

## WHO IS FRANZ BIBFELDT?

Franz Bibfeldt is a German theologian who promoted accommodation theology. This theology includes many contradictory theories like Social Gospel, existentialism, death-of-God, <sup>→ evangelism !!!</sup> evangelicalism, deconstructionalism and New Age. Bibfeldt believes that if he covers all areas of theology he is going to get one of them right. He has offered advice to many religions. Catholics still remember his advice during the Second Vatican Council. Recently, Peter Steinfels of the New York Times nominated Bibfeldt for the funniest theologian in 1994.

Bibfeldt's academic career starts at the University of Bern, where he studied church history. He received a Doctorate of Digressive Theology in 1929 from the University of Worms. His unpublished dissertation "The Problem With The Year Zero" was not received well by the scholarly community. Robert Howard Clausen cited Bibfeldt in 1947 at Concordia Lutheran Seminary. The citation was in a footnote. Citations to Bibfeldt appeared in the student magazine, which Martin E. Marty edited. The school library cataloged Bibfeldt's works in their card catalog. No one has actually check out Bibfeldt's works because they are on interlibrary loan. Recently there was a public display of Bibfeldt memorabilia at the University of Chicago Divinity School. Autographed photographs of former students of theology were on display. These students included former Mayor Richard J. Daley, and the 1971 Playmate of the Year. These statements expressed esteem for Bibfeldt. Some people believe Bibfeldt wrote speeches for former President Eisenhower and is the author the famous line that America is "founded on a deeply felt religious faith--and I don't care what it is". Bibfeldt wrote



if you use "the" you really must make  
him pre-eminent; if he's just eminent,  
use the article "an," not "the."

Both/And in reply to Kierkegaard's Either/Or. When this work received bad reviews he wrote a revision titled Either/Or and/or Both/And.

Martin E. Marty gathers many stories about Franz Bibfeldt in Unrelieved Paradox. This book attempts to define and explain the theology of Franz Bibfeldt. Since Marty was present at the creation of Bibfeldt, he is the eminent scholar about the life, times and strange happenings of Franz Bibfeldt. A complete list of the scholarly societies is not possible because his views covered the spectrum of religious thought. He authored 36 books and co-authored five books. There are five unpublished articles by Bibfeldt and six books written about him. There is no listing of any academic appointments or teaching positions held by Bibfeldt. However, there are many numerous sightings of Bibfeldt. (These sightings are similar to Bigfoot sightings in the American northwest.) → Good!

The greatest contribution of Franz Bibfeldt to scholarly communication is the Franz Bibfeldt Festival held in Chicago on the Wednesday closest to April 1. Marty and Brauer, who head the Bibfeldt Foundation, distribute honorary Bibfeldt degrees, sausage, sauerkraut and beer. A professor or graduate student delivers a lecture on Bibfeldtism. These lectures are the main source of knowledge about the theology of Franz Bibfeldt. The lecturer receives \$29.95 from the Donnelley Stool of Bibfeldt Studies.

My search for Franz Bibfeldt was difficult. I consulted all of the biographical indexes and dictionaries where I work. I went home and reviewed my copy of Introduction To Reference Work Volume I by William A. Katz to see if I had over looked any source in my first search. The second day of searching produced two references to Franz Bibfeldt. I discovered a citation in Uncover to an article in the University of



Chicago Magazine. The title of the article is "The Unbearable Lightness of Franz Bibfeldt." The second citation was in The Expand Academic Index. This was a reference to a book review of the Unrelieved Paradox in Publishers Weekly. The issue I needed was not available where I worked so I went to the public library to acquire the book review. I looked through Essay and General Literature Index, Biography Index on CD-ROM and The Christian Science Monitor Index. This search resulted in no citations or any reference to Franz Bibfeldt. I went to Arizona State University Library to search. I started with Dissertation Abstracts on CD-ROM, Humanities and Art Citation Index, any directory of religious biography in the library and different religious encyclopedias and dictionaries. I then decided to check if the name Bibfeldt was a play on words. I checked German - English dictionaries. I entered Bibfeldt as an author, subject and keyword. All data base searches resulted in no results.

I admit that my finding Bibfeldt was an accident. I was working on some bibliographic instruction exercises using the New York Times CD-ROM. When I finished the questions, I decided to try one more time. I searched by subject in this database. The data base covered the time period covering January 1994 to January 1995. I entered Bibfeldt. Two citations appeared. This is a full text data base so I printed the two articles. These articles contained enough information about Franz Bibfeldt to end my search. However, I continued to search by other means.

