

QUESTION 3

The legendary and curiously elusive scholar Franz Bibfeldt allegedly was "born" to Friedrich and Brunhilda Bibfeldt in Safe-Hast by Groszenknetten, Niedersachsen, Oldenburg, Germany on November 1, 1899, appropriately on All-Saints Day, so as not to show preference for one saint over another. (Perhaps this town is located near the fabled "Gilly Gilly Hasenpfeffer, Katzenellenbogen by the Sea (sic) that we as youngsters sang about around the campfire. Records documenting Bibfeldt's academic career, academic affiliations, memberships in scholarly organizations and achievement of tenure and advancement in rank remain sketchy. However, authoritative sources divulged that his 1927 unpublished Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Worms was entitled "The Problems of the Year Zero." Neither the 1993 International Handbook of Universities nor the Guide to Universities of Europe, 13th edition, list a University of Worms. Bibfeldt's contention that he could find no evidence of the year between 1 B. C. and 1 A. D., provided fodder for scholarly discussion for years to come and might account for Franz's elusiveness, for his "calendar impairment" put him and his ideas permanently behind everyone else in the world.

The first citation of Bibfeldt explains the imaginary being of this "scholar." In 1947, Robert Howard Clausen, a classmate of now well respected Martin E. Marty, professor of modern Christian history at the University of Chicago 's Divinity School, invented Franz Bibfeldt as one of several fake footnotes to a term paper

submitted during his freshman year at Concordia Lutheran Seminary in St. Louis. Martin Marty, in his own autobiography, By Way of Response, divulged this origin of "The Bibfeldt Legend" which has snowballed since. References cropped up in their student magazine, edited, of course, by Marty. A librarian co-conspirator entered bogus records of Bibfeldt's works in the card catalog and the bookstore perennially had Bibfeldtiana "on order." At this point, the hoax was admitted to seminary officials after Marty had reviewed a nonexistent work by Bibfeldt, "The Relieved Paradox," translated by R. Cloweson and published by Howard Press in the December 19, 1951 Concordia Seminarian. These names were suspiciously similar to that of Marty's (fellow cohort). *tautology???*

The Bibfeldt spoof of theology and academia graduated with Marty and made its way with him to the University of Chicago where Bibfeldt gained even more scholarly supporters. Beginning in the 1970s, an (almost) annual Franz Bibfeldt Festival or Symposium is held at the University of Chicago complete with an honored lecturer and sizable audience fortified with beer, sauerkraut, bratwurst and apple strudel. This event occurs on the Wednesday closest to April 1st, a sure clue to its lack of legitimacy. Moreover, a Bibfeldt Foundation, headed by Martin E. Marty himself, an endowed "Donnelly Stool," and actual Bibfeldt memorabilia archived at the University of Chicago Divinity School show how devoted Bibfeldt's following has become.

Religious columnists credit Bibfeldt with 35 books, "uncounted" scholarly articles (pretty hard to count what doesn't exist) including the widely heralded "I'm OK, You're DOA," in the

Journal for Scientific Study of the Weird, 1968 in which Franz detailed his theories on the dead as the minority most discriminated against. Actually, many of his writings and observations always came curiously one year or so after similar research had already been documented elsewhere. In 1994, Martin Marty and Jerald Brauer, Dean Emeritus of University of Chicago's Divinity School, edited an entire book of Bibfeldtiana entitled The Unrelieved Paradox: Studies in the Theology of Franz Bibfeldt.

Bibfeldt's significance for scholarly communication demonstrated that one can easily create fakes or hoaxes, to commit and perpetuate fraud, especially with willing and enthusiastic accomplices. Reputable scholars, exercising their minds and wit, are not above perpetrating a spoof to poke fun at academia, and the academic process. With so many scholars involved, this was not an instance of devious fraud; it might be classified as a stress reliever. In an atmosphere of "publish or perish," I wonder if the speakers at the Bibfeldt gatherings listed those papers on their vitae.

a nice
research
challenge

My methodology in searching for Bibfeldt included the traditional paper and electronic resources. The ASU online databases - IAC-Expanded Academic Index and Uncover located two articles. I immediately ordered the University of Chicago Magazine article which I later discovered on the Internet at <http://www.uchicago.edu.alumni.mag/9502/Feb95Bibfeldt.html>. The Publishers' Weekly book review of Marty's book confirmed the hoax situation. A quick check of Bio-base and several familiar Religious and Theology books and Art and Humanities Citation Index

turned up nothing. Newspaper Abstracts On Disc-CDROM located two Chicago Tribune and two New York Times articles.

