

**Ammunition for Denominational  
Trench Warfare from the Academic World  
Tom Hanks**

After repeated delays (understandable in view of the immense scope of the project), finally published in 2000 was the long-awaited ***Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*** (Third Edition, BDAG, Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), revised and edited by Frederick William Danker and based on Walter Bauer's German work. Undoubtedly many entries contain significant insights on the meaning of Greek words and extensive bibliography. Most important, after decades of suicides by lesbians and gay men who read the mistranslation of the 1946 RSV innovation indicating that "homosexuals" could never enter the kingdom of God, professor Danker now acknowledges that such a translation was "inappropriate." (See my work, *The Subversive Gospel: A New Testament Commentary of Liberation*, Pilgrim Press, 2000, under 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy, pp. 108 and 172 for details and more recent bibliography than Danker was able to include.) I was relieved to see that the page number I cited from Danker's proofs available last year is still correct (BDAG, p. 135), and the definition considerably improved over the one in the proofs, evidence that Danker is still wrestling with the problem of rendering Paul's "bed-males" (literally) in comprehensible English. As indicated on the cover flyleaf, "perhaps the single most important lexical innovation of Danker's edition is inclusion of extended definitions for Greek terms" and in the case of "bed-males" (Greek: *arsenokoitai*) Danker's definition is "a *male* who engages in sexual *activity* with a person of his own sex, *pederast*." (my italics for "male" and "activity").

Danker's new definition at least moves us away from the blatant error that Paul's condemnation included lesbians, and from the ridiculous anachronism that supposed Paul understood 19<sup>th</sup> century scientific discoveries about sexual orientation. Danker also includes reference to Dale Martin's important article (which I was able to copy for him after visiting his paper-strewn apartment in St. Louis two years ago), showing that the "sexual activity" referred to is not just any sexual activity but one involving exploitation, injustice, oppression (see the more recent literature cited in my book and below on Leviticus in the Anchor Bible). The tragic errors of earlier editions of this lexicon and English translations dependent on them have now become enshrined in translations around the world (the Bible Society now even distributes a "corrected" edition of the Reina-Valera, the Spanish equivalent of our King James version, with "homosexuals" substituted for the original "los que se hechan con varones", males who lie with males).

--- Tom Hanks

Since the first volume of the Anchor Bible's 3-volume work on Leviticus (New York: Doubleday, 2000) stopped at Lev. 17, we have waited several years to see how Jacob Milgrom, the leading orthodox Jewish expert on the Hebrew Bible would treat the clobber texts of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13. He does not disappoint us, but cites and confirms the conclusion of Saul Olyan (for details see my *The Subversive Gospel*, under Romans, p. 91) that the only sexual act condemned in Leviticus is (unprotected) male-male anal sex. Since Paul follows Leviticus closely in this area, this affects the translation of "bed-males" (see above) which should specify "a male who engages in (unprotected) anal sex to exploit another male". Scholars will continue to debate whether the exploited male be a youth (pederasty), slave, or prostitute (not exclusive, but commonly overlapping categories). In 1 Timothy the immediate contexts suggests sexual abuse of slaves (see my *The Subversive Gospel*, p. 172 for details and documentation). Milgrom also indicates that the rationale for the such prohibitions in Leviticus 18 and 20 was to maximize population growth and hence not appropriate for a modern world characterized by the opposite problem of population explosion.

For non-specialists, unaccustomed to becoming euphoric over commentaries on Leviticus, it may be difficult to appreciate my excitement over Milgrom's Leviticus commentary. Certainly Saul Olyan's 1994 article made what appeared to be an irrefutable case, as I noted in my More Light review of Bernadette Brooten. However, articles appearing in collections on (homo)-sexuality tend to be ignored by mainline scholars. Had Olyan's conclusion been incorporated in a mainline ("liberal") commentary on Leviticus,

the resulting mainstreaming would be cause for rejoicing. However, when the leading orthodox Jewish scholar incorporates the conclusion, signaling a major shift even in orthodox circles on homophobia and sexual minorities, our rejoicing may turn to celebration - especially when politically accompanied by our first Jewish vice presidential candidate's defense of gay rights (also orthodox Jewish).

**3** Amazing insight on Romans from a member of the Pontifical Biblical Commission. It's not new, but new to me. Someone at the AARSBL recommended I take a look at Brendan Byrne's *Romans* (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical/Michael Glazier, 1995). Pope John Paul II appointed Australian Byrne, S.J., to the Pontifical Biblical Commission in 1990. Although written before some of the developments indicated above, Byrne's commentary, had it been written in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, might have made the Protestant Reformation unnecessary, and also contains wise comments about homophobic misapplication to modern homosexuals. For instance, concerning Romans 1:18-32 Byrne writes:

"Current debate concerning both the ethics of homosexual practice, the treatment of homosexuals both within and without the Christian church, and the emotions and moral dilemmas aroused by the AIDS epidemic have understandably focused attention upon this passage in recent years...It provides the only clear reference to homosexual behavior in the New Testament. Interpretation must take into account both the context and specific rhetorical role of this allusion within the wider argument of Romans. In particular, it must reckon with a considerable gap between what is envisaged by this text from the ancient world and the personal situations addressed by contemporary moral and pastoral reflection. What both the ancient literature in general and this text in particular have in mind is homosexual behavior on the part of those who have deliberately chosen to abandon what is considered to be the universal norm-heterosexual relations. The ancient world in general, and early Christian writers such as Paul in particular, made no distinction between being of homosexual disposition as an *abiding* personal psychological orientation, the cause of which remains mysterious to modern science, and free choice on the part of heterosexual persons to engage in homosexual activity. Any modern moral assessment of the issue in which scripture plays a part must clearly take this gap between ancient and modern thinking into consideration. It is also salutary to keep in mind that the allusion to same-sex relations, such as it is in Rom 1:26-27, is not there for its own sake but functions rhetorically as preparation for a 'trap' set up precisely to catch those who condemn such behavior and yet, in some way 'do the very same things' (2:1,3)" (p. 70),

Should the next Pope have ears to hear such subversive Catholic interpretation of Paul's gospel, the glacier of Vatican homophobia might melt considerably!

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