

QUESTION 3

A. Who is Franz Bibfeldt?

To answer the question one must read The Unrelieved Paradox: Studies in the Theology of Franz Bibfeldt. This book will track Bibfeldt's career in "terms of his education, academic affiliations, publication history, membership in scholarly organizations, achievement of tenure and advancement in rank." As Jerry K. Robbins in his review of the book in *Christian Century* points out, the twenty-five contributors to this work establish Bibfeldt's "historicity, explore his postmodern theology, praise his pastoral sensitivity, note his impact on culture, and critique the massive misguided scholarship that has grown up around his name." This work includes a bibliography of Bibfeldt's work. It was edited by Martin E. Marty and Jerald C. Brauer.

Unfortunately, I was not able to get my hands on a copy of this very important treatise because much to my horror no library or bookstore carried it! And, due to my tendency to procrastinate, I did not have enough time to order it and wait for its arrival. (Nor was I certain that I wanted to pay \$14.99 for a copy!) Nevertheless, in my favor, I must add that I did find some very interesting information on Franz Bibfeldt due to my resourcefulness!

In an article by Michael Hirsley in the 4/16/93 edition of the *Chicago Tribune*, "Scholars gather to toast legend," I discovered some important facts about Bibfeldt's life. Bibfeldt was born in Sage-Hast by Grozenberg, Oldenburg, Niedersachsen, Germany. Bibfeldt was conceived in the back seat of an old Volkswagen on Feb. 2. An article "Theologian writes stuff of which legends are made" by the same writer in the 4/1/92 edition of the *Chicago Tribune*, provided me with some additional information. Bibfeldt was born on November 1, 1899. How appropriate that he was born on All Saints Day so, as in the words of Hirsley, "as not to show preference for one saint over another."

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Bibfeldt was an aspiring athlete, but ~~due to experienced~~ frustrations he turned to theology. Throughout his forty-five year career he has inspired debate about his scholarship and has, therefore, been often cited in the works of students and theologians alike. For example, his doctoral dissertation on "The Problems of the Year Zero" continues to attract attention because he could find no evidence of the year between 1 B.C. and 1 A.D. His work on pastoral care of the dead has also been explored. It was in this work that students uncovered his very famous quote "I'm O.K; you're DOA."

In an article in the 8/12/94 edition of the Daily News of Los Angeles, Peter Steinfelds of the New York Times provides the following insightful information on Bibfeldt's philosophy. Bibfeldt is the master of accommodation theology. To quote:

From the Social Gospel to neo-orthodoxy, from existentialism to liberation theology, from the death-of-God to born-again evangelicalism, from deconstructionalism to the New Age, Bibfeldt is there displaying what has been hailed 'the Bibfeldtian conquest of extreme moderation' or his 'indomitable spirit of appeasement.'

In other words, as Ed Briggs, a writer at the Richmond Times-Dispatch on 12/31/94 wrote, "Bibfeldt is to modern theology as Superman or the Harvard Lampoon is to our culture."

To return to the article in the Daily News of Los Angeles, I also discovered that Bibfeldt was the author of a work entitled at first "Both/And" and later revised to "Either/Or and/or Both/And." This work was in response to Kierkegaard's volume on faith, "Either/Or." This article also informed me that Bibfeldt was a Lutheran, although he did offer ^{advice} ~~advise~~ to Roman Catholics! The editors of The Unrelieved Paradox: Studies in the Theology of Franz Bibfeldt, Marty and Brauer, also usually hold an annual festival in Bibfeldt's honor.

These editors also head the Bibfeldt Foundation...how curious...wait a minute...according to all the sources I have identified **FRANZ BIBFELDT DOES NOT EXIST!** You say sacrilege?

B. The Origins of Franz Bibfeldt

According to the same article by Ed Briggs mentioned earlier, Bibfeldt "emerged in the post-war days at Concordia Theological Seminar in St. Louis during a student protest of Sunday library closings." Several students, including Martin Marty protested by creating fictitious footnotes. Robert Howard Clausen is recognized as the inventor of Bibfeldt. Clausen cited Bibfeldt for a term paper he wrote in 1947. However, Marty has been credited with his survival, his evolution, and his popularity. Many believe that Bibfeldt is actually the alter ego of Marty, but Marty denies it claiming that everyone can hold a mirror up to themselves and see Bibfeldt. Nevertheless, because Marty has been so elemental to the character Bibfeldt, I think Marty also deserves identification.

