FRANZ BIBFELDT: THEOLOGIAN FOR THE 1970s

In Tribute on His Seventy-Fifth Birthday and to Recognize His Introduction to America Twenty-Five Years Ago

Franz Bibfeldt was born in the early morning hours of Nov. 1, 1897 at Sage-Hast bei Groszenkneten, Oldenburg, Niedersachsen, Germany and was baptized later the same day. His birth was one day premature, since he was conceived on February 2 after a Candlemas party. His father, Friedrich Bibfeldt happened to be home that day and evening at a time when he was travelling to represent Friedrich Naumann during the latter's efforts to establish the Nationalsoziale Verein. This meant that the father was a Protestant Christian, a Liberal, a Democrat, and a non-Marxian socialist--certainly the proper background for the future theologian.

The baptism occurred on the birth-date, November 1, because that was All Saints Day, dedicated to "all the apostles, martyrs, confessors and all the just and perfect who are at rest." Franz's parents did not want to offend any of the saints--hence their effort to please all of them by choosing this date for their son's christening. This willingness to please everybody was a personality trait the parents passed on to their son, and also served him well for his chosen calling.
Not much is known of a biographical character, but before that little bit is detailed, it is important to establish Bibfeldt's central position, since he is not widely recognized in America. To the heart of it: his is known as the theology of "both/and," based on the suggestion that it is possible for the contemporary theologian to be relevant to everything and to adapt to anything. Something of this thinker's position is evident from the title of his best-known pamphlet; within a decade after Karl Barth had written one called Nein! (No!), Bibfeldt with Vielleicht (Perhaps!) responded.

Bibfeldt, having studied the history of the subject intensely, defines theology as "the art of making things come out right." His motto is Respondeo Ergo Sum, "I respond, therefore I am;" this phrase styles him perfectly for the role we have designated him, "theologian for the 1970s." The Bibfeldt family coat of arms shows the god Proteus rampant on a weathervane, an excellent symbol for the 1970s. One should recall that Proteus was the herdsman of the many seals which belonged to Poseidon, the sea-god. "He hated to prophesy and in order to avoid it he would change his shape, appearing as a lion, a dragon or even fire. Ordinarily he looked like an old, old man." The motto on the arms corresponds to the one Bibfeldt chose personally; it reads, "I dance to the tune that is played"—an old Spanish proverb.

Bibfeldt's thesis is that the theologian should and can reconcile everything to everything. "If God can do it, why can't we?" he asked. This thought occurred to him
as a student while he pondered the ejaculation of Eunomius, the fourth-century bishop of Cyzicus and patron of so many subsequent theologians, "I know God as well as He knows Himself." The man whom we honor now consolidated his viewpoint in the best-known of his translated works, *The Relieved Paradox* (Howard Press, 1951). The words which best characterize the thought of this Sic et Non man are "be relevant," "adapt," "accommodate," "adjust," "compromise," "come to terms with," and the like.

The admirable consistency of Bibfeldt's application of these less-than-original principles has occasioned some of the attention given him. He likes to quote Archilochus: "The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing." But, while he is first of all the hedgehog since he knows "one big thing" about the nature of much of the theological enterprise, he is also the fox, knowing "many things." He has, therefore, commented on many subjects and as these comments become better known there is no doubt that he will become a household word. After only twenty-five years of exposure to America, he has already attracted several followers.

Details of his life are meagre, though more may be known after the interview of him by Howard Hughes appears in a popular American magazine. We do know that in his home town he joined the Turnverein "Gut Heil," "good health." This may have seemed a strange choice, since the Turners were and are a semi-anti-clerical semi-secret semi-athletic society. But Bibfeldt has always
been attracted to entities which we characterize with the prefix "semi-" and, in any case, it was his nature to "play both sides of the street." He became an expert equilibrist and tightrope walker and was an excellent gymnast on the balance beams. But ultimately he was to be disgraced and to turn from athletics. The German Turners all tried to get duelling-scars to match those of their militaristic contemporaries in the university fraternities. When Bibfeldt's turn came, it happened that he jumped just as his opponent swung for his cheek, and the young athlete was cut at a place which he was never able to show to the public. It is thought that this event led him to write the famous essay "Empathy with the Circumcised," the article which later induced James Robinson to classify him in the "empathist" school of later Heideggerians and may have stood behind his long record of good relations with the Jews, from his sanctuary in Switzerland through the Nazi period.

Having failed at the Turnverein, Bibfeldt was seventeen years old. It was 1914, and war was brewing; soon he would be in the military. W. H. Auden's poem about the "unknown citizen" perfectly characterized him: "Our researchers into Public Opinion are content that he held the proper opinions for the time of year/ When there was peace, he was for peace, when there was war, he
went." Bibfeldt went to Switzerland; for that reason he came to be known as a pacifist theologian. Having failed at athletics and having avoided the military, there was not much for him to do, so he went to the university of Bern to study church history. In order to balance the reputation he was gaining for arrogance during the time when Eunomius was his model, he chose to think of himself as humble and called himself "Exiguus."

Reading Cassiodorus one day—reading Cassiodorus is the kind of thing church history students did in those times—he came across another 'Exiguus,' in this case Dionysius Exiguus, the sixth century Scythian monk who did much work on the Christian calendar. This serendipitous discovery led Bibfeldt to write his doctoral thesis on "The Problem of the Year Zero."

He came to be disturbed over the fact that, as the Encyclopedia Britannica says, "chronologers admit no year between 1 B.C. and A.D. 1." The man who wanted to reconcile all subjects and to make things come out right did not believe it fair to move the calendar two years when really only one had passed. In the course of this work he became so adapted to thinking in terms of "one year earlier," that he has been one year off for many events. For all we know, he may have been here a year ago today or will be here a year from today for this festive observance!
The thesis was not well-received and was never published. The years were passing and this great man had not found himself. Then he learned of the fact that theologians could entertain the coincidentia oppositorum, the "coincidence of opposites;" a new discipline and vocation lay ahead of him. Athletics, the military, church history—none of these fields permitted him to excel. He became a theologian, devoting himself to epistemology. It was his contention that it "makes no difference whether something is known or not-known, because knowing and not-knowing both are dimensions of the same faculty, the knowing-not-knowing faculty."

His ability to speak this way made him popular with the followers of Martin Heidegger, and for some time he attended conferences of the Heideggerian theologians. However, when he contended that the geschicklich ("fateful") and geschichtlich ("historic") were identical, he was excluded and entered his silent years. We know that he wrote and was for some time a parish pastor, but it is his through his writings that he gained what measure of fame has come to him, culminating in *The Relieved Paradox*.

Since this celebration is being held in Chicago, it might be well to comment on his relations to this city and this university. While he was first cited in a course paper by Robert Howard Clausen in the autumn of 1947 at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, most of the Bibfeldtian lore has lived on at Chicago. Were it not for the attention paid him by Jerald C. Brauer, the first American professional to cite him in a formal lecture,
it is possible that a number of eminent religionists would have overlooked him. Among those introduced by Professor Brauer to Bibfeldt's approach have been Paul Tillich, Helmut Thielicke, Joseph Sittler, Karl Barth, Cardinal Leo-Josef Suenens, and Mircea Eliade; regrettably, his influence has never shown up in their work.

