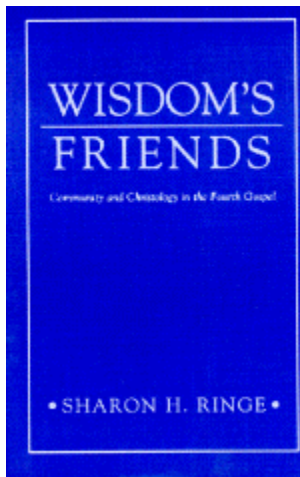


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**Ringe, Sharon H.**

***Wisdom's Friends: Community and Christology in the Fourth Gospel***

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Sharon Ringe has written a wonderfully refreshing, carefully argued, and nicely nuanced investigation of Johannine Ecclesiology and Christology, as seen through the themes of wisdom and friendship. Her introductions and conclusions in each chapter are remarkably well written and provide excellent transitions to the subsequent material. At first glance, the title of this book might seem inappropriate since, as Ringe admits, the word “wisdom” is never used in John. However, her detailed exposition of the pervasive influence of wisdom traditions throughout the Fourth Gospel (FG) proves how appropriate the title actually is.

In the introductory chapter, “Wisdom and Friendship: Images of Christ and Church,” Ringe clearly explains her rationale for studying these two biblical themes and discusses her four presuppositions about Christology and Ecclesiology, namely that these are interdependent, metaphorical, plural, and contextual. She expresses her main point succinctly: “at the heart of the picture of the church in the Fourth Gospel is a model of accompaniment that is seen paradigmatically in Jesus’ life as it embodies dimensions of Wisdom and friendship. The same model is carried on in the church through the ‘other Paraclete,’ the Spirit of truth (14:16), who ‘becomes flesh’ in the community of believers. Friendship and Wisdom are thus related as much to ecclesiology as to Christology—or perhaps for the author of the Fourth Gospel they are ecclesiological precisely because they are christological” (p. 5).

Ringe discusses the contextual background of the FG in her second chapter, “Getting to Know the Johannine Community.” She suggests that this Gospel’s language should not be seen as poor quality “schoolhouse Greek,” but rather as “immigrant Greek,” with its simpler vocabulary and mixed style indicating a second-generation “community in transition” (p. 13). She proposes that the Johannine community is located “somewhere in the Jewish Dispersion,” and considers Alexandria the most convincing option (p. 14). Socially, the community contains a mixture of ethnic groups (mostly Jews, some Samaritans and Greeks), with women playing prominent roles. Although the identity of the “disciple whom Jesus loved” cannot be determined with certainty, Ringe argues that “son” in 19:26 might be a generic reference, and thus cautiously concludes, “at least the possibility exists that this disciple might have been a woman” (p. 17). She also discusses the relationship of the Johannine community to the Jewish synagogues and other Christian churches: “the picture we get is of a community fighting for its own integrity by setting itself over against—and yet still connected to—other Christians (such as the churches of the Synoptic tradition), and also over against such outsiders as the followers of John the Baptist and the community’s principal antagonists, ‘the Jews’” (p. 27).

The third chapter looks at “The Roots of Wisdom” in Jewish literature prior to the FG, with special attention to diachronic developments in the conception and portrayals of Wisdom (changing from a divine principle to a personified presence). Ringe analyzes not only the relationship between Wisdom and God but also the activities ascribed to Wisdom, first in the Hebrew Bible (Ps 104, Job 28, and esp. Prov 1-9) and then in the Deuterocanonical Literature (Sirach 24, Baruch 3:9–4:4, and esp. Wisdom of Solomon). Overall, Wisdom is a mediating figure that “expresses God’s presence and self-disclosure in the created order” and “assures that divine transcendence does not mean divine absence” (p. 42). In some later Jewish literature, however, Wisdom’s mediating role is circumscribed and replaced by the divine λόγος, due largely to the difference in grammatical gender. Thus, “while what was affirmed about Wisdom’s power and way may have given voice to many of the Christians’ affirmations about Jesus, her feminine personification surely collided with Jesus’ male identity. Philo’s introduction of the λόγος as bearing both a cosmological and a salvific role connected to and in some sense replacing that of Wisdom establishes Philo as a significant bridge between the earlier wisdom texts and the Fourth Gospel” (p. 44-45).