I look forward to borrowing Marty's recent book, Unrelieved Paradox from classmate, Shannon Lyon, and shall continue to track this spoof in the future.

Franz Bibfeldt

Infamous theologian Franz Bibfeldt, son of Friedrich and Brunhilda Bibfeldt was born on November 1, 1897. He was born at Sage-Hast bei Groszenkneten, Oldenburg, Neidersachsen, Germany. Unable to excel in athletics, the military or church history, Bibfeldt became a theologian. In 1927 he submitted his doctoral thesis on "The Problem of the Year Zero" to the University of Worms.

"Never officially connected with one particular institution or even a specific doctrine," (Easton, 1995) Bibfeldt still managed to write some 35 books and uncounted articles. He was named Theologian of the Year in 1994 by evangelical magazine, The Wittenburg Door. Bibfeldt is considered "the master of accommodation theology." (Steinfels, Nov. 1994)

His writings have usually been responses to the work of others. He responded to Karl Barth's Nein! (No) with Veilleicht? (Perhaps?). He replied to Either/Or by Kierkegaard with Both/And and in response to that work's negative reviews, penned Both/And and/or Either/Or. ✓
Veilleicht

Bibfeldt presented his paper "God is a Howl" at the Theology on the Beat international conference in 1957. "I'm OK, You're DOA" appeared in 1968 in Journal for Scientific Study of the Weird. He wrote Bonding of the Will: Lutheran Thoughts on Men Hugging in 1992.

The Bibfeldt archives are housed at the University of Chicago Divinity School. The school often plays host to a springtime Bibfeldt festival luncheon/lecture. The Bibfeldt Foundation presents the

lecturer with \$29.95, the endowment from the Donnelly Stool of Bibfeldt Studies. The usual luncheon fare consists of sausage, sauerkraut and beer. Traditionally this luncheon/lecture is held on the Wednesday closest to April 1st.

This date is an appropriate one since Franz Bibfeldt was actually invented by a desperate freshman at Concordia Seminary in 1947. It seems that when Robert H. Clausen found the library closed and his paper was due the next day, he simply invented the footnotes. What started as a desperate act to get a paper turned in on time has become an ever larger legend in the lore of academic hoaxes.

Clausen's classmate Martin E. Marty was struck by the name Bibfeldt and began interviewing Clausen about his invention. Gradually Bibfeldt began to take on a life of his own. His "writings" appeared as filler in the student magazine Marty and Clausen edited during their final years at Concordia. As others caught on to the hoax, they got in on the fun. Some professors, the librarian, the bookstore, even some publishers joined in and added to the lore.

Jerald Brauer brought Bibfeldt scholarship to the University of Chicago Divinity School. Martin E. Marty later joined Brauer on the Divinity School faculty. Through the interest of students and professors, the Bibfeldt legend has continued to grow.

The Bibfeldt hoax illustrates how easy it can be to invent citations. The spring festival is a great way to relieve the intensity of study - the taking of oneself too seriously. Bibfeldt's "writings" first conceived as a broad satire on the academic system have moved on to tackle current theological/philosophical trends as well. Bibfeldt

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takes the ideas in these trends to their logical conclusion and beyond. He has become a tool used by students and professors alike in confronting ideas.

1. Easton, John "The Unbearable Lightness of Being Bibfeldt" University of Chicago Magazine 87 (Feb. 1, 1995). This article is available in print or electronic format. I did a word search using Bibfeldt in UNCOVER. The article can be ordered online from UNCOVER. The electronic version can be obtained through the world wide web. Address is <http://www.uchicago.edu/alumni.mag> You will get the magazine's home page, from there click on the February issue, then the article in the table of contents to look at the fulltext of the article. Or <http://www.uchicago.edu/alumni.mag/9502/Feb95Bibfeldt.html> or <http://www.uchicago.edu/alumni.mag/9502/Feb95Bibfeldt.extra.html>

2. Hirsley, Michael. "Theologian Writes Stuff of Which Legends are Made." Chicago Tribune, April 1, 1992 Sec:1 p.1,14. I found this article on Newspaper Abstracts OnDisc Jan. 1994-Jan. 1995, using Bibfeldt as a search term.