His first trip to America occurred in the early years of the United Nations. It is believed that he gave the United States' U.N. ambassador Warren Austin the suggestion that an Arab-Israeli dispute at the U.N. could be resolved if only the Arab delegates and Israeli delegates would come out with him into the hall to settle the affair "like Christian gentlemen." But the Chicago visit is believed to have occurred on July 1, 1970, the day after Professor Brauer had been Dean of the Divinity School. (Recall that Bibfeldt is often one year off in his commitments). The only evidence we have of that visit was a graffito in the Swift Hall men's room, the epigraph of Bibfeldt's popular book, *The Crooked Way*. It reads, "God grades on the curve."¹

¹This is the place to acknowledge my indebtedness. Most scholarly papers—and the reader can tell this is a scholarly paper because now it has a footnote—apprise others of the authors' debts to the Guggenheim Foundation or the Fulbright program. I would like to thank the University of Chicago Buildings and Grounds department for leaving the graffito there for many months until it was brought to my attention.
The only time Bibfeldt is known to have referred to a member of the Chicago faculty in print occurred when he reviewed Prof. Robert M. Grant's *U-Boats Destroyed*. In that review Bibfeldt argued that "destroyed" was a too radical concept; since he had lived in Switzerland, he was sure that his criticism was not based in chauvinism; but Bibfeldt would have preferred *U-Boats Damaged*. Not finding his supporters at Swift Hall on that July day—indeed, finding no one in the Divinity School in mid-summer—he went to the Urban Training Center, since he had long sought Emerging Structures of Viable Ministry, and "took the plunge." This was a UTC program which called for its students to be on their own without funds or identity papers for a week in Chicago.

Through a set of circumstances too complicated to describe here, the plunge took him to Chicago's third world-renowned theological locale, the mansion of Hugh Hefner. This accident suited Franz Bibfeldt well, since he had always wanted to meet Bishop John A. T. Robinson or Harvey Cox, but neither of them were there that week. He did get to be friendly with one of the bunnies, even though she found his writings difficult. "Another theologian who stayed here left behind a book called *Peter*, by Oscar Cullmann. I tried to read that, and it was difficult. Franz, you are the hardest thing I have come up against since Cullmann's *Peter*."

It is known that Bibfeldt later went to Esalen, where he read Norman O. Brown's writings on "polymorphous perversity." Desiring to be relevant to this and now
having found his goal, the place "where the action was," he went on to develop a variation of the Brown theme. (Theologians rarely plagiarize; they usually adapt themes.) Bibfeldt favored "polyperverse morphology." A reviewer of his paper on this subject was later to say, "Baron von Hügel once said, 'I kiss my daughter not only because I love her but in order to love her.' Bibfeldt would kiss his daughter because he is a dirty old man." Bibfeldt, by the way, never had a daughter, so far as we know; we do know that he did not marry. While in California, he also devoted himself to a study of Charles Schulz' work, to which another Chicagoan, Robert Short had drawn him. Bibfeldt always favored the Schulzian concept of "the wishy-washy," a phrase that loses something in translation ("saft- und kraft-loS, läppisch, geringfügig"). The famed Howard Hughes interview for Mr. Hefner is also believed to have occurred at this time, but no other record of Bibfeldt's second American visit is available to us.

While it is not possible to give the content of Bibfeldt's protean thought on an occasion such as this, something should be said about its manner, style, and relation to other modern theology. Eunomius and Dinnysus Exiguus were left behind. "Historical theology takes too long to write," said Bibfeldt after he finished both his dissertation and his Habilitationsschrift. They took so long, in fact, that he finally chose to dedicate them after the long scholarly sit to St. Fiacre, patron
of hemorrhoid-sufferers.

Bibfeldt turned to the moderns when he read Neander to the effect that Friedrich Daniel Schleiermacher was the true shaper of modern theology, and that his was both a **Gefuehlstheologie** and a "pectoral theology." (*Pectus est quod facit theologum*). Favoring the pectoral approach, he read further when he heard that Schleiermacher "is neither for absoluteness nor against it." The Schleiermacherian concept of religion as the feeling of absolute dependence was too much for Bibfeldt's läppisch-approach, and he revised this to "relative dependence."

Soren Kierkegaard disturbed him most. One would have expected that Bibfeldt's reply to Kierkegaard's Either/Or would have been Both/And. But that would have represented too drastic a choice for the man who elevated the saftlos to high status. His treatise was called Either/Or and Both/And. Having heard that Kierkegaard was always haunted by the fact that his father had always been haunted by the fact that he, the father, had once stood on a heath in Jutland and had cursed God, Bibfeldt decided to even things out; he went to Jutland and cursed the heath.

He agreed with Adolf Harnack concerning the Hegelians at Tübingen: "The work of the Tübingen School was an episode: in which we have learned much, but after which we must unlearn more." Bibfeldt virtually made unlearning a life-passion. He found little in Albrecht Ritschl, another nineteenth century giant. Asked what he thought of Ritschl's response, "Where I find mystery, I say nothing about it,"
Bibfeldt as a theologian of mystery—some would say of bewilderment—replied, "Where I find Ritschl, I say nothing about him."

Having heard of Ludwig Feuerbach's materialist anti-theology and its condensation in the phrase, "Man ist was er iszt," man is what he eats, he recalled the New Testament saying about that which issues forth from a man as characterizing the man, and developed an anthropology parallel to Feuerbach's in his famous essay translated into English under the title Scatology and Eschatology.

Bibfeldt was not content with Karl Barth's adoption of the Kierkegaardian concept of the "infinite qualitative difference" between time and eternity, between God and man, and spoke of the "relative quantitative similarity" between them. He knew that Barth's famous commentary on Romans had made theological history, and was told of his fellow Swiss' recall of that event: "As I look back upon my course, I seem to myself as one who, ascending the dark staircase of a church tower and trying to steady himself, reached for the bannister, but got hold of the bell rope instead." Bibfeldt's response: "Hold to the bannister. Given his attack on Barth in The Relieved Paradox, it is a sign of Barth's graciousness that he so enjoyed the work of Bibfeldt, who seemed to represent no threat to him.

Americans may wonder about his attitude toward American theology. For example, what was his opinion of "the Chicago School," of process thought, of theology which depicted an evolving "God? This suited Bibfeldt fine, but he also
wanted to give equal time to the opposition, as was his wont, and quoted Dean W. R. Inge, "You forget, said the Devil with a twinkle, that I have been evolving too."

He was attracted to Unitarianism because he had read of Ralph Waldo Emerson's dismissal of it for its "pale negations." Bibfeldt thought there was nothing wrong with "pale," but wanted negations to be balanced with affirmations.

Attracted to American political theology, he favored the late Senator Everett M. Dirksen of Illinois, since he could find no record of that Senator's ever having taken a firm and consistent position on anything. But that was mere politics, and he was interested in civil religion. Thus he came across Dwight D. Eisenhower; hearing that Nelson Algren called Eisenhower "that man who melted like cotton candy in the mouth of history," Bibfeldt asked that this pleasant saying be his own epitaph one day. Who better than Eisenhower had summarized so well the "adaptation theology" when he had said that government must be "founded in a deeply felt religious faith—and I don't care what it is." Bibfeldt was not to be so happy with American civil religion again until the ascendancy of Richard M. Nixon, who was equally positionless. It should be increasingly clear why we nominated Bibfeldt "the theologian for the 1970s."

So far as formal modern theology is concerned, he liked some of the radicals of the 1960s, notably Thomas J. J. Altizer's position on the coincidentia oppositorum, since it enabled Bibfeldt to speak on both sides of all issues and still seem to be taking a stand. His first reading of
Robinson's *Honest to God* impressed him, since Robinson wanted to replace a God "up there" or "out there" with a God in the dimension of depth, which must mean "down here" or "in here." Bibfeldt worked out the idea of "God on the average," more or less transcendent. On Robinson he was later to paraphrase a line of Peter de'vries, "On the surface, he's profound. Deep down, he's shallow."

Having read the two best-known books of Harvey Cox and having been told that the theses of the two were contradictory, he was asked, "Is Secular City or *The Feast of Fools* correct?" Bibfeldt's answer was "Yes!" This oracular style stood him in good stead during the death of God controversy. When asked "Is God dead?" it was he who answered, "God—Is." By the way, not having come across the October, 1965 issues of the New York *Times* and *Time* magazine until April 7, 1966, he almost missed out on the Death of God movement, so he had only one day in which to become relevant to it, since the April 8, 1966 *Time* cover story on God marked the end of the movement in the sense of a phenomenon to which Bibfeldt felt the need to adapt.