In chapter 4, “Wisdom Made Flesh,” Ringe investigates the influence of these wisdom motifs in the FG itself. She begins by discussing the Prologue as a hymn to God’s Word (John 1:1-18), and then explores its thematic developments in the rest of the Gospel (presence and gifts, acceptance and rejection, glory and incarnation). Numerous scholars have shown similar thematic connections, but what is most valuable here is that Ringe discusses other attributes of divine Wisdom also, those not reflected in the Prologue but visible later in the FG. Just like personified Wisdom, the Johannine Jesus encounters people in public places, is “sent from above,” is a teacher of wisdom’s ways, provides

God's bountiful gifts, and speaks in divine terms. While not claiming to have resolved the tension caused by the grammatical discrepancy between Wisdom and Word (Does the masculine Jesus fully incorporate the feminine aspects of Wisdom? Or has Jesus' maleness eclipsed and co-opted "Lady Wisdom?"), her proposal is nicely nuanced: "perhaps the best that can be said is that our understanding of both Wisdom and Jesus Christ are transformed—the first by the saga of the incarnation, and the second by the feminine (even female) qualities by which his divine identity is defined" (p. 62).

A detailed exposition of the Johannine theme of "friendship" comprises Ringe's fifth chapter, "Appointed to be Friends." After briefly introducing the key terms in Greek, φιλέω, φίλος, and ἀγαπάω (but curiously omitting ἀγάπη), she looks carefully at John 15:1-17, the passage most central to the friendship theme, and then presents some comparisons with other ancient literature. While many Hellenistic writers discuss different types of friends and/or qualities of true friendship more abstractly (esp. Aristotle, Cicero, and Lucian), the FG focuses on the concrete actions expected of friends (loving one another, committing their lives to each other, etc.). Although the Hebrew Bible does not use explicit "friendship" language, it does contain some important narrative examples of actual friendships (esp. David and Jonathan, and Ruth and Naomi). Ringe then elaborates on the role of friendship in the Johannine portrayal of Jesus and the disciples, both in daily life and in times of crisis, all of which is illustrated well in the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd (John 10:1-18). The only thing that is not entirely convincing here is Ringe's translation of the verb τίθημι as "appoints" (always in quotation marks). She says that Jesus devotes himself to his disciples "even to the radical degree of 'appointing' (τίθημι) his life on their behalf" (p. 67). The accompanying endnote (#9, p. 111) explains that because "appoint" is the more natural meaning of τίθημι in John 15:16, the same verb should be translated as "appoint" in 15:13 also. However, "to place, lay down" is a more appropriate translation elsewhere in John (10:11-18, 11:34, 13:4, 19:41-42, etc.), while "appoint" leads to some statements that are awkward in standard English: "The grace in which we share, then, is Jesus' initiative in calling his followers 'friends' and 'appointing' them to 'appoint' their lives... on behalf of one another" (p. 56; cf. pp. 82-83).

Chapter 6 highlights the role of the "Other Paraclete" in continuing the incarnation of the logos/wisdom among the Johannine community after the departure of Jesus. Through chiasmic analyzes of the παράκλητος passages (John 14:15-26 and 15:26–16:15), Ringe shows the impact of this theme on John's Christology and ecclesiology. Finally, chapter 7 presents some brief "Conclusions and Implications," in which Ringe connects the results of this study with her own pastoral interests and theological experiences, especially her periodic teaching in Central America and ministry among Hispanics in North America. One item that might initially disturb some readers is that Ringe frequently writes "Wisdom/ὁ λόγος" in combination, almost as if these were identical terms. Those who know Greek might object that σοφία ("wisdom") and λόγος ("word") are completely

different words, even if related thematically. After reading Ringe's book, however, I began wondering whether "wisdom" might be a perfectly appropriate *translation* of λόγος, not just an associated theme. This term has such a wide range of meaning in other contexts (not just "word," but "statement, speech, treatise, account, reason," etc.), so perhaps "wisdom" would be the best translation in its specialized Johannine context.

This book contains extensive and up-to-date bibliographical references in the endnotes (pp. 99-115), but no separate bibliography. It has an "Index of Scripture and Other Ancient Literature," but no author or subject indices. Unfortunately, some of the words and phrases printed in Greek and Hebrew scripts are not translated (e.g., pp. 76, 80, 91, etc.), thereby making this book more difficult for beginning students or non-specialists to understand. Even though this may not have been Ringe's primarily intended audience, I would hope that future editions provide translations for all the ancient terms, so that this clearly-written and well-argued scholarly work might attain the widest possible audience, as it deserves.