

Two New Books from Old Seminex Colleagues

Colleagues,

Two for the price of one. No, not the books, but the review. And as long-time ThTh readers know, a straightforward “review” is seldom what you get in a ThTh book review. This one will likely be no exception. But instead of an extended debate with the author (and often lots of others) by this reviewer—as frequently happens—this time it’s extended narrative about the two dear authors. And dear they are.

But first the two books just off the press:

Frederick William Danker.

The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament.

University of Chicago Press. 2009. 390 pp. Hardcover.

List \$55, (Amazon \$44)Robert H. Smith.

Wounded Lord: Reading John Through the Eyes of Thomas: A Pastoral and Theological Commentary on the Fourth Gospel.

Ed. Donna Duensing. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books. 2009 202 pp. Paper.

\$24 (Amazon)

I’ve known Fred and Bob since the early 1950s. Bob was my classmate at Concordia Seminary, my colleague at Seminex, my next door neighbor for many years on Aberdeen Place just two blocks away from “the sem,” etcetera, etcetera. Marie and I visited Bob out in California at the Lutheran Seminary in Berkeley as he was coping with his third (and final) in a string of cancers, conscious that his time was short and pushing hard to finish this commentary of John’s Gospel. So I’ve read his

last will and testament as more, much more, than “just a book.” Bob’s widow, Donna Duensing (also a staffer at the seminary), has seen the manuscript through to publication. Bob’s dates are 1932-2006.

Fred Danker is half-a-generation older than Bob (and me too, coming up on 79 tomorrow), born July 1920 That means he’s coming up on his 90th birthday. His wife Lois, as much a superstar as Fred in her own many callings, died a year ago. Marie and I have been neighboring with Lois and Fred since 1995 when we left our house near that (in)famous sem, and moved into the Adlon Condominium building in midtown St. Louis. Fred and Lois had come here some years before. ‘Fact is, they “invited us in” by alerting us to the For Sale sign. So we’ve almost “been family” and now even more so with Fred after Lois’s demise. He’s at our supper table several evenings per week.

Conversations with Fred cover the spectrum of national politics, life (or death) in the church, baseball (where Fred is more in the know than I am, especially about the St. Louis Cardinals and the NY Yankees—and besides I’m a Chicago Cubs fan). Oh, yes, and tennis. With every major international tennis match Fred instructs both Marie and me about what the Williams sisters will or won’t be able to do this time.

Often it’s about words—Greek, of course, Latin, English, German, and other tongues. Where does that word come from? Why those curious multiple meanings? Yes, now and then we wind up in Sanskrit and with the empty space on the supper table covered with Webster, the OED, other dictionaries, a volume or two from the Encyclopedia Britannica, the German Brockhaus, and, of course, Fred’s own magnum opus Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 1100 double-columned pages (five-and-one-half pounds) from 2000.

We really ought to sell tickets and set up some extra chairs.

Fred's new book listed above, The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, is not a scissors-and-paste 67% reduction of his magnum opus mentioned above, affectionately known as BDAG ("bee-dag") in the community of NT scholars. [B for Bauer (author of the first German edition in 1928), D for Danker (3rd English edition, 2000) and A and G for Arndt and Gingrich (whose first and then second editions got Bauer to speak English beginning in 1957).]

Scissors-and-paste skeletal-version? "Oh, no," he says, "it's brand new from the first page to the last. That's what the U.of Chicago Press wanted, so that's what I had in mind from p. 1 to 390." What he had in mind! Yes, that's the mind-blowing thing. That's why he's the world's #1 lexicographer for New Testament Greek. That's why he was so honored this past August at the SNTS [Society for New Testament Studies] at the international scholars get-together in Vienna. He has it all in his head.

When he spoke those quoted words above, I told him what had just happened a day earlier as Marie and I took one of our frequent walks in the Missouri Botanical Garden not far from our home. We met a Garden staffer pruning one of the exotic trees. I asked him: How do you know which branch to cut and which one to leave? He tapped his forehead and said: "It's all up here."

Most all of you know that I'm not competent to review Fred's new lexicon, even though I know a little Greek. So this is a promo piece. If you want to know what Matthew, Mark, Luke, and all the rest are really saying, get a copy. It weighs four pounds less than BDAG. That's a blessing right there. Fits lightly into your suitcase alongside your laptop when you travel. And Amazon currently is giving a 20% discount.

Now to Bob Smith's commentary on John's Gospel. The title says

it all: "Wounded Lord. Reading John Through the Eyes of Thomas: A Pastoral and Theological Commentary."

Reading through the eyes of Thomas signals the final episode in John's Easter account in chapter 20. "Unless the death marks are still there in the resurrected Jesus, he is not my Lord and my God." That's how Bob reads Thomas' response to the other disciples. Thomas is not—repeat not—a "doubter." That standard label for Thomas is a misnomer. Even worse, it represents a misunderstanding of why St. John (and John alone) puts Thomas here at the very end of his Gospel. But not as an incurable skeptic. He was there to see and hear the "Lazarus, come out!" event. Been there, witnessed that.

Smith turns the tables on Thomas' bad reputation. Thomas is the good-guy disciple, the final witness to the truth of Jesus. Thomas speaks for the evangelist himself. He says it point-blank—just in case you've missed it in the preceding 19 chapters. To be anybody's Lord and God, you have to kill the killer-virus that terminates all sinners. Is the resurrected Jesus still "the (wounded) Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world?" If so, the death-marks will be there. Should they disappear, then death is still "Lord and God," and we need to search for another savior.

Bob presents John's Gospel as a radical "theologia crucis," the theology of the cross. He tracks Thomas' confession at the end as the cantus firmus throughout the entire Gospel, from the prologue in chapter one to the epilogue chapter 21. Bob sees all John's key (and sometimes novel) predicates for Jesus as cruciform. As you go with Bob chapter after chapter, it becomes a long list: word, light, hour, temple, water, bread, glory, work, shepherd, way, vine, joy, truth, life, love, paraclete, new commandment, peace, power and more.

Yes, it's a tour-de-force—and very compelling. Though Bob is in conversation with other scholars as he goes along, there are no footnotes. He calls it a pastoral and theological commentary. Indeed it is. It's Bob's own last sermon, himself doing what John says he was doing throughout his Gospel: "These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name." One more time: Remember the death marks do not challenge his being your Lord and God. They are the marks that verify those titles.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

P.S. There was an epic event in Seminex's history where Bob Smith and Fred Danker were the principals. An unforgettable pas-de-deux. It happened during a faculty meeting, where we'd gathered to decide whether or not we'd approve our first woman graduate for ordination as pastor. She was a brilliant student, but she was a woman, and we all grew up in the Missouri Synod where that was a no-no.

Bob chaired the meeting. In his Quaker-style leadership he seldom called for votes. Instead he'd let us talk and talk and then when he divined the "sense of the meeting," he'd put it into words. Nine times out of ten we all agreed: "That's exactly what I've been saying."

After our long discussion on this one, Bob said: "Colleagues, I think I hear a consensus. No one among us sees any significant grounds—either in the Scriptures or in our Lutheran Confessions—to prevent us from certifying Ms. X for ordination to the holy ministry. Do we all agree on that?" Fred raises his hand: "I don't agree on that." Bob: "Fred, you've sat here for two hours like the rest of us and you haven't said boo. And now you say No. What's going on?" Fred: "I'm against the ordination

of anybody. It's not in the New Testament!"