From the beginning I felt that there had to be a reference to Bibfeldt on the Internet. Since Martin E. Marty is at the University of Chicago, I tried to get into the University of Chicago Library. The host refused connection. I then tried to find the

Since you've already used the word covered, you don't need the participle covering - just eliminate it! Try this & you'll see it reads <sup>more</sup> smoothly.



University of Chicago's home page on the Internet. I was successful. From the home page I found the library. This inquiry did not result in any useful information. I eventually found the University of Chicago Magazine from the home page. I accessed the February issue and printed the "Unbearable Lightness of Franz Bibfeldt".

The articles confirmed what I had suspected. Franz Bibfeldt was not a real person. Scholars want acknowledgment. They want their works published and cited by other scholars. Scholars should be very easy to find. They do not want obscurity. They want the esteem and respect of their peers. The people responsible for the creation of Bibfeldt have kept him alive and well for many years. It was not difficult for a student to create Franz Bibfeldt. A closed library and a paper due led to the creation a citation referring to Franz Bibfeldt. How much information is falsified by people or scholars? This creates doubt on the integrity of all scholarly communication.

2 tests  
one's  
ingenuity  
searching

#### WORKS CITED

Easton, John. "The Unbearable Lightness of Being Bibfeldt," University of Chicago Magazine February, 1995:

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

"Notes" Publishers Weekly 15 August 1994: 56.

Steinfels, Peter. "Beliefs." New York Times 5 November 1994, late ed. - final:12, reproduced in New York Times Ondisc. CD-ROM, Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, Inc., 1995.



3. In his 1963 address before the American Theosophists Society, Paul Tillich, in response to the rising popularity of Bibfeldt's early accommodation theology, said, "Accommodation theology is abomination theology." And in his monumental Decline of Western Man, K. Volitz called accommodation theology the most insipid and popular form of Christianity in the West. Despite these poor evaluations of his work, Franz Bibfeldt's influence on American theology can scarcely be overestimated.

Bibfeldt remains an enigma to those who would study him. In part, it is due to the strange and enigmatic habits evident in the titling of his books. Both/And was retitled Either/or and/or Both/And went through six editions each bearing a title which was a variant of this theme. Then, with the seventh edition, Bibfeldt retitled his work Conjunctions. There then followed three works called Conjunctions, none of which was a continuation of or republication of the others. This, of course, makes citing Bibfeldt's early work difficult.

Perhaps, however, Bibfeldt's own reluctance to become a public figure has contributed to his being the unseen presence in modern theology. Everyone who has ever met Bibfeldt has been told a different story about who he is, with which institution he is affiliated. Yet, Bibfeldt remains a figure with some influence. If no comprehensive biography of the man can be written, then we should remember Bibfeldt's reply when asked to define freedom, "Freedom is not having a past you can be pinned down to." Obviously, Bibfeldt remains the freest of men.



would be eliminated. Publishers will be able to turn a profit, but perhaps a less sizable profit, since this type of market would be more competitive. Dual pricing could be eliminated and a more equitable price/use system could be established.

### Question 3

#### The Life of Franz Bibfeldt<sup>1</sup>

Franz Bibfeldt "is a figment of the imaginations of a couple of seminarians who created him 46 years ago [in 1993] as a hoax."<sup>2</sup> The 2 seminarians who created Franz Bibfeldt were Robert Clausen and Martin Marty. Bibfeldt was cited in a footnote of a paper that Clausen wrote in 1947 while attending Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. Clausen used the fake citation in his paper to protest the library being closed on Sundays. Although Bibfeldt originated in St. Louis, he is most well known at the University of Chicago. Jerald C. Brauer is the first American professional to cite Bibfeldt in a formal lecture.

Although not titled as such, the biography of Franz Bibfeldt is "The Unrelieved Paradox: Studies in the Theology of Franz Bibfeldt", edited by Martin E. Marty and Jerald C. Brauer. It is published by William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company in Grand Rapids, Michigan. It was published in 1994 and is 231 pages in length.

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<sup>1</sup>All information on the life of Franz Bibfeldt was found in *The Unrelieved Paradox: Studies in the Theology of Franz Bibfeldt* Martin E. Marty and Jerald C. Brauer (eds.), Grand Rapids, Michigan; William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994.

<sup>2</sup> Taken from a paper clipping titled "Scholars gather to toast a legend" which appeared in the Chicago Tribune, April 16, 1993 and was written by Michael Hirshey. Copy of the paper clipping was found on page 210 of *The Unrelieved Paradox: Studies in the Theology of Franz Bibfeldt* Martin E. Marty and Jerald C. Brauer (eds.), Grand Rapids, Michigan; William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994.