3. Hirsley, Michael. "Scholars Gather to Toast Legend." Chicago Tribune, April 16, 1993 Sect.2. I found this article on Newspaper Abstracts OnDisc Jan. 1992-Dec. 1993, using Bibfeldt as a search term.

4. Marty, Martin E. By Way of Response. Journeys in Faith Series. Nashville: Abingdon, 1981. This title was in one of the

articles. I found it in the online catalog of the Mesa Public Library. I used a title search.

5. Marty, Martin E. and Jerald C. Brauer. The Unrelieved Paradox: Studies in the Theology of Franz Bibfeldt. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. I first found a book review of this title in the Expanded Academic Index. Then I also found a bibliographic entry for it in the University of Chicago library catalog. I reached the catalog by going to <http://www.uchicago.edu>. From there I went into the University Library , then the Catalogs and other Library Information Servers, then into the University of Chicago library catalog , then searched by title. ASU library has this title on order, according to our online catalog.

6. Steinfels, Peter. "Beliefs." New York Times Nov. 5, 1994 Sec. A p.12 col. 1. and Dec. 31, 1994 Sec. 1 National Desk p.10. My source for these articles was Newspaper Abstracts OnDisc Jan. 1994-Jan. 1995. I used Bibfeldt as a search term.

7. Review of The Unrelieved Paradox: Studies in the Theology of Franz Bibfeldt. In Publisher's Weekly 241 (Aug. 15, 1994): 56. I found this in the Expanded Academic Index using search terms fraud and education.

Question 3:

Franz Bibfeldt is not only a hoax and a figment of someone's bored imagination, but a most scholarly one at that (in his own twisted way). After suffering great frustration as a failed athlete, Bibfeldt, a German theologian we are told, wrote his doctoral dissertation on "The Problems of the Year Zero" and submitted it to the University of Worms in 1927.

He studied the history of theology seriously and produced a paper titled, Vielleicht? (Perhaps?) in response to one Karl Barth's pamphlet, Nein! (No!). He also wrote Both/And in response to Kierkegaard's Either/Or. This was followed by Both/And, and/or, and Either/Or.

Where else?
Bibfeldt made regular visits to America in the 1950s and visited assorted cults and alternative religious centers in California in the 1960s. He was profoundly influenced by the secular writings of Charles Schulz (author/illustrator), especially the Schulzian concept of "the wishy-washy" (saft- und kraft-los, läppisch, geringfügig); a phrase "that loses something in translation" notes Martin Marty, a professor of modern Christian history at the University of Chicago.

The definitive Bibfeldt bibliography presently stands at 35 books and uncounted scholarly articles. Among the topics included are: the death of God, feminism and feminists, professional sports contracts, fundamentalism, Eastern religions, personal, theological, and social trends, and deconstructive polytheism. At one point in his career, his article, "I'm OK, You're DOA," writings on the dead, became quite influential.

In 1947, one Martin Marty, Ph.D. 1956, along with a freshman classmate, attempted to enter the Concordia library whereupon they found it to be closed. Alas! How was he to complete his citations? No worry for Marty. (He simply invented^{*} his footnotes. The name Franz Bibfeldt "struck me," says Marty. For three summers, Martin and his friend would discuss Bibfeldt's thought processes whereupon he soon became a figure larger than life.

According to Bibfeldt's wife, Hilda Braunschweiger-Bibfeldt, he began to write fiction to deliberately satirize American religious society, having been rejected by the group, and thus invented Martin Marty to get even.

Martin Marty reviewed Bibfeldt's The Relieved Paradox, which was translated by R. Cloweson and published by Howard Press in the Concordia Seminarian in the December 19, 1951 issue.

There is no indication (at the present time) that a biography is being written on Bibfeldt but in Martin Marty's autobiography, By Way of Response, more insight about Bibfeldt is revealed to whomever would wish to gain more insight.