On Roman Catholic thought he has had much to say, but space permits little opportunity to develop it here. I am told that Father Andrew Greeley is researching the Catholic counterparts to these Bibfeldtian themes. Bibfeldt has shown interest in the workings of the hierarchy, and has generally liked the American ecclesiastical style. He felt, on the basis of having read a chess rule book, that most bishops are living up to their obligations: "A bishop can
move diagonally only." He has commented on the burning issue of celibacy, and made a constructive proposal. "I think Roman Catholicism should keep celibacy—but should make it a little easier for everybody."

The "new morality" and situation ethics pleased him most, and he has been grateful to Joseph Fletcher for resurrecting St. Augustine's maxim for ethics, "Love with care and then what you will, do," especially when he heard it in Latin: "Dilige et quod vis, fac." "I like that!"

H. R. Mackintosh has said that "a great man condemns the world to the task of explaining him." We Bibfeldtians gladly take on the explanatory task to which we have been condemned by this great man. What makes this task possible is Bibfeldt's consistency. When the theological world was neo-orthodox, he adapted himself to it. When theologians half a generation later all wanted to accommodate themselves to the secular, his weathervane turned him there. When they moved toward the new religious enthusiasms and transcendence, Proteus as a symbol came again to his rescue. Now in the 1970s, an age of anomie and acedia and apathy, his time seems certainly to have come, and he will be relevant to still another age.

F. Scott Fitzgerald once said that "the test of a first rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function." On those terms, Franz Bibfeldt is the genius of our time, the proper theologian for tomorrow.
Those of us who have both followed and led the career of Franz Bibfeldt, who have both respected and disspised, both read and ignored, his work, are both appreciative and saddened by your appearance here today, yesterday and tomorrow. We both thank and feel that both anything and everything (and even nothing) which brings both greater fame and infamy to our beloved Bibfeldt is to be both cherished and disregarded. In both the long and the short of it, therefore, we must say both thanks and no-thanks.

It is the custom that great men of the academy are often honored by the publication of a festschrift—and so it is that those of us who have stood in awe of the achievement of Franz Bibfeldt have a place in this program.

The publication of the festschrift has been an extremely difficult task because the relief paradox requires, of course, that virtually all positions and perspectives be included. Yet, with the current state of the publishing industry, no publisher was willing to take on that task. In other words, we were in need of the utilization of the relief paradox itself. We really are quite proud of the results of our efforts. We have contributions from, in the arts: Sir Walter Scott, Alfred Lord Tennyson, William Wordsworth, Robert Browning, Jonathan Swift, Robert Burns, Verdi, Kipling, Byron, and King Lear. From the world of the bench we have contributions from Oliver Wendell Holmes and Louis Bandeis; from politics: Prime Minister William Gladstone, President James Buchanan, Aaron Burr, Alexander Hamilton, Benjamin Franklin, Winston Churchill and President Warren Harding. Our only regret was that we could not get a theologian to make a contribution. Yet with all these contributions we have a book of exactly 150 pages.

So at this time,
So at this time it gives me great pleasure to present to you a festschrift in honor of Franz Bibfeldt—requesting that you give it to him whenever you see him next.

The title—as I uncover the original copy—is appropriate more to Bibfeldt's character than to the many subjects to which he was drawn—but better we capture the husk than the essence (to recall Bibfeldt's own response to Harnack), THE SENSUOUS DIRTY OLD MAN, which in its own way is not so much a paradox, but undoubtedly a relief.
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Not much is known of a biographical character, but before that little bit is detailed, it is important to establish Bibfeldt's central position, since he is not widely recognized in America. To the heart of it: his is known as the theology of "both/and," based on the suggestion that it is possible for the contemporary theologian to be relevant to everything and to adapt to anything. Something of this thinker's position is evident from the title of his best-known pamphlet; within a decade after Karl Barth had written one called *Nein!* (No!), Bibfeldt with *Vielleicht* (Perhaps!)

Bibfeldt, having studied the history of the subject intensely, defines theology as "the art of making things come out right." His motto is *Respondeo Ergo Sum*, "I respond, therefore I am;" this phrase styles him perfectly for the role we have designated him, "theologian for the 1970s." The Bibfeldt family coat of arms shows the god Proteus rampant on a weathervane, an excellent symbol for the 1970s. One should recall that Proteus was the herdsman of the many seals which belonged to Poseidon, the sea-god. "He hated to prophesy and in order to avoid it he would change his shape, appearing as a lion, a dragon or even fire. Ordinarily he looked like an old, old man." The motto on the arms corresponds to the one Bibfeldt chose personally; it reads, "I dance to the tune that is played"—an old Spanish proverb.

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Through a set of circumstances too complicated to describe here, the plunge took him to Chicago's third world-renowned theological locale, the mansion of Hugh Hefner. This accident suited Franz Bibfeldt well, since he had always wanted to meet Bishop John A. T. Robinson or Harvey Cox, but neither of them were there that week. He did get to be friendly with one of the bunnies, even though she found his writings difficult. "Another theologian who stayed here left behind a book called *Peter*, by Oscar Cullmann. I tried to read that, and it was difficult. Franz, you are the hardest thing I have come up against since Cullmann's *Peter*.

It is known that Bibfeldt later went to Esalen, where he read Norman O. Brown's writings on "polymorphous perversity." Desiring to be relevant to this and now
having found his goal, the place "where the action was," he went on to develop a variation of the Brown theme. (Theologians rarely plagiarize; they usually adapt themes). Bibfeldt favored "poly perverse morphology." A reviewer of his paper on this subject was later to say, "Baron von Hügel once said, 'I kiss my daughter not only because I love her but in order to love her.' Bibfeldt would kiss his daughter because he is a dirty old man." Bibfeldt, by the way, never had a daughter, so far as we know; we do know that he did not marry. While in California, he also devoted himself to a study of Charles Schulz's work, to which another Chicagoan, Robert Short had drawn him. Bibfeldt always favored the Schulzian concept of "the wishy-washy," a phrase that loses something in translation ("saft= und kraft=los, läppisch, geringfügig"). The famed Howard Hughes interview for Mr. Hefner is also believed to have occurred at this time, but no other record of Bibfeldt's second American visit is available to us.

While it is not possible to give the content of Bibfeldt's protean thought on an occasion such as this, something should be said about its manner, style, and relation to other modern theology. Eunomius and Dimnysus Exiguus were left behind. "Historical theology takes too long to write," said Bibfeldt after he finished both his dissertation and his Habilitationsschrift. They took so long, in fact, that he finally chose to dedicate them after the long scholarly sit to St. Fiacre, patron
Bibfeldt turned to the moderns when he read Neander to the effect that Friedrich Daniel Schleiermacher was the true shaper of modern theology, and that his was both a gefuehlstheologie and a "pectoral theology." (Pectus est quod facit theologum). Favoring the pectoral approach, he read further when he heard that Schleiermacher "is neither for absoluteness nor against it." The Schleiermacherian concept of religion as the feeling of absolute dependence was too much for Bibfeldt's läppisch-approach, and he revised this to "relative dependence."

Soren Kierkegaard disturbed him most. One would have expected that Bibfeldt's reply to Kierkegaard's Either/Or would have been Both/And. But that would have represented too drastic a choice for the man who elevated the saftlos to high status. His treatise was called Either/Or and Both/And. Having heard that Kierkegaard was always haunted by the fact that his father had always been haunted by the fact that he, the father, had once stood on a heath in Jutland and had cursed God, Bibfeldt decided to even things out; he went to Jutland and cursed the heath.

He agreed with Adolf Harnack concerning the Hegelians at Tübingen: "The work of the Tübingen School was an episode: in which we have learned much, but after which we must unlearn more." Bibfeldt virtually made unlearning a life-passion. He found little in Albrecht Ritschl, another nineteenth century giant. Asked what he thought of Ritschl's response, "Where I find mystery, I say nothing about it,"
Bibfeldt as a theologian of mystery—some would say of bewilderment—replied, "Where I find Ritschl, I say nothing about him."