C. Who is Martin E. Marty?

The biographical information that I located on Marty is from Marquis Who's Who, 1994. He was born on February 5, 1928 in West Point, Nebraska. He was married in 1952 to Elsa Schumacher. She died of cancer in December 1981. He was remarried in 1982 to Harriet Lindemann. He has seven children. He was ordained to the ministry of the Lutheran Church in 1952.

Marty holds the following degrees:

LHD (hon.), Centre Coll., 1994
 LHD (hon.), Drake U., 1994
 LHD (hon.), George Fox Coll., 1994
 DD, Hope Coll., 1993

DD, Northwestern Coll., 1994
 LHD, Calif. Luth. U., 1993
 Litt.D, U. Nebr., 1993
 DD (hon.) Baker U., 1992

Marty is the editor of *Christian Century magazine*, a professor at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, and has been the pastor at three congregations. He was the President of the Park Ridge Center: An Institution for Study of Health, Faith and Ethics from 1985-89. He is currently the director of the Fundamentalism Project for the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He is a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Society of American Historians; and he is a member of the American Philosophical Society, the American Academy of Religion, and the American Antiquarian Society. Marty is also a prolific writer; he is the author of more than twenty creative works. In 1971 he won the National Book Award for his work The Righteous Empire.

F. Significance for Scholarly Communication

I believe the words of Ed Briggs sum up the significance of Franz Bibfeldt on the world of scholarly communication:

The whimsical words of Bibfeldt have become a serious tool used mostly by Marty over the years in lectures and in essays to poke fun at academia and theology when it's needed. By elevating Bibfeldt's ability to change sides to affirm opposing views, Marty is poking fun at theologians' embrace of what they call the *Zeitgeist*, or spirit of the times to whose whistling many modern theologians dance and change steps.

As Marty points out, more significantly, "Bibfeldt is a reminder that a person need not exist in order to influence lives." Could he be referring to...God?

E. The Search

I have indicated the sources I have used to find the information I have documented. However, I found all of these sources electronically using Dialog databases. I used the biography file (234) to find out biographical information about Martin. E. Marty. I used the LC-MARC-Books and REMARC files (426, 421) to find out what Marty had published. These files produced nothing when trying to find Bibfeldt, as he does not exist. I initially located information on Bibfeldt in the Academic Index (file 88). Here I found reviews of the book edited by Marty and Brauer, The Unrelieved Paradox: Studies in the Theology of Franz Bibfeldt. To conclude my search, and find out any additional information, I searched the magazine and newspaper indexes.

3. Franz Bibfeldt is an imaginary German-born theologian who was created in 1951 by Martin Marty, a theologian from the University of Chicago. The seeds of Bibfeldt's identity were actually first revealed in 1947, when a fellow graduate student of Marty's cited Bibfeldt in a bogus footnote in a term paper. Later, Marty decided to create the Bibfeldt character as a school prank, by citing Bibfeldt's "work" in the school newspaper and reviewing his "books," one of them a published book review on Bibfeldt's work *The Relieved Paradox* (Portaro, 32). According to an article in the *New York Times*, "a sympathetic school librarian even entered Bibfeldt's works into the card catalogue, although they were always mysteriously out on loan" (Steinfels, A12). For the next 46 years, Franz Bibfeldt grew to become a beloved theologian of the absurd, and is honored periodically by members of the Franz Bibfeldt Society, the American Academy of Religion, and the Society of Biblical Literature (Steinfels, A12). Bibfeldt is even honored with a special display case at the University of Chicago, which contains autographed pictures from such esteemed admirers as "the late Mayor Richard J. Daley and Chairman Mao Tse-tung, former President Jimmy Carter and former Playmate of the Year Sharon Clark" (Hirsley, 1992, p. 1).

However, finding information about Mr. Bibfeldt's works is about as easy as trying to locate Bibfeldt himself. It took me awhile to realize that Mr. Bibfeldt did not exist, but I figured it out eventually. His name was not found on *SABIO*, although I located one article about him on *UnCover*, using the search term

"Bibfeldt." However, the abstract to the article told me nothing about the man. Published in the February 1, 1995 edition of the *University of Chicago Magazine* (which the U of A does not carry) the *UnCover* abstract of the article noted that although Bibfeldt is "known to generations of scholars (and one Playmate of the Year), Franz Bibfeldt has led a life that, to paraphrase Twain, has been greatly exaggerated." However, I was able to locate what I needed in OCLC's *FirstSearch*. After several unsuccessful queries in *WorldCat*, *Biography Index*, *LibraryLit*, and most of the other databases, I decided to try a keyword search "Bibfeldt" in *News Abstracts*. I came up with three articles from the *Chicago Tribune* and the *New York Times*. It was in these articles that I found that Bibfeldt was in fact an imaginary theologian, born in 1899 in Germany. I also located a book review of the latest definitive work on Bibfeldt in *FirstSearch's Periodical Abstracts*, an article from the April 5, 1995 issue of the *Christian Century*. From what I'd read in the newspaper articles, I realized that theologians must have a pretty good sense of humor, and that I might find other articles about Bibfeldt in *Religion Index*. I did, by using the search term "Bibfeldt." I found three more articles, all of which discussed Bibfeldt's life, work, and philosophy of religion (see Lovin, 1980, 1987; and Portaro, 1992).