Bibfeldt has contributed in countless ways toward scholarly communication. Why, how would we know to this day that "God works through apparent accidents" or that "any saying which is too hard to follow is to be understood to mean the opposite of what it literally says." His existence has created a cult-like following, reminding us that "a person need not exist in order to influence lives."

* It wasn't Marty who invented Bibfeldt but his buddy, R.H. Cloweson. Marty, however, took the lead in spreading the hoax. See attached copy of article marked section.

A Bibfeldt Stool has been established for faculty positions at the University of Chicago. Each year, \$29.95 is endowed for the stool which goes to the guest who delivers the Bibfeldt lecture, scheduled on a Wednesday at the end of March or the start of April for a luncheon series open to students and faculty.

Students have gained great insight from Bibfeldt's work on pastoral care of the dead. It was at this time that his article "I'm OK, You're DOA," was recognized as one of great importance. And after Bibfeldt entered the realm of televangelists into the world of show business and encouraged budding theologians to follow suit, he brought to light sensitive issues of the time by asking stirring questions. At a 1983 seminary graduation speech, he asked, "How many of you first gained a sense of the fallenness of man through the brutality of Tom and Jerry? How many first appreciated the banality of evil from watching the futile schemes of Boris and Natasha fail repeatedly to destroy moose and squirrel? Bert and Ernie are all very well, but they don't bring us any closer to solving the riddle of existence, do they?" Bibfeldt has kept a great many thinkers thinking, until they have not been able to think anymore. This is only one of his many contributions to the scholarly community.

My first (successful) attempt at locating information on Franz Bibfeldt occurred in the MARS Room of Hayden Library at Arizona State University. The MARS Room is composed of various CD-ROM terminals. I used the Business Index on InfoTrac. Once the Business Index was requested and loaded, I entered Franz

Bibfeldt as keyword (name). The search located one hit. It was a review on the book, The unrelieved paradox: studies in the theology of Franz Bibfeldt / edited by Martin E. Marty and Jerold C. Brauer. It was located in Publisher's Weekly, August 15, 1994, volume 241, n. 33, p. 56(1). The information was short and not very leading so I switched to the New York Times Ondisc. I searched in the most recent years available (1994) using Bibfeldt as keyword and found another review which proved to be more helpful. The review mentioned that Bibfeldt had been created by the University of Chicago's most eminent scholars. The date given was November 5, 1994, for a column written in the University of Chicago Magazine on a newly published collection of mock scholarly studies about Bibfeldt.

I then decided to try using Gopher to see if I could find the magazine at the University of Chicago. From Gopher, I went to Other Sources, then Veronica, and used the keywords, University of Chicago. This took me to University of Chicago Information (+UCInfo, Gopher). The screen said, "Welcome to the University of Chicago Press Gopher." Although I didn't track down any information on Bibfeldt on this path, I did notice an e-mail address which sounded like a safe place to direct questions to.

The address was: gopher-team@midway.uchicago.edu

Perhaps I cheated, but before I could stop myself, I sent an e-mail question to the gopher-team at the U. of Chicago Press. This was late one evening. By mid-morning of the following day, I had all the information I needed. The morning was April 24,

1995. Donald Goldhamer sent a response to me, care of gopher-team@midway.uchicago.edu. This was his message:

The University of Chicago Magazine recently published an article about Franz Bibfeldt. It is online (use a WorldWideWeb browser like Mosaic, Netscape or Lynx rather than a Gopher browser) and the locator is:

<http://www.uchicago.edu/alumni.mag/9502/Feb95Bibfeldt.html>

and

<http://www.uchicago.edu/alumni.mag/9502/Feb95Bibfeldtextra.html>

You might want to contact the article's author, John Easton, who is director of media affairs at the University of Chicago Medical Center, at 312-702-6241.

And then, in the next issue, there were two letters published which referred to Bibfeldt (quoted below):

BETTER FRANZ THAN ELVIS and SHARP TURN AHEAD

Donald H. Goldhamer

UCInfo Project Manager

Networking Services, University of Chicago

Culver Hall #206, 1025 E. 57th St, Chicago IL 60637

d-goldhamer@UChicago.EDU [End of message]

At the first chance I had that day, I used Netscape to search for the address given me. I downloaded eleven pages of information from which I used to answer Question #3. There is so much more info that I could have stated here for you but I simply answered the question in a straightforward manner. You can see everything I received over the web by using the URL I have listed. I did not contact the author John Easton. This would

have cost money. But I did send Donald Goldhamer a thank-you e-note.