Having heard of Ludwig Feuerbach's materialist anti-theology and its condensation in the phrase, "Man ist was er iszt," man is what he eats, he recalled the New Testament saying about that which issues forth from a man as characterizing the man, and developed an anthropology parallel to Feuerbach's in his famous essay translated into English under the title Scatology and Eschatology.

Bibfeldt was not content with Karl Barth's adoption of the Kierkegaardian concept of the "infinite qualitative difference" between time and eternity, between God and man, and spoke of the "relative quantitative similarity" between them. He knew that Barth's famous commentary on Romans had made theological history, and was told of his fellow Swiss' recall of that event: "As I look back upon my course, I seem to myself as one who, ascending the dark staircase of a church tower and trying to steady himself, reached for the bannister, but got hold of the bell rope instead." Bibfeldt's response: "Hold to the bannister. Given his attack on Barth in The Relieved Paradox, it is a sign of Barth's graciousness that he so enjoyed the work of Bibfeldt, who seemed to represent no threat to him.

Americans may wonder about his attitude toward American theology. For example, what was his opinion of "the Chicago School," of process thought, of theology which depicted an evolving "od? This suited Bibfeldt fine, but he also
wanted to give equal time to the opposition, as was his wont, and quoted Dean W. R. Inge, "You forget, said the Devil with a twinkle, that I have been evolving too." He was attracted to Unitarianism because he had read of Ralph Waldo Emerson's dismissal of it for its "pale negations." Bibfeldt thought there was nothing wrong with "pale," but wanted negations to be balanced with affirmations.

Attracted to American political theology, he favored the late Senator Everett M. Dirksen of Illinois, since he could find no record of that Senator's ever having taken a firm and consistent position on anything. But that was mere politics, and he was interested in civil religion. Thus he came across Dwight D. Eisenhower; hearing that Nelson Algren called Eisenhower "that man who melted like cotton candy in the mouth of history," Bibfeldt asked that this pleasant saying be his own epitaph one day. Who better than Eisenhower had summarized so well the "adaptation theology" when he had said that government must be "founded in a deeply felt religious faith—and I don't care what it is." Bibfeldt was not to be so happy with American civil religion again until the ascendancy of Richard M. Nixon, who was equally positionless. It should be increasingly clear why we nominated Bibfeldt "the theologian for the 1970s."

So far as formal modern theology is concerned, he liked some of the radicals of the 1960s, notably Thomas J. J. Altizer's position on the coincidentia oppositorum, since it enabled Bibfeldt to speak on both sides of all issues and still seem to be taking a stand. His first reading of
Robinson's *Honest to God* impressed him, since Robinson wanted to replace a God "up there" or "out there" with a God in the dimension of depth, which must mean "down here" or "in here." Bibfeldt worked out the idea of "God on the average," more or less transcendent. On Robinson he was later to paraphrase a line of Peter de Vries, "On the surface, he's profound. Deep down, he's shallow."

Having read the two best-known books of Harvey Cox and having been told that the theses of the two were contradictory, he was asked, "*Is Secular City* or *The Feast of Fools* correct?" Bibfeldt's answer was "Yes!" This oracular style stood him in good stead during the death of God controversy. When asked "Is God dead?" it was he who answered, "God---Is." By the way, not having come across the October, 1965 issues of the *New York Times* and *Time* magazine until April 7, 1966, he almost missed out on the Death of God movement, so he had only one day in which to become relevant to it, since the April 8, 1966 *Time* cover story on God marked the end of the movement in the sense of a phenomenon to which Bibfeldt felt the need to adapt.

On Roman Catholic thought he has had much to say, but space permits little opportunity to develop it here. I am told that Father Andrew Greeley is researching the Catholic counterparts to these Bibfeldtian themes. He has shown interest in the workings of the hierarchy, and has generally liked the American ecclesiastical style. He felt, on the basis of having read a chess rule book, that most bishops are living up to their obligations: "A bishop can
move diagonally only." He has commented on the burning issue of celibacy, and made a constructive proposal. "I think Roman Catholicism should keep celibacy—but should make it a little easier for everybody."

The "new morality" and situation ethics pleased him most, and he has been grateful to Joseph Fletcher for resurrecting St. Augustine's maxim for ethics, "Love with care and then what you will, do," especially when he heard it in Latin: "Dilige et quod vis, fac." "I like that!"

H. R. Mackintosh has said that "a great man condemns the world to the task of explaining him." We Bibfeldtians gladly take on the explanatory task to which we have been condemned by this great man. What makes this task possible is Bibfeldt's consistency. When the theological world was neo-orthodox, he adapted himself to it. When theologians half a generation later all wanted to accommodate themselves to the secular, his weathervane turned him there. When they moved toward the new religious enthusiasms and transcendence, Proteus as a symbol came again to his rescue. Now in the 1970s, an age of anomie and accedie and apathy, his time seems certainly to have come, and he will be relevant to still another age.

F. Scott Fitzgerald once said that "the test of a first rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function." On those terms, Franz Bibfeldt is the genius of our time, the proper theologian for tomorrow.

Martin E. Marty, The Bibfeldt Foundation
The University of Chicago, November 1, 1972
Franz Bibfeldt was asked to be here today but unfortunately he could not do so -- he insisted on staying in St. Louis, saying that every man has his Preus. Somehow he got the idea that we had asked him to celebrate the Bicentennial this year and he informed me that in this building we were apparently not so Schnell as we thought. I told him that if we had wanted to ask him to Hitchcock Schnell we would have done so. Perhaps this was one reason for his not being here today. [*we will need note explaining pun on dormitory name] But he did send me at least the outline of his remarks and asked me to bring this message to his friends old and new. He claims he has no enemies; this illusion must be due to advancing years or even to hardening of the arteries.

What he wanted to talk about was what he considered the real heroes of the Revolution, one of whom was his ancestor Martin Bibfeldt. These heroes were not the Yankees or the British, nor even the Hessian whom the British brought with them. They were the quiet Pennsylvania Dutchmen whom the Hessians hired. History has little to tell us about them, and this is why we always need revisionist history or even historical revisionism. Martin Bibfeldt was born in Paradise, Pennsylvania, on February 22, 1732. After getting run out of Paradise at a fairly early age he moved to the nearby town of Intercourse and proceeded to raise a family. In the typical early American manner, failure succeeded failure, and by 1776 he was ready for a declaration of independence. The revolutionary army refused his services. The recruiter told him they "weren’t worth a Continental." Martin thereupon turned loyalist and since he knew
German much better than English, though that’s not saying much, he attached himself to a Hessian regiment that tried to prevent Washington from crossing the Delaware. As we all know from the picture of the man or divine being in the boat, crossing the ice as the British or Hessian dogs pursued, with the red glare of Martin Bibfeldt’s rockets in the background, Washington did cross the Delaware. Bibfeldt surrendered. This was just about 200 years ago. He marked the beginning of Bibfeldt’s revolution that has meant so much in the local histories of eastern Pennsylvania.

Naturally he was soon freed by the colonials, for they noticed that his appetite for Knackwurst, sauerkraut, and even Wiener Schnitzel was a terrible burden on the treasury. Once on his own, he took colonial aptitude tests, and it was discovered that he had an aptitude for absolutely nothing. Once more we find him to be a truly typical early American sage. Moreover his memory was poor. He tried to achieve fame by memorizing things from Dr. Franklin’s thoughts but he could not even get "Early to bed, early to rise" into his head. He claimed to have invented electricity, but people thought he had simply been struck by lightning. He lived on, finally, in the poor house at Lancaster, Pennsylvania, until 1812 when he got out and was shot as he tried to join the British again.

What is the message of Martin Bibfeldt for our trying times? First of all, keep trying. Or, if you are trying enough, you may succeed and you may not. As a matter of fact, his little-known Notebook of 1798 contains exactly these thoughts.