A few highlights of the imaginary life of Franz Bibfeldt are:

- \* Franz Bibfeldt was born on November 1, 1897 at Sage-Hast bei Groszenkneten, Oldenburg, Niedersachsen, Germany.
- \* At about age 17 he went to the University of Bern to study church history.
- \* His doctoral thesis was titled *The Problem of the Year Zero*. His thesis was never published.
- \* His first published manuscript was *Der Philemerbrief: Ein Exegetisches-Theologisches Kommentar*, 5 vols. Berlin: Lowenbrau Verlag; 1933.
- \* He became a theologian and eventually wrote *The Relieved Paradox*, in addition to numerous other manuscripts (see appendix).
- \* Bibfeldt was married to Hilda Braunschweiger-Bibfeldt.
- \* He was a member of Turnverein ("... a semi-anticlerical, semi-secret, semi-athletic society").
- \* Bibfeldt first visited Chicago in 1969 at the request of the students of the Divinity School at the University of Chicago.

#### Franz Bibfeldt and Scholarly Communication

The significance of Franz Bibfeldt to scholarly communication is two-fold: 1) scholarly communication can be creative, lighthearted, and entertaining, and 2) scholarly communication is not always what it seems and may be damaging.

The fact that a supposed true-life character created in 1947 still lives and thrives shows great creativeness and imagination. The fact that so many people are part of the Franz Bibfeldt



lore is unique. It has obviously been a very entertaining diversion for several well-known and respected scholars. They make a point that perhaps not all scholarly communication needs to be serious. There may be room for creative "fun" in scholarly communication.

On the other hand, what may be considered creative and fun to some people may not be considered such by others. Many people have been (and probably will continue to be) misled by this hoax. Much time may be wasted before discovery of the deception. In the Franz Bibfeldt case, there does not seem to be much damage that has been done by this hoax. A few well-known personalities have been embarrassed to find out they autographed photographs, espousing the virtues of Bibfeldt, and a few people have, I'm sure, lost time trying to locate information on Franz Bibfeldt, but these are fairly minor damages and inconveniences. This, however, may not always be the case. The real significance of Franz Bibfeldt to scholarly communication is a warning not to unquestionably accept scholarly work just because it is in print or touted as gospel by other people.

20/11/94 de

#### Resources Used

1. A search of the database ERIC provided 1 result—a book review in *Publishers Weekly* (August 15, 1994) of "The Unrelieved Paradox" edited by Martin E. Marty and Jerald C. Brauer.
2. I located a copy of *Publishers Weekly* at the Tucson Public Library. After reading the book review, I found a copy of the book from which I obtained all my information on Franz Bibfeldt.



3. I searched several other indexes and databases for additional information on Franz Bibfeldt, but was unsuccessful in my searches. I attempted to located<sup>9</sup> manuscripts written by Franz Bibfeldt, but failed to located anything. I also attempted to find additional information on Bibfeldt by searching the Internet, but again failed to find any information. I was able to connect to the University of Chicago's web site and locate the Divinity School (from which Bibfeldt lore lives on), however the Divinity School was not accessible.



## A Partial Franz Bibfeldt Bibliography

### Books by Bibfeldt

- 1927 "The Problem of the Year Zero." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Worms.
- 1933 *Der Philemerbrief: Ein Exegetisches-Theologisches Kommentar*, 5 vols. Berlin: Loewenbrau Verlag.
- 1934 *Vielleicht? Antwort an das "Nein" Barths*. Basel: Via Media Verlag.
- 1936 *The Crooked Way*. London: privately published.
- *The Variables*. Berlin: privately published.
- 1937 *Both/And: A Response to Kierkegaard*. Graustark: Dubitare Verlag.
- 1938 *Either/Or and/or Both/And*. London: Sic et Non Press.
- 1948 *A Pragmatist's Paraphrase of Selected Sayings of Jesus*. New York: James Publishing Co.
- 1950 *The Relieved Paradox*, trans. R. H. Clausen. London: Howard Press.
- 1956 *Purity of Mind is to Think Pleasant Thoughts*, trans. A. Anders. Copenhagen: Hallmark Press.
- *The Boys of Sumer: Akkadian Origins of the National Pastime*, trans. S. Spencer. Chicago: Addison & Clark.
- 1957 *Here I Sit: Luther Reconsidered*. St. Louis: privately published.
- 1958 *Paradoxes Observed*. Chicago: Perspective Press.
- 1959 *Paradoxes Lost*. Los Angeles: Milton Publishing.
- 1960 *Paradoxes Regained*. Juneau: Gelidus Publishing.
- 1961 *Schlemiel und Schlemazel: Barth Gegenüber Tillich*. Berlin: Gesundheit & Danke.
- *The Relieved Paradox and the State*. Chicago: Sublevatio & Smith.
- 1962 *The Relieved Paradox and Society*. Atlanta: Mimicus Publishing.