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Bibfeldt's "works" include a doctoral dissertation entitled "The Problems of the Year Zero," in which he "could find no evidence of the year between 1 B.C. and 1 A.D." (Hirsley, 1992,

p. 1). He also wrote *Both/And*, and its sequel, *Both/And/Or/Either/Or* ("the quintessence of Anglican thought," according to Distinguished Bibfeldt Lecturer for 1992, Sam Portaro, 32) and *The Minister as Mortician*, in which Bibfeldt asserts that "the dead are the truly silent majority and thus the definitively oppressed group" (Portaro, 33). Bibfeldt's philosophy of religion is as follows:

Theology according to Bibfeldt is "the art of making things come out right," and the task of theologians is to reconcile everything to everything else: After all, "If God can do it, why can't we?" As an annual Bibfeldt lecturer has explained, the great scholar's method is thus "to affirm all propositions simultaneously, in the hope that some of them might be true and a few of them might even be popular (Steinfels, A12).

Bibfeldt's philosophy has stimulated scholarly communication for more than one theologian. A colleague of Marty's, Robin W. Lovin, Associate Professor of Ethics and Society and a former Guggenheim scholar, did an in-depth psychological analysis of Bibfeldt's philosophy, in a 1980 article in *Criterion* entitled "Franz Bibfeldt: The Breakdown of Consciousness and the Origins of the Quadrilateral Mind." Lovin, a distinguished Bibfeldt lecturer, points out that there must be:

a proper appreciation of the psychological and physiological foundations of Bibfeldt's theology. This

man who has tried so hard to please everybody and who has attempted throughout his career as author and teacher to affirm all propositions simultaneously, in the hope that some of them might be true, and a few of them might even be popular-- this man has obviously developed a brain function that allows him to affirm a proposition with one part of his mind and deny it with another (Lovin, 26).

It is clear from this and other articles that Franz Bibfeldt is taken as seriously as theologians take themselves as human beings. How refreshing! Every few years, Bibfeldt is honored at the University of Chicago by members of the Bibfeldt Foundation, in which a distinguished speaker updates participants of the theologian's latest exploits. Just this year, the definitive work on Bibfeldt was released. Edited by Marty and his colleague, Jerald C. Brauer (both of whom head the Bibfeldt Foundation) *The Unrelieved Paradox* outlines Bibfeldt's life, work, and philosophy for the serious Bibfeldt scholar. It has received positive reviews in the *Christian Century* (April 5, 1995, p. 368) and *Publisher's Weekly* (August 15, 1994).

Bibfeldt's legacy has survived for the last 46 years due to the great imagination of Martin Marty and a cast of loyal admirers. Although Bibfeldt himself is already 92 years old, he hasn't been seen in decades. Yet he may be one of the most influential theologians of our era. As Martin Marty has stated: "Bibfeldt is a reminder that a person need not exist in order to

quence lives" (Hirsley, 1992, p. 14). With the release of the new scholarly work by Marty and Brauer, scholars can look forward to many years of productive Bibfeldt scholarship.

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- "The Unrelieved Paradox: Studies in the Theology of Franz Bibfeldt. [book review] *Publishers' Weekly* 241(33) 15 Aug. 1994: 56.

"Who" is usually reserved for
people, not institutions

foreign publications. Library clients must work with agents to evaluate publishers pricing practices. Libraries ^{that} who use the same subscription agent demand the establishment of user groups to put pressure on publishers to change unfair pricing. As a commodity, information exported and imported should have to follow the same international export laws. ✓

In conclusion differential pricing will only change when the library community, including the end user and the agent demand that publishers implement fair pricing for exported publications. International export regulations, enforced for international publications will eliminate geographic price differences.