In 1799, however, he was lucky enough to come upon a book of poems and in that year’s notes he inscribed words which his descendent Franz Bibfeldt and, indeed, all worthwhile theologians or administrators were to find meaningful. WHATEVER IS, IS RIGHT. Here is the
essence of Martin Bibfeldt’s theological message, the words not so much Protestant as Popish, that were to overarch hermeneutically and to mesmerize the thought of his successors. **Whatever is, is right** is a thought which has always meant much to Franz Bibfeldt and is surely the essence of whatever we learn here in his name. With it goes the sublime philosophical axiom inculcated by all our professors and most of our students: **Change is decay.** Had Martin Bibfeldt lived to see our university with its absolute devotion to Christianity -- the primitive and pure Christianity of St. Clement and the immortal Phoenix -- he would have gone on to draw the last and most logical conclusion: if **change is decay**, then **Decay is change** -- and this we learn from the story of the Phoenix itself, the central myth of the Christian religion.

I recall the last time I saw Franz Bibfeldt, his quavering lips barely enunciated the basic principles of his ancestors. Whatever is, is right, he said and then he added, with an unexpected declension into modern vulgarism: Tell them to tell it like it is. This is what I have tried to do.

[R.G.'s Bibfeldt address]

"Distinguished colleagues, fun-loving students, if any are present, ladies and gentlemen . . .

The thought of Franz Bibfeldt needs no introduction, or even apology, before an audience like this one. Professor Marty’s inaugural, or memorial, lecture of 1972 surely said all that was worth saying, and more, at the time. With the materials available to him in that year, the command of Jesus to his disciples was obviously applicable, "Let not your right hand know what your left hand is doing." No adequate picture of Bibfeldt was available to scholars at that time. Only the combination of certain letters written by him and certain reports leaked from
government files makes it possible to say what his real contribution to the official renewal has been since about 1933. At that time, you will recall, Bibfeldt was about 36, according to Professor Marty.

I. The Nazi Era

The first invaluable piece of new evidence we possess comes from the files of the American Military Government in Lower Graustark. It is a photograph of a small crowd giving the party salute and in it we definitely see the saturnine countenance of our hero who is standing in the front row. This by itself would not be remarkable. What is more significant is the attached letter which somehow fell into the Americans' hands. "Dearest Leni (the letter is addressed to the movie star Leni Riefenstahl), Adolf has told me that his price for allowing me to see you again is for me to create and lead a movement of theological renewal in the church. Nothing can give me more pleasure, except of course being with you. I have not quite decided what to call the movement, but the word neo-orthodoxy was suggested the other day by Dr. Rosenberg. I admire him tremendously, almost much as I admire the Führer himself. Will you be the first to be renewed? I count on our date on Sunday." No date, no place. Even so, the letter sheds new light, both promising and unpromising, on Bibfeldt.

It is not generally known that in the late Thirties Bibfeldt taught New Testament theology at the University of Graustark. Though he advanced only briefly to the rank of ordinarius, his students, and even some of his colleagues, were well aware of his merits, and although like other New Testament fantasies his new method of Numerologiegeschichte collapsed, it was highly regarded for a time, at least by Party members. In the methodological spectrum it lay
between Schallanalyse and Formgeschichte; indeed, it looked ahead toward other Geschichtes of our time. It involved counting the letters in various New Testament passages, using the presupposition or Ding an sich that to express a theological thought requires no fewer than 40 letters and no more than 50. On this basis Bibfeldt was able to revise much of the rubbish his predecessors had produced. Many of his calculations have survived, chiefly because the OSS thought they might contain a new German cipher.

II. After the War

After the war there were many Germans who thought that perhaps they had been misled by the Party and the Movement. Bibfeldt was among them. He could express himself freely as favoring the French, the British, the Americans, and the Russians. One of his deepest expressions, however, favored none of these powers. It was produced in a time of Angst -- apparently during the Berlin airlift -- and is a sermon preached in a small church in Graustark. The text was taken from the Psalms (75:6): "Neither from the east, nor from the west, nor yet from the South, cometh lifting up." Bibfeldt, with other neo-orthodox theologians of his time, was rather fond of allegorization. This is to say that he used the Bible as he had used Mein Kampf, as a book of spells. And in this verse from the Psalms he found a reference to the 1948 political situation. His people should promote close relations with Scandinavia; lifting up would obviously come from the North if not from East, West or South.

When his applications to teach at Uppsala, Lund, or Aarhus were rejected he turned with renewed vigor to biblical criticism. The most important article in the new period was of course the hermeneutical study of Psalm 75, based no longer on Numerologiegeschichte but on the
theological point that God tells the hermeneut what to think. Having read just a little Pope (not the Roman one), Bibfeldt felt that whatever has been was right; therefore, since he had not received a Scandinavian call he would have to emend the text, however reluctantly. Relying on three magical cylinders from Ur and a gold plate in the British Museum, he decided that the Psalmist must have intended to say this: "Neither from the East nor from the West (Bibfeldt was disenchanted with all the northern powers), nor yet from the North, cometh lifting up." Though only his students accepted the new reading, it was impressive enough to Bibfeldt himself. He decided, like other theologians of his era (E. Peterson, H. Schleier), to wend his way southward and see what possibilities of theological renewal lay in Italy, where one could find Rome aeterna, the Ecclesia and theologia perennis, perhaps even a Pafa amabilis.

III. Romeward

Bibfeldt arrived in Rome too soon. A few Jesuits, however, recognized his potential value as a Protestant Trojan horse or, as they liked to put it in order to confuse him, the column of Trojan. His renown as the chameleon of the western world (as Barth called him) or the forerunner of border-line theology (Tillich) or sexy Biebgeldt (Thielicke) means that for almost a decade he lived free of charge in a branch of the Banco di Santo Spirito. He was more welcome in Rome than in Athens, where the Patriarch referred to him as ho loimos ton dusmon (ὁ λοιμὸς τῶν δυσμῶν), or The Pest of the West.

During this time he assiduously studied Italian. The result was that during several papal audiences he was heard expressing himself fluently, with the use of such expressions as "Molto bene," "presto," "pronto," and "prego." Whether or not papal policy was influenced by
Bibfeldt's counsel is hard to say. At the time of the Vatican Council he firmly opposed innovation but advocated reform, thus winning from both sides almost unmitigated contempt. Such is the lot of the Bibfeldts of this world, always misunderstood or, it may be, understood.

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. His lectures in English lost the rest of it. It was not so much how he said it as what he said. Responding to the basic theological crisis produced by Altizer (on the one occasion when Altizer visited Harper Library God appeared to him and said, "I am he who is not"). Bibfeldt boldly proclaimed the past existence or Wasness of God. Since he had spent so much time in Rome he was able to suggest a Latin term, not the esse or essence of the divine nature but its fuisse or fuissence. This dismayed his hearers, few of whom were acquainted with the language involved. Bibfeldt also insisted that the Blik described by another God is deader was a misunderstood Blitz, but his further ramblings about Krieg in relation to this were incomprehensible.

On returning to Rome from Chicago, Bibfeldt felt that it was time for him to begin work on his magnum opus. Certainly it would not be called Entweder/Oder, and Die Beide/Und seemed rather weird. He therefore concluded that it should simply be called Magnum Opus; in addition, a Latin title, he wrongly supposed, might attract Roman Catholic readers. At one point he thought of keeping it anonymous and simply ascribing it to "the apostle of theological renewal," but a publisher with whom he was briefly in contact discouraged him.

The great advance in hermeneutical methodological exactitude which Bibfeldt achieved,
or thought he achieved, was based on neo-syllogistic existentialism. There if I say "God is," I have gone too far; if I say "God is not" I have not gone far enough (or vice versa); therefore I must simply say "God" and start there. Thus "if God, then" leads to the heart of the matter. (This can be rephrased as "if God, so.") From the heart of the matter we go up to the head or down to the feet by asking the precisely phrased question, "if God, so what?" After 330 pages of closely packed metaphysics, physics, metamorphosis, pseudo-morphosis, and the like, Bibfeldt's book comes to an end. A reviewer (it was kindly published) pointed to this fact as perhaps Bibfeldt's supreme achievement.