The Theology of Franz Bibfeldt and Scholarly Communication

Franz Bibfeldt is an elusive person to track. A search of bibliographic databases yielded a review of a book and an article in THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO MAGAZINE. A search of various libraries failed to produce anyone who owned a copy of THE RELIEVED PARADOX. A search of traditional biographical reference sources produced no results. So the question must than be asked; "How can someone who is so obscure be important to scholarly communication?" The answer to that question is manifold.

By asking students to locate information about Franz Bibfeldt, you have used this obscure theologian to encourage students to examine how they find information. In this case, the small group from Phoenix would exchange hints about possible sources of information and how valuable various sources were. Eventually, we had produced a short reading list of materials on Franz Bibfeldt. This process is similar to the process used by scholars when they are faced with a seemingly unsolvable question. By contacting other scholars who are working on the same or similar projects, scholars can brainstorm, share raw data and critique theories. This method of contacting the invisible college is very prominent in scholarly communication and the transformation of information into knowledge.

A second aspect of asking a question about Bibfeldt is that the students assume that all the information a professor requests or provides is factual and accurate. Therefore, we spent a great

deal of time and effort trying to find information about Franz Bibfeldt in the standard information sources. The assumption was made that this person was an eminent scholar instead of an elaborate hoax.¹

Franz Bibfeldt has a great deal to say about scholarly communication beginning with his first citation at Concordia in 1947. As a student, one's work must be based upon or corroborated by other works. As a result, a student with a sound theory or good ideas cannot submit a paper expounding them without supporting evidence in the form of footnotes and references. Although Robert Howard Clausen's ideas and reasoning were sound since he received an A on the paper, he was aware that he needed references to give his paper the necessary support from the scholarly community.² This has far reaching implications for scholarly communication.

First, it encourages new scholars to remain within the hegemony of their chosen field by requiring them to find support for their work within the established knowledge of their field. This effectively discourages the development and proposal of radically new theories or paradigms. It also illustrates the importance of the halo effect in the acceptance or evaluation of another scholar's work. Whether the instructor agrees with a student's interpretation, a paper with citations to a number of sources will be more favorably reviewed because all these sources can't be wrong. Also, the student has also done a lot of research into the topic. This halo effect continues in the evaluation of scholarly works among peers. An article with a number of references is more likely to have the interpretation put forth

halo effect

accepted with little question by the scholarly community; however, a sound theory with little support in the form of citations can have a difficult time finding acceptance among scholars. right
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The ease with which the original citation was accepted illustrates how easily fraud or misconduct can occur within the scholarly exchange. If false citations are not noticed, would a scholar discover false data through casual reading? Would a scholar recognize a plagiarized paper or article? Generally, scholar^{^s} will not notice these incidents of misconduct. This is not because scholars are careless or uninformed. Instead, just as we trusted that there really was a Professor Bibfeldt somewhere because you asked about him, scholars trust that the information provided by other scholars is truthful. This underlying trust is what allows the Bibfeldt hoax^{to} continue and misconduct to occur.

The continuity of Bibfeldt's theology indicates the process of establishing internal consistency. As various scholars have been asked to explain Bibfeldt's theology, they have created an internal consistency by examining other works by "Bibfeldt" in order to determine how Bibfeldt would respond to the topic of discussion. Since all new ideas had to be understood in terms of Bibfeldt's accepted theology, the scholars who were asked to explain Bibfeldt's theology made the data fit his theology.³ In general, all scholars seek to establish this internal consistency for any theory since internal consistency is considered a mark of a valid theory. Therefore, once scholars have accepted a position, there is a tendency to interpret new data and information so that it is consistent with the established theory. This can be both positive

and negative. The positive is that it can strengthen and expand a paradigm or hegemony in order to include more possibilities. It reduces the sudden, erratic and unpredictable shifts in paradigms by seeking to explain conflicting data in terms of the established paradigm. The negative aspect is that it discourages opposing points of view, thereby limiting the scholarly exchange since scholars will tend to ignore outlier data. It can also effectively delay the acceptance of sound theories simply because they are not consistent with the established paradigm.