- 1965 *The Fire We Can Light: Religious Reflections on Cremation*. London/Paris: Ardor & Humidus.
- 1968 *I'm OK, You're DOA*. New York: Mortis Corpus Press.
- 1969 *I Hear What You're Saying, but I Just Don't Care: Thoughts on Pastoral Counseling*. London/New York: Rogers Press.
- 1971 *Long Discourse on the Study of Theology, Philosophy of Religion, Scripture, Church History, Liturgy, Hymnody, Folk Music, Interpretive Dance, Pastoral Care, Parish Administration, Haberdashery, and Etiquette*. Chicago: Muy Grande Publishing.
- 1972 *Crypto-Calvinist Existentialism: Predestined to Eternal Insecurity* (incl. Eng. trans. of Dutch hymn "Who Will Reload the Canons of Dordt?"). Amsterdam: Kok & Beker.
- 1975 *Howdy, Deutero-Isaiah: Salutation Motifs in Isaiah 40-66*. Tübingen: Specious Press.
- 1976 *The Food Context of Pastoral Care*, ed. B. Mahan. Bangkok: Panang Press.
- *Minister as Mortician*. New York: Mortis Corpus.
- 1978 *Magnum Opus*. London: privately published.
- *God: Getting to Know the Creator*. Des Moines: Vanity Press.
- 1981 *Luther on Vacation: From Worms to Cancun*, with preface by Robin Leach. Honolulu: Viator Publishing.
- 1982 *I Haven't Got a Q: Epistemic Dissonance and the Question of Synoptic Origins*. Oxford/Berlin: privately published.
- 1984 *Eggnog Hammadi: Newly Discovered Texts Relating to Egyptian Gnostic Season Libations*. Cairo: Pyramid Press.
- 1986 *Mysticism, Now and Zen*. San Francisco: Galanty Press.
- *Life's Little Deconstruction Book*. New York/Paris: Dairy Dada Books.
- 1991 *The Wealth of King Solomon: A Hebrew Scripture Prefigurement of Sports Contracts*. Chicago: Addison & Clark.
- 1992 *Bonding of the Will: Heterodoxy and Orthodoxy in the Practice of Men Hugging*. Minneapolis: Bly Books.
- 1993 *Mass-o-Schism: Liturgical Practice in the Anglican and Lefevrite Churches*. Oxford/New York: Genuflection Press.

#### *Books co-authored by Bibfeldt*

- 1959 (with Herman F. Nootiks) *Die Auslegung als eine Glückliche Schatzung*. Sage Hast bei Groszenkneten, Niedersachsen, Oldenburg, Germany: privately published.
- 1964 (with H. Winfeld Tutte) *Arbeitlose Menschen: Jünger in Theologie*



- und Kirchengeschichte*, preface by M. Daly, introduction by J. Brauer. Berlin: Entmannung Verlag.
- 1974 (with Hans Küng) *God and the Problem of Freud*. New York: Sic & Non.
- 1985 (with Donald Trump) *Majoring in the Minor Profits: Fame and Fortune Through Pseudonymous Authorship*. New York: Vanity of Vanities Press.
- 1990 (with H. Winfield Tutte) *The Execution of Islamic Literary Criticism: The Ayatollah as Man of Letters*. Teheran: Recondite Books.

### *Unpublished Articles by Bibfeldt*

- 1950 "Empathy with the Circumcised"
- 1957 "Scatology and Eschatology"
- 1964 "Theology as the Unsought Answer to the Unasked Question"
- 1966 "Outline for a Future Examination of New Testament Envoys in the Context of Greco-Roman Diplomatic and Epistolary Conventions: The Example of Timothy, Titus, and Anäis Nin"
- 1987 "Philanthropic Privilege as the *Imago Dei*"

### *Books about Bibfeldt*

- 1974 Bibfeldt, V. W. *Theologische Fahrvergnügen: Meine Reise mit Onkel Franz*. Heidelberg: Turnverein Verlag.
- 1979 Von Keester, P. T. L. *Semperlapsarianismus: Die Sündelehre in der Theologie Bibfeldts*, foreword by J. Swaggart. Baton Rouge: Peccavi Press.
- 1987 Von Keester, P.T.L. *How Many Pinheads Can Dance on an Angel? Scholastic Metaphysics in a Post-Bibfeldtian World* (humor). Wheaton, IL: Facetious Press.
- 1988 Whitmore, T. and Bessler, J. *Theologian Absconditus: The Existential Problematics of Franz Bibfeldt*, introduction by R. Rosengarten. Grand Rapids/Chicago: Ex Nihilo Press.
- 1989 Nootiks, Herman F. *Let the Circle Be Unbroken: The Eisogetical Theology of Franz Bibfeldt*. Berlin: Unsinnig Verlag.