At the time it was his supreme achievement. A little later, however, The University of Chicago recalled its initial response to his work -- none -- and the faculty concluded that as usual it had failed to recognize real greatness. A committee lost itself in the dank obscurity of Magnum Opus and recommended the unique degree of B.V.M., apparently under the impression that Bibfeldt was a Jesuit. At the convocation there was a little trouble from American Nazis, who came to Rockefeller Chapel to honor a genuine, if ex-, Party member, but in an impromptu address Bibfeldt rose to the occasion. "During the Hitler years," he said, "I was not exactly a martyr, but on the other hand I was not firmly loyal to the Nazi party. The method of both/and set forth in my book of neo-syllogistic existentialism fully justifies my position, at least in so far as it is close to that of Heidegger and the other revolutionary saints of our time." At this point even the bland collegiate Gothic of Rockefeller had experienced more than it could tolerate. That is why the Chapel has lain in ruins from that day to this."
The Quest for the Historical Bibfelt

Throughout the recent quest for the historical Bibfelt, the discussion has been marred by the universal misunderstanding of taking "Bibfelt" to be a name rather than a title. Although the point is so obvious that it should no require argument at all, Bibfelt scholars have a remarkable ability to avoid the obvious. Therefore, it is the purpose of this essay to demonstrate once and for all that Bibfelt cannot be considered as Franz's last name, but is rather a religious title given to him in the course of his life.

A brief remark on methodology is necessary at this point. In order to demonstrate this thesis, an hermeneutical method of some sophistication is needed, a type of demythologizing, whereby we may understand and re-express in intelligible and meaningful contemporary language the true meaning of the source texts. The warrents for this are too obvious to be cited: in particular this method is required by the nature of the texts themselves as shown by Franz's own use of Numerologiegeschichte.

To proceed, then, with the demythologizing. First, let us consider the refusal of the United States Department of State to grant Franz a visa to attend to last Bibfelt Lecture. They officially cited Bibfelt's activities in the theological reform movement which he undertook for the Nazis during World War II as the reason for their rejection of the application. There were also rumors current at the time that the rejection was actually due to an unfortunate incident involving Bibfelt's wife and an official of the State Department. The mythological element in both of these "reasons" is patent: the real reason
for the rejection is that the State Department could find no evidence of a person named Franz Bibfelt (there being, of course no such person, any more than there is a person named Elizabeth Queen), but they were reluctant to admit this because of the high esteem that Bibfelt's works were apparently held at the University of Chicago. (It has also been suggested that Bibfelt's popularit here was a contributing factor in the State Department decision.) In any case, one cannot grant a visa to a non-existent person, and to grant one to a person with only a first name is equally unthinkable.

A second instance which supports my thesis is to be found in the manuscript tradition of Franz's last work, Magnum Opus. Although the title page of the printed edition cites the author as "Franz Bibfelt", the original manuscript — the autograph, as recently demonstrated by Adolf Polanski, SJ — bears only the name "Franz". This clearly shows that Franz himself did not use "Bibfelt" as a name, and further that it was in common use as a title by the time of the publication of Magnum Opus.

The third and definitive instance involves the final pericopae of the G-source: that during Franz's first (and, as far as we can tell, only) visit to Chicago, he spoke in Rockefeller Chapel. His words on the occasion were so intolerable as to cause the destruction of the Chapel, which the G-source relates, "lies in ruins to this day". This enigmatic story is certainly original, as it satisfies the criteria of dissimilarity, coherence and single attestation. Archeological excavations on the cite of Rockefeller indicate that while other structures have occupied the cite, the Chapel itself
has never suffered anything approaching ruin. Thus several
things may be meant by the mythic language of this story:
the intent may be to show the power of the historical Franz's
words, extending even to the physical universe. Or the story
may show how Franz fulfills the office of Bibfelt, through
the Bibfeltian conquest of all forms of extreme moderation,
the latter symbolized by the regular Rockefeller preaching,
or, more likely, by the collegiate Gothic of the building.

These instances could be multiplied ad nauseum (and prob-
amably will be), by applying the hermeneutical method to the
various stories and sayings found in our two main sources,
the Bibfelt According to Marty, and the G-source. But it
should be clear, even from this brief exposition, that Bibfelt
is not a name but a title. This leads ineluctably to the
questions of the meaning of the title, and its source.

For the answer to these questions, we must turn to an
article by Ludwig Amadeus Strauss, published at Tübingen in
the Zeitschrift für Geisteswissenschftliche Studium (CCCXIII:2;
pp. 4-67) in 1821. (This obscure but significant theological
journal was available at Regenstein until sometime last fall,
when it seems to have disappeared: I have been able to uncover
no other trace of it.-- but this is a problem not unfamiliar
to Bibfelt scholars.) Strauss in this seminal article dis-
cusses the evolution and history of a syncretic religious sect
known as the Anophilists. The sect still survived in Tübingen
at the time of his article. It was named after its founder,
Anophile, an early Medieval figure about whom little is known.
Since the sect was certainly heretical from the start, the
absence of sources from this period is hardly surprising. A resurgence in its vitality was felt with the influence of the alchemists, both Islamic and Christian. The foremost figure during this period was the alchemist, Peristalsis. As an expression of the Anophilist identification with the downtrodden (and anyone else who agreed with them), they took Pope Joan as their patronness, and Peristalsis began the movement to have her canonized.¹

The Anophilists were remotely Christian and broadly tolerant. Apparently, their numbers included such diverse luminaries as Pope Julius II, Luther and Tetzel, Francis Bacon, Oliver Cromwell, Schleiermacher (in his earliest days at the university), and Ben Franklin. Theologically, they accepted anything which did not appear to commit them to something — and held it passionately. (Already the affinities with Franz become evident!) Their credo was: "Anything and everything — sometimes." But their central original contribution to the history of theology is of special note for our present concern: it is the understanding of the Bibium feltum. This term refers to a figure — whether human or not is unknown — who will mark the end of the Age (or, according to some sources the beginning), presumably by succeeding in the attempt to have Pope Joan canonized. The derivation of the title remains obscure, even after Strauss's pioneering work. The most generally accepted theory at present is that Bibium is derived from the verb bibo, to imbibe, and feltum is a copist's error which should read feltrum, meaning felt. Then the title would be derived from the alchemical attempt to turn felt into gold by lining a silver cup with felt and then filling it with beer.
(Remember that the cult is German in origin.) If the attempt failed, one could always drink the beer. At the time of Peristalsis (considered by some the "second founder" of the Anophilists, by others as the perverter of the essence of Anophilism), drinking beer from a felt-lined cup seems to have become part of the cultic observance of the Anophilists.

Whatever its origin, the Bibium feltum remained a vital part of Anophilist theology down to the time of Strauss, and, as we shall see presently, beyond. Although it was, as we have seen, originally a steno symbol, Bibium feltum was used in the 19th century as a tensive symbol by the Anophilists of that time. This was due no doubt to its greater existential adequacy in the context of the emerging modernity. It was this usage which allowed its application to the historical Franz, as it appears in the German form (rather than the Latin), Bibfelt.

Although in the absence of an adequate monographic literature our account of the development must remain tentative, what happened was apparently this: Franz's theology, teaching, work, and above all, his life, appealed to the Anophilists in Tübingen as the incarnation of all they had ever imagined. Franz became directly acquainted with them during his stay in Tübingen. It is said that he instantly recognized his affinity with the sect, and therefore rejected membership. However, his later involvement with the curia during his stay in Rome proved the final factor in his qualification as Bibfelt: here was the means for fulfilling the eschatological hope of having Joan canonized. Franz, in the
hope of getting a greater circulation for his forthcoming Magnum Opus, readily agreed, and even allowed the addition of the title "Bibfelt", to appear on the title page of this work.