As Bibfeldt has taken on a life of his own, it illustrates the old saying, "Repeat a lie often enough and it begins to be the truth." The implication of this on scholarly communication is that a frequently repeated falsehood has a better chance of acceptance than an obscure truth.

In conclusion, I know that I haven't answered all your questions regarding the life and times of Franz Bibfeldt. Once I knew that he was fictitious, my focus centered on trying to determine what this fictitious theologian has to say about the scholarly exchange of information and knowledge. ^{One hopes} Hopefully, the lack of a lot of citations will not have a negative halo effect. Instead, I hope that a clearly stated interpretation of a few facts will have sufficient weight in this scholarly exchange.

1. Hirsley, Michael; "Theologian Writes Stuff of Which Legends Are Made," CHICAGO TRIBUNE, April 1, 1992, pp2,14.
2. Easton, John; "The Unbearable Lightness of Being Bibfeldt," THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO MAGAZINE, February 1995, available at www.uchicago.edu/alumni.mag/9502/feb95Bibfeldt.html.
3. Steinfels, Peter; "Beliefs," NEW YORK TIMES, November 5, 1994, section 1, p12.

societal changes that won't occur easily or rapidly.

Question 3

Franz Bibfeldt is a fictional character. Peter Steinfelds sums up his career in an article titled, "From the scholar's scholar, practical advice on making everything turn out right".¹⁵

According to Steinfelds, Bibfeldt was invented in a fake footnote to a term paper at Concordia Lutheran seminary in 1947. He has become a folk hero at the Chicago Divinity School which has entries for him in ~~its~~ library's card catalog. There is an annual Bibfeldt Festival held on April 1, and autographed photos to Bibfeldt from such dignitaries as Mayor Richard Daley and the 1971 Playmate of the Year can be found in a glass display case at the school.

According to Steinfelds, Martin E. Marty, a well published theologian, was in seminary school and the editor of the student magazine when the obscure references to Bibfeldt cropped up. Marty and Jerald C. Brauer are the editors of the recently published book, *The Unrelieved Paradox: Studies in the Theology of Franz Bibfeldt*,¹⁶ which details Bibfeldt's career. Incidentally, Steinfelds refers to this book as the *Relieved Paradox*. By leaving off the "un", this reference also becomes obscure.

Reference to Steinfelds article was found by searching *Readers Guide to Periodical Literature* on the Firstsearch database, using Bibfeldt as a keyword. An additional reference, "Franz Bibfeldt: the breakdown of consciousness and the origins of the quadrilateral mind," in *Criterion*, vol. 19, pages 23-27, Autumn, 1980, can be found in the *Religious One* index for 1974-1980, on page 29.

Is this not me
confused, too!

A creative and diligent person might find the additional references:

"I saw Elvis talking to Franz Bibfeldt," in *Religious and Inspirational Books and Serials* vol. 10, pages 24-42, 1988, and "Bibliographical research as penitence," in *Seminary and Graduate School Handbook*, 1990 edition.

3) I began my search for Franz Bibfeldt in OCLC. What had he written? Nothing!?! How could this be? Allen said he was a "scholar." What about Bibfeldt as subject? One hit - The Unrelieved Paradox by Martin Marty (whoever that is). But that still didn't seem right. A famous scholar, worthy of inclusion on my final exam, who has captured the attention of just one author? Nevertheless, a quick scan of the subject headings for Marty's book revealed theology as Bibfeldt's apparent bailiwick. Off, then, to the Humanities Citation Index. Surely others have cited Franz, if not actually penned entire works devoted to his enduring legacy . . . Forty-five minutes later, still nothing. Something's afoot. Back to the OCLC record for Marty's book. Subject: Theology -- Doctrinal -- *Humor*. Ah ha! something *is* afoot. Still, the question remained, who is (or was) he? Every index (Religion One and -Two, even Reader's Guide!), every database (Humanities Index, Current Contents, EAI) all led to just Marty's new (1994) book, or a review of it in *Publisher's Weekly*. But the UA library does not own (and apparently has no plans to buy) the book, and past experience led me to conclude that our ILL department had a snowball's chance in Tucson of getting it for me by May 10. And, once I tracked it down (no mean feat), the review in *PW* shed virtually no light whatsoever. Finally, a check of Carl Uncover revealed an article by John Easton, published in the February, 1995 issue of the *University of Chicago Magazine* titled "The Unbearable Lightness of Being Bibfeldt." Ah ha, Chicago! - home to Martin Marty. Surely this article would at least provide a place to start. Remembering that ILL subsidizes Carl Uncover fax service, and having worked in that department for 2 months (hence, my earlier defeatist attitude), I decided to call in a favor and ask them to walk my request through the process. Two hours later the article was hand-delivered (sometimes the system *does* work) and the veil was lifted completely from question #3. (I have quoted *extensively* from Easton's article below. Aside from it answering my every question about Bibfeldt, I found it to be one of the most thoroughly entertaining pieces I have read in quite some time.)