Franz Bibfeldt

Franz Bibfeldt does not exist. The first reference to Franz came up in the Expanded Academic Index accessed through Arizona State University's catalog. (carl.asu.lib.edu). A book review in Publishers Weekly (August 15, 1994, pp.56) uncovered, The Unrelieved paradox: studies in the theology of Franz Bibfeldt. Franz was not to be seen or heard of again in any of the numerous catalogs searched in sabio.arizona.edu. The book review in Publishers Weekly revealed that Franz was a unique human being. ✓

Good hunting
The only available copy of The Unrelieved paradox edited by Martin E. Marty and Jerald C. Brauer turned up at a local bookstore. A quick scan of the book listed citations in journals that were unfamiliar. Another hunt on the internet verified the existence of the book's contributors. They proved to be legitimate graduates from the University of Chicago, School of Divinity and were cited numerous times in the online uchicago.edu catalog. No citations listed in the book's footnotes could be verified. ✓✓

Franz Bibfeldt, the radical *both/and* trendy theologian did not exist, rather he was beget in the frantic mind of a procrastinating divinity student who had been denied access to weekend use of the school's divinity library. Dr. Bibfeldt's paper existence, including his birth at Sage-Hast bei Groszenkneten, Germany (November 1, 1897), his academic achievements, including a Doctorate of Digressive Theology (D.D.T.) from the University of Worms, all appears to be well documented by the editors of Unrelieved Paradox, however, nothing was found to substantiate this claim.

Very often, a request for reference documents from vendors will be returned with a note "unable to verify citation." This response to document requests cast doubt that a paper or person ever existed. Fraudulent citations only cast doubts on the work of the author and make it more difficult to sort out valid reference works.

when librarians should be able to tell publishers "Thanks but No Thanks" to an overinflated journal of questionable relevance to the library's users, they have little choice but to grudgingly play along with dual pricing on behalf of faculty members and the excessive role of publication as a measure of worth in academia. It would probably take achieving infinite power and authority to guide the dismantling of the "publish-or-perish" system. Until then, practices such as dual pricing will undoubtedly continue and create rifts within the scholarly community. Once absolute control is established by someone (hopefully, librarians), send word from the mountaintop "YE SHALL BE JUDGED BY WHAT YOU DO, NOT HOW MUCH" and fundamental change may have a chance.

3. Franz Bibfeldt is an imaginary scholar and theologian who seems to have been invented by University of Chicago Divinity School professor Martin Marty and then co-opted by other scholars. Indeed, in inquiring who Bibfeldt is and what he has done in his life, one soon realizes that the answers depend entirely on the person asked. To some he is a Lutheran, to others an Anglican. Some identify him as a chauvinist while others rest assured that he is a feminist through and through. Bibfeldt seems to be and believe whatever the person writing about him wants Bibfeldt to be and believe. In short, Bibfeldt is a mythical figure who has been used by scholars to have a little fun but

also to make often satirical statements about their fields and scholarship in general. Apparently many professors, especially at the University of Chicago, are making a habit of attributing various statements and positions to Mr. Bibfeldt. Although the lore of Franz Bibfeldt is developing rapidly, from a bibliographic standpoint, locating sources of information about him remains as elusive as the man himself.

My search of several electronic and print sources of bibliographic information met only limited success. Searches for any information on Bibfeldt in electronic article indexes such as Expanded Academic Index, CarlUncover, the Humanities Index and OCLC resulted in only a handful of articles and a single book. Similarly, consultation of print sources such as the Religion One Index and the Religious and Theological Abstracts turned up two articles. Without question, the authoritative source on Bibfeldt is the newly published The Unrelieved Paradox: Studies in the Theology of Franz Bibfeldt, edited by Martin Marty and Jerald Brauer. This work undoubtedly offers many perspectives on the man and the myth (which in this case are one ^{and} in the same). Unfortunately, The Unrelieved Paradox is not widely available yet and answers to the questions posed on the Final Exam are mostly impossible to answer without creating one's own personal bit of Bibfeldtian lore.

From the few articles on Bibfeldt that are readily available to the typical researcher, however, there are a few "facts" about his publishing record that can be ascertained. The Relieved Paradox apparently got Bibfeldt his first mention in the American

press in the form of a 1951 review of that book. He is also credited with penning such literary gems as The Minister as Mortician, Both/And and its stunning sequel Both/And/And/Or/Either/Or. Other works attributed to Bibfeldt are his dissertation entitled "The Problem of the Year Zero" and the manuscript "A Pragmatist's Paraphrase of the Sayings of Jesus."

Bibfeldt's significance for scholarly communication is that he acts as a vehicle for scholars to make bold or biting statements somewhat "safely" should others take too great an offense. His "existence" has promoted the exchange of ideas that might never have been shared without his availability as a spokesman for whomever cared to use him. Bibfeldt is a willing pawn of academicians who see in him a scholar who is always right and can never be pinned down to a specific position. In other words, he is everything they want to be!