In retrospect, all that Franz ever wrote can be seen as Anophilist: his syncretism in particular, as well as his incomparable ability to take a stand on almost nothing. His Numerologiegeschichte was the result of his hermeneutical method applied to his alchemical sources — and it had about as much success.

There remains for future research to distinguish the kernal of the historical Franz from the historic, Anophilist Bibfelt, for the latter is but the expression of the perspectival or faith-image of the former, seen through the expectation of the Bibium fultum. I must leave such questions to future scholarship. Foremost among these great theological questions — like Franz's own perennial preoccupation with the question of whether Adam had a navel — is the crucial question of whether Franz ever had a last name.

David Ousley
March 31, 1976

In the late Middle Ages, Joan was thought to have become pope having spent her life masquerading as a man. She was discovered only when she gave birth to a son during a procession to the Lateran. She died shortly thereafter.
THE QUEST FOR THE HISTORICAL BIBFELDT

Until recently most of the readily accessible resources—for here we must exclude some Bibfeldtian graffiti on the alley exit at Jimmy's—on the life and works of Franz Bibfeldt were the secondary complications, I mean compilations, conveniently labelled as the M and G sources. Although the two sources are useful to the study herein pursued, so I have been told, the quest for the historical Bibfeldt cannot and will not be bound by the dated and insufficient method of source criticism. (Here I might also add that I don't really know whether the myopic Marty and the grabby Grant sources can be trusted.) Consequently, in my quest for the historical Bibfeldt I have focused on his primary works, and I have employed the methods of the most modern scholarly approaches: redaction criticism, linguistic analysis, structural criticism, handwriting analysis, ouija board, and astrological hindcasts. In addition, I have drawn upon letters and other junk supplied by Bibfeldt's wife. And using the most dignified scholarly style of writing, I avoid footnotes and I plagiarize freely.

The quest for the Historical Bibfeldt gained recognition and scholarly sanction in the autumn of 1975 when Joseph Kitagawa wrote the following letter to Attorney General Edward Levi.

Dear Ed:

I am sure—at least I hope—that you remember that I am Dean of the Divinity School at the University of Chicago. The Divinity School, you will recall, is housed in Swift Hall, which is the building sort of attached to Bond Chapel.

Now that you are our nation's attorney general, I, and all concerned theologians, need your help in resolving a problem. Some years ago Franz Bibfeldt, the notorious or notable German theologian, is reported to have come to Swift Hall during the dark, lonely hours of summer. Since none of our research faculty were here, there is no documentary evidence that he was indeed here, although two security policemen and a janitor claim to have seen his shadow. The problem, Eddie, is this: some new theological students here, by adapting recent theories of steno- and tensive symbols, have proposed that Franz Bibfeldt is merely a symbol, and they have begun to debate whether he is a steno- or a tensive symbol. Of course you can realize the gravity of the situation. The future of constructive theology rests on our ability to prove that Bibfeldt is indeed
a historical person, not a symbol, either steno- or tensive.

Since the Bibfeldt Foundation itself is located in Swift Hall, I request that you send a copy of the FBI and CIA files on Bibfeldt himself. Revealing the contents of the files, I am sure, will squelch all of the symbolic Bibfeldt theories.

Thank you for your assistance.

Fraternally,
Dean Joseph Kitagawa

The reply from the attorney general also merits mention. In part it reads:

Yes, Joey, there is a Bibfeldt. He is as real as J. Edgar Hoover was! And regarding your request for copies of our investigative files on Bibfeldt, I have personally made certain that they have been sent to you. Please remit 20¢ for the xeroxing charge.

Fondly,
The Attorney General

P. S. Yes, I do remember Swift Hall. Isn't it the building where the basement lounge is furnished with orange leather whoopie cushions from Marshall Fields?

These two letters provide the context for the modern quest for the historical Bibfeldt.

Franz Joseph Haydn Martin Luther Bibfeldt was born in the trundle seat of an 1892 Volkswagen on November 1, 1897. His father, a Protestant Bishop with revivalistic inclinations, and his mother, a Roman Catholic with charismatic tendencies, were on their way to a Bavarian camp meeting when the car broke down two miles from Sage-Hast bei Groszenkneten, Oldenburg, Niedersachsen, Germany and Mrs. Bibfeldt went into labor. According to the M source, Franz's birth was a day early since he had been conceived on February 2, after a Candlemas party.

The Protestant-Catholic marriage of his mother and father early modelled a kind of tolerance that Franz was later to find vital to his Both/And philosophical, theological stance. The M and G sources tell us little or nothing (as usual) about Franz's childhood years. But by using the Q, or Queer source, which is nothing more than the first letters of Franz's given names applied anagrammatically to a ouija board, we can determine that Franz did have an Oedipal complex. And from an impressionistic analysis of his first-grade
sized that his mother was a virgin. In contrast to his maternal obsession, Franz never mentions his father in his later teaching and writings; and this omission has lead many specious scholars to speculate that perhaps the Oedipal complex was not merely a fantasy with Franz. The only post-birth reference to Franz's father is rather obtuse; for one of Franz's childhood playmates has revealed that his Father's vocation as a bishop gave Franz his nickname as a "son of a bish!"

Of the adolescent years of Bibfeldt we know little (which actually says a lot). What we do know, though, comes from the spurious or serious work of 1961 entitled *Lurid Stories from a Confessional Booth, or Everything You Always Suspected about Confessionalists but Didn't Know for Sure*, by Father X. In the second chapter Father X reports that he often heard Franz's confessions during the boy's puberty years. Apparently, Franz would sow his wild oats during the week, and then on Sundays he would go to mass and pray for crop failure. (It is also interesting to note that Father X reveals that listening to confessions by nuns is like getting stoned to death with popcorn!)

Our knowledge of Bibfeldt until 1929 is even scantier than his adolescent years, although that is hard to believe. In 1929 Bibfeldt graduated from the University of Worms, where he took his D. D. T.—Doctorate in Digressive Theology. His first scholarly article appeared later that year, and it was inspired by his fiancee Hannah Barthmann. The essay, entitled "How to Get More Out of Speaking in Tongues," was an inessential analysis of New Testament glossolalia, which Bibfeldt regarded as a French method of "greeting the brethren with a holy kiss!" The article received such notoriety that Bibfeldt was immediately invited to teach New Testament theology at the University of Graustark.

Most of our knowledge of the adult Bibfeldt comes from his own teachings and writings, most of which were published either psuedonymously or anonymously. The one book that has borne Bibfeldt's own name as author is his tour de farce,
as he called it, *The Relieved Paradox,* which was published by Howard Press in 1951. In the book Bibfeldt sets forth the basis for his great theology of *Both/And,* a position deduced from his desire for absolute adaptability and relevance. In the book he states his belief that theology is "the art of making things come out right." And as the M source also notes, "his motto is *Respondeo Ergo Sum,* 'I respond, therefore I am.'" Because of this centrality of "reactionarianism" to his thought, Bibfeldt has sometimes been called "an intellectual Billy Graham, a veritable Billy James Hargis, a conscientious Carl McIntyre."

The fact that most of Bibfeldt's works were published either anonymously or pseudonymously (an ironic, unrelieved paradox with his *Both/And* philosophy) presents us with the problem of determining what are genuine Bibfeldt writings. There are several criteria which we have used to ascertain which writings are indeed authentic Bibfeldtian works. First of all, there is the criterion of multiple attestation: if several critics and reviewers have attributed a particular work to several different theologians and/or radio evangelists, then the state of confusion surely points to Bibfeldt as the only logical author.