NOTE: All extant essays and lectures on Bibfeldt, heretofore unpublished, are published in this volume.



3.

Who was Franz Bibfeldt? Or, Looking for Bibfeldt in All the Wrong Places and Mostly Not Finding Him.

What was Franz Bibfeldt's contribution to scholarship? He caused a number of Library School students to search high and low for him. I searched every database on Sabio and found a brief review listed in Expanded Academic Index, for Publisher's Weekly, August 15, 1994. I had searched under Bibfeldt's name and then once I had the reference, under authors Martin E. Marty and Jerald Brauer. We didn't have this issue so I had to go downtown. When I found out that The Unrelieved Paradox: Studies in the Theology of Franz Bibfeldt was a spoof, I still wondered if he had been a real person. I checked Newsbank to see if there were any reviews in papers, and found (under Martin Marty's name) a review by Peter Steinfels in the New York Times, Nov. 5, 1994, p. 12.

It turns out he never existed, but was invented at Concordia Lutheran Seminary in 1947. After a fake footnote relating to him appeared in a paper, other students began to quote him. A librarian put him in the card catalog, even though his works were always out.

I couldn't find any other references except one in Current Contents to an article in the University of Chicago Magazine which we don't have (and neither does TPL) so I looked at the religion press and found a review in the April 5, 1995 Christian Century.



Martin Marty says of Bibfeldt that he, "like Elvis, manifested pervasive presence through absence."

I think his importance for scholarship is that he shows that scholars can, should and do have a sense of humor.

Dr. Veaner,

As of Tues., May 9, I still had not received my grade + comments for my oral presentation. You can mail them to me at this address:

3814 E. 4th St. #208  
Tucson 85716

Thank you.

Reset 5/11/95 to  
SAC office had old address.  
(Did misplaced the correct  
address to give me.)



for institutions because both individuals and institutions will have the same access.

It may cost both librarians and publishers a bit to initially set up this process, but in the long run it will save both sides money and headaches.

After many stressful hours of trying to find anything on Franz Bibfeldt, I soon began to feel that perhaps he did not really exist. I searched the following using both subject and keyword searches on Franz Bibfeldt:

Expanded Academic Index  
Dissertation Abstracts  
Biography Index  
MLA Literature  
Contemporary Authors  
SocioFile  
Arts and Humanities Indexes  
Arts and Humanities Citation Index (year by year)  
Social Science Citation Index (all volumes the Reference Room had)  
All of the general encyclopedias  
The Encyclopedia of Religion  
Several Who's Who  
The World of Learning  
The National Faculty Directory  
OCLC Authority File  
Whatever else is on the LAN  
SABIO  
World Wide Web  
Internet  
Three Librarians



So, from all of that, I found one reference to Franz Bibfeldt. I found out there was a review of *The Unrelieved Paradox: Studies in the Theology of Franz Bibfeldt* published in *Publisher's Weekly*. I could never find our copy of that issue on the shelf, so I went to the public library and found it. I felt pretty sure then that this was not a real person. However, the name did exist, so I thought there must be something out there about him.

I looked in the *Religion Index: One* under the authors of the above book and managed to find a few things in a journal, called *Criterion*, on Bibfeldt. It was also suggested to me by a librarian that I look in FirstSearch. I tried nearly every database and found the above book. I also found information from News Abstracts of all places. In one of the newspaper articles, I discovered who was going to be giving a lecture at the annual Bibfeldt Festival: Rev. Sam Portaro (*Chicago Tribune*, 1 April 1992). I found his name in the *Religion Index: One*, 1992 and found an article in *Criterion* (Spring/Summer 1992).

Franz Bibfeldt was first cited ". . . as a fake footnote to a term paper at Concordia Lutheran seminary in 1947," (*NY Times*, 5 Nov 1994) Bibfeldt was created by Martin E. Marty of the University of Chicago Divinity School. *The Relieved Paradox*, by William B. Eerdmans (but in other places, by Bibfeldt) is a collection of Bibfeldt's stories and professorial puns.

Bibfeldt wrote a response entitled *Both/And* in response to Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*. Bibfeldt's sequel was



Both/And/And/Or/Either/Or. He has also written *The Minister as Mortician*. What is Bibfeldt's contribution to scholarly communication? Theological humor!!