelftree has tried to take seriously the absence of exorcisms in John while also giving some attention to the charges, especially in John 7:20 and 8:48-52, where Jesus is accused by "the people" (7:20) or "the Jews"⁴⁶ (8:48, 52) of having a demon, or of being a Samaritan and having a demon (8:48).⁴⁷ Twelftree considers the charge that Jesus was a Samaritan most likely to be a way of referring to Jesus having outrageous views or teaching.⁴⁸ This may also underlie in part the charge of having

⁴¹ "Absence", 358-61.

⁴² J. H. Elliott ("Sorcery and Magic in the Revelation of John", *Listening* 28 [1993] 264) and P. F. Esler (*The Jews/Christians in Their Social Worlds* [London/New York: Routledge, 1994] 138) note the distinction made between sorcery and witchcraft, following Evans-Pritchard.

⁴³ "Absence", 358.

⁴⁴ Richly noted by Twelftree, *Exorcist*, 199-200.

⁴⁵ Jesus is also called a "sinner" by the Jews/Pharisees in John 9:24, and he is accused of deceiving the crowds (John 7:12, 47). Such labelling is consistent with witchcraft and sorcery accusations noted by B. J. Malina and J. H. Neyrey, *Calling Jesus Names: The Social Value of Labels in Matthew* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge, 1988), 26-7.

⁴⁶ Are these Jewish Christians (cf. 8:31)? See M. W. G. Stibbe, *John's Gospel* (New Testament Readings; London/New York: Routledge, 1994) 123-8; M. D. Goulder, *A Tale of Two Missions* (London: SCM, 1994) 124-5. Against this view, the following points can be made: (i) Elsewhere in the context, the opponents are simply called "the Jews" (8:48, 52), and this is also consistent with the other accusations levelled in John 7:20 ("the people") and in John 10: 10-19-20, John refers to a division among the Jews. "Many of them" accuse him of having a demon, while the "others" doubt it. Clearly the "believing" Jews in this case are those who *doubt that he has a demon*. (ii) The accusation that the Jews in John 8:34-59 are seeking to kill Jesus seems an extreme charge (even in satirical speech) to level against Jewish Christians. (iii) The evidence for an attack on "Jewish Christians" elsewhere in the fourth gospel is far from clear. There is no specific mention of James. For his part, Peter comes out no worse in the fourth gospel than in other gospels. All the closest disciples (apart from Judas) are kept safe by Jesus (17:12) and receive the Spirit (John 20:22; Paraclete without differentiation). (iv) The fourth gospel shows a considerable awareness of the changing lines of division which Jesus was causing among "Jews" (7:12-13, 7:40-4, and even 7:50-2 after 7:48; also 11:43-6). Many of these divisions simply appear to be in flux throughout his ministry.

⁴⁷ In the following verses in John 8:49-52, focus is only on the charge of having a demon.

⁴⁸ K. Haacker ("Samaritan, Samaritan: Zigeipring", *WUNT* 73 [1978] 463) notes two main interpretations of the combined charges in John 8:48. (i) The view of most exegets that the two halves of the accusation are related or mean the same