Franz Bibfeldt was born "from a volatile meeting of a seminal frustration and a fertile imagination" on a Sunday afternoon in the autumn of 1947, at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis.

He sprang from the imagination of freshman Robert Clausen who, unable to gain access to the library to finish a term paper, simply invented footnotes, Bibfeldt being the most memorable. The paper got an "A". Clausen and classmate Martin Marty, to relieve their boredom at work, began discussing the finer points of fictional Bibfeldtian theology, and the discussion apparently spread quickly beyond the two seminarians. "The librarian joined the harmless conspiracy by cataloging the corpus of Bibfeldtiana." Bibfeldt's "slight volume" received a triumphant review (Marty's) in the December, 1951 issue of the *Concordia Seminarian*, and the legend of Franz Bibfeldt was on its way.

"Bibfeldt's reputation soon spread, or perhaps oozed, beyond the University . . . By the early 1970s an occasional Bibfeldt festival, at which students presented the latest in Bibfeldt scholarship, began to occur. Before long there was a Bibfeldt Foundation - nonprofit, of course. There wasn't nearly enough money to fund an endowed chair, but a thoughtful gift - it's the thought that counts - from University (of Chicago) benefactors permitted the establishment of the Donnelley Stool of Bibfeldt Studies: a handsome, three legged sort of chair. The Foundation proceeds, carefully invested, now produce an annual income of \$29.95, which is presented to the person who delivers the annual lecture, as long as he or she can come up with a nickel change . . . Reporters from Chicago papers routinely cover the quasi-annual Bibfeldt lecture, usually for the April 1 issue, and the theologian has also gained national exposure through CBS, National Public Radio, and the *New York Times*. An entire session at the 1988 American Association of Religions meeting was devoted to Franz Bibfeldt's life and legacy. In 1994 the *Wittenburg Door*, an evangelical magazine, named him its Theologian of the Year.

Yet, despite his fame and the fervent admiration of his devotees, Bibfeldt the man has remained something of an enigma. "Never officially connected with one particular institution or even a specific doctrine, his whereabouts have long been shrouded . . . He may even be dead." What we do know is that "Bibfeldt spent much of the 1960s in California, visiting assorted cults and alternative religious centers . . . It was during these years that Bibfeldt perfected his now

exalted, exiguous, exegetical technique of 'creating very little out of absolutely nothing but calling it scholarship anyway - a widely imitated methodology that was coined *Horsgeschichte*."

This "exalted" and "widely imitated" methodology, of course, comprises the central theme of Bibfeldt's contribution to scholarly communication. "Bibfeldt is about being able to affirm on Tuesday, negate on Thursday, and affirm again by Saturday, depending on who asked." As Martin Marty himself points out, "Bibfeldt is a reminder that a person need not exist in order to influence lives." Neither, apparently need his work.

Marty goes on to remind us that "the history of academic hoaxes is as long and dreary as the academy itself, and the list of invented names in scholarly footnotes threatens to be as long as are authentic ones." Which should lead scholars and librarians everywhere, once again, to that time-honored caveat, "don't b'lieve everything ya read."

A well done, efficient job
of sleuthing! But don't you
think your ILL experience
gave you a leg up. Don't feel
guilty about it - unfair
advantage?