Note: Articles with information on Bibfeldt can be found in

-Criterion, Spring/Summer 1992

-Chicago Tribune, April 1, 1992

-Publisher's Weekly, August 15, 1994

-University of Chicago Magazine, February 1, 1995

-Christian Century, April 5, 1995

I followed several leads to find out about Franz Bibfeldt. I began by looking through the Humanities Citation Index, to no apparent avail. Next, I looked on the Expanded Academic Index, and in Carl UnCover, where I found citations on Bibfeldt with no problem. EAI directed me to an article in Publisher's Weekly, Aug.15, 1994, and Carl Uncover cited an article by John Easton, "The Unbearable Lightness of Being Bibfeldt," in the Feb.1, 1995 issue of the University of Chicago Magazine. The Easton article was a review of Martin Marty and Jerald Brauer's book on Bibfeldt, titled, The Relieved Paradox: Studies in the Theology of Franz Bibfeldt, Eerdmans, 1994. I found a copy of the book, and it is the source of most of the information on Bibfeldt in this paper. (Hereafter, page-numbered items in parentheses will be taken from the Marty and Brauer book).

Franz Joseph Haydn Martin Luther Bibfeldt, "... so named in order to provide a variety of stage names for anticipated musical and theological careers..." (p.28), was a theologian mainly known by only a handful of Divinity scholars, although, in his time, he has been acknowledged and feted, one might say, by people such as Charles Kuralt, Richard Daley, and even the 1971 Playboy Playmate.

Although, as Martin Marty says, "The concept of an ordered Bibfeldt is oxymoronic." (p.xii), I shall try to mention a few of the high points of his life, and, "...in the case of inconsistencies and contradictions, ... the reader should know that they are ...all as correct as each other ." (p.3).

Bibfeldt went to the University of Bern to study church history, after failing as a gymnast. His first scholarly article was "How to Get More Out of Speaking in Tongues." He moved on, apparently, and received his doctoral degree in 1929 from the University of

Worms. His doctoral thesis was "The Problem of the Year Zero," which was ill-received and never published. He got his degree as a D.D.T. - Doctor of Digressive Theology. He was invited, on the strength of his "Speaking in Tongues" article, to teach at the University of Graustark.

As for his publication history, his papers are now currently residing in the Special Collections of the Regenstein Library at the University of Chicago. (p.xi). Among these are: his best-known pamphlet, "Veilleicht?," a response to Karl Barth's "Nein!", his most famous translated work, The Relieved Paradox, Howard Press, 1951, and his last work, Magnum Opus. Search for his The Relieved Paradox, although it should be in the main stacks, shows that it has always been checked out when needed for citation.

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To very briefly summarize Bibfeldt's religious thought, "The words that best characterize the thought of [Bibfeldt] are 'be relevant,' 'adapt,' 'accom^Modate,' 'adjust,' 'compromise,' 'come to terms with,' and the like." (p.4).

For more details of his career, achievements, and history of advancements, please refer to the Marty and Brauer work, but I must note that the highlight of his scholarship was reported by Robert M. Grant in that book:

The peak of his career seems to have been achieved around 1969, when he was flown to Chicago by misguided students who supposed that his theology as expressed at that time would help them in their attempt to take over the Divinity School. When he announced his intention of lecturing in German, much of his prospective audience vanished. (p.15)

He was first cited in a scholarly work in 1947 in a course paper by Robert Howard Clausen at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, which was then picked up on by Jerald Brauer, and he began to be as well-liked as he is today.

There is a partial bibliography of Bibfeldt in The Unrelieved

Paradox, pages 178-180. Among others, including the so-called Ur-Bibfeldt essay, by Marty, a biography of the scholar appears on page 172 of The Unrelieved Paradox.

Bibfeldt's significance for scholarly communication is that he "... is 'about' Proteanism... It is about being able to affirm and negate, to change. Scholars of Bibfeldt, by studying him carefully, have been able to track one of the main elements in twentieth century theology. One might ask: how could one be a Barthian ("God as Wholly Other") one year, a death-of-God theologian the next, and a Barthian again a year later? Why is it that so many of the theologians who were on the far left in the late 1960s turned to the right in the 1980s? Bibfeldtians know: it is the Zeitgeist, the spirit of the times, to whose whistlings many theologians dance. Bibfeldt is a virtuoso in the theological art of making things come out right, or changing his sails to meet the winds, of saving face after it has been slapped by shifts in fashion." (p.xii). That is, Bibfeldt is significant because he inspires through satire, by showing us ourselves.

*Great job of digging!
And charmingly written.*