The second test is that of uniqueness and difficulty: if the work in question is abstruse and absurd and unlike anything that would seem reasonable to the theological enterprise, then surely the work is that of Bibfeldt. This criterion is closely related to the third: if anything in print is too ridiculous to be believed, then surely it must be the doings of Bibfeldt. For instance, the proclamation of the "*Wisness of God,*" as the G source points out, is indeed a statement too ridiculous to be attributed to anyone but Bibfeldt. The criterion of contradiction also indicates that a work is probably Bibfeldt's, for this test, as we can imagine, is that of noting an affirmative statement on one page and its contradiction a few pages later. The final test for Bibfeldtian authenticity is that of characteristic linguistic usage. Here we cite Bibfeldt's unique introductory formula with which he often begins his most profane-- I mean profound--
sayings: "Perhaps, perhaps...," or as it has been rendered in the paraphrastic perversion that goes by the title of The Living Bibfeldt, "Yes and no! Yes and no...!"

Applying these criteria to various pseudonymous and anonymous works of significant merit, we can prove beyond a reasonable doubt that many of them are Bibfeldt's own works. The most significant book in this group is the massive commentary on the Epistle to Philemon. Published in 1933, Philemerbrief, as it has often been cited, flipped like a tiddly-wink into the gloomy world of the depression and created the playground for modern theology. In Philemerbrief, Bibfeldt refines his hermeneutical method of Numerologiegisch: his goal in writing the Philemon commentary was to devote one full paragraph to each letter of each word and to get at least one chapter out of each verse in the epistle. As a result he was able to make it massive and comprehensive. His most incisive chapter by far is the twelfth one in which he interprets verse twelve: "[Onesimus] Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels...." The basis of Bibfeldt's interpretation is that Paul used the phrase "mine own bowels" as a euphemism for "mine own chitlins." The hermeneutic here at work obviously is a redaction of the numerologiegisch method with which he had begun the work. Realizing this, Bibfeldt now calls his hermeneutical method "Bullgeschichte," since he thinks that the name of the method should reflect the content of the interpretation. (Here we might note that the "Bullgeschichte" hermeneutic has become the most influential method of reasoning and interpretation among American students, who frequently refer to it cryptologically as the B. S. Factor.)

Another New Testament theology book which can be attributed with great certainty to Bibfeldt is A Pragmatist's Paraphrase of Selected Sayings of Jesus. Published in 1948, the book represents Bibfeldt's first attempt to say something useful. He decided to write the book in order to balance the one-sided, radical nature of many of the sayings of Jesus. Thus in an effort to deal with the
impracticality of many of Jesus's teachings, Bibfeldt sub-developed his Bullgeschichte method by proposing a hermeneutic of reversism, which can be explained most succinctly by quoting from Bibfeldt's preface to the book.

Reversism operates as follows: Any saying which is too hard to understand or to follow is to be understood to mean the opposite of what it literally says. My rationale for this lies in the recognition that Jesus was a pragmatist. Indeed, we might call him the "Prince of Pragmatists"

The following selections from the chapter on the Sermon on the Mount are representative of Bibfeldt's experiment with reversism.

5:3 Blessed are the rich in money, for they can build bigger and better churches. Who cares about the Kingdom of God?
5:4 Blessed are those who are always happy, having everything they need, for they don't have to be comforted.
5:5 Blessed are the ambitious, for they shall eventually own the earth.
5:6 Blessed are those who are in charge of dispensing righteousness, for they won't have to go to jail unless they tamper with income tax laws.
5:7 Blessed are those who show no mercy to those who owe them money, for they shall build bigger and better bank accounts.
5:8 Blessed are those whose external appearance and behavior are impeccable, for they shall look nice when they see God.

Several other works published anonymously but as yet untranslated—except for my translation of the titles—are also presumably the products of Bibfeldt. (We must wait until the translations of the works appear before attempting to determine authenticity of Bibfeldtian authorship, for one of Bibfeldt's most eagerly received teachings— at least by graduate students—is that critical research should never be done in the original language.) Some of the titles of books whose translations we eagerly await are: There I Sit, The Cowardice to Exist, and Blessed Rage for Pietistic Pulchritude; and it is rumored that his forthcoming book on the theology of history and politics will be titled Raping the Whirlwind.

One other primary resource has been translated and needs to be mentioned here. Published under the pseudonym "Martin E. Marty" (can you imagine the difficulty Bibfeldt must have faced when he tried to find and succeed in choosing a name more ridiculous sounding than "Franz Bibfeldt"?!) The book is entitled: The Pro and Con Book of Religious America.
It fits most of the criteria established to determine Bibfeldtian authenticity. First, the book is unlike anything else in the theological enterprise: it is indeed a unique epithet that America is called "religious!" The criterion of contradiction also holds here, for half the book is a refutation of the other half, and "verse-visa," as Bibfeldt himself would say. And finally the book complies with the test of ridiculosity because half of it is printed upside down— and on purpose. (Critical speculation has suggested that the upside down portion is intended for the theology students at Harvard, Bob Jones, and Oral Roberts University).

Before concluding, we need to recall that Bibfeldt visited Swift Hall on July 1, 1970. Although he found no faculty members here— a fact that made him wonder if it were a religious holiday— he was able to get into Swift library. And it was he who first suggested that Swift Hall library would make an excellent greenhouse, for he noted that with the frequent use of the B. S. Factor in theological analysis and explication, the Divinity School library would be a fertile place for an indoor garden.

The shock of finding Swift Hall almost vacant, though, has caused serious complications. Since no one was here to welcome him, Bibfeldt has, so to speak, "withdrawn" from the public eye. Hannah, however, urges that letters and cards and flowers can be sent to Franz in care of The Brandenburg Home for Indigents and Crazies, Brandenburg, West Germany. A monetary donation, Hannah urges that you send contributions to the Divinity School of Bethel College.

In conclusion, I think it appropriate that we dismiss ourselves with Bibfeldt's favorite benediction, which he first used when he shared a dais with Paul Tillich and Billy Graham in 1961. Both adapting and combining their emphases, Bibfeldt then declared: "May the Ground of all Being bless you all real good! Perhaps."

John L. Price
April 1, 1976
THE MAN WHO ISN'T THERE

SOME NOTES ON THE QUEST FOR THE HISTORICAL FRANZ BIBFELDT

Dennis L. Landon
9 April 1976
It is certainly no accident that the topic at hand today is the Quest for the historical Franz Bibfeldt. Like the quest for the historical Jesus, and indeed like the great quests of legend—for the Holy Grail, the source of the Nile, the perfect martini—the closer scholars come to the object of their pursuit the farther it recedes from them, the more completely it eludes their grasp. Perhaps the best illustration of our difficulty, but perhaps also of the promise of our inquiry, comes in this reflection from Gellett Burgess:

"Yesterday upon the stair,
I met a man who wasn't there
He wasn't there again today.
I wish, I wish he'd stay away."

I am hard pressed to think of a better summary of the current state of Bibfeldt scholarship.

The problem is not just that scholars have been unable to locate the essential Bibfeldt, it is even more that they have been looking in all the wrong places—namely in Europe, where Bibfeldt was born, grew up, and has spent his formative years. It should be obvious to anyone sensitive to the thrust of his work that Bibfeldt, the theologian committed to being all things to all men, would not be so narrow as to allow his thought to be formed by his own family, education, and culture. Anyone can do that! To fully understand Bibfeldt we must look first to the sitz im leben—and then ignore it.
Our thesis is that to bring the real Bibfeldt to light we must look to this country, and to American popular culture. There we will find the great man, not in the desiccated scholarship of the academy, or the effete irrelevance of the Church, but in the center of mass society—only there will we see him in his true role, as theologian of the people.

Theorists of mass culture have long sought for the organizing principle of American popular culture. What is it that links Joyce Brothers and David Bowie; why is Johnny Carson obsessed with the TIDE-BOWL man; how are we to understand Marilyn Chambers and Totie Fields as the dialectical twin-geist of modernity? I am here to affirm that there is a way, and while I do not intend to develop this theory in all its implications today, I do not shrink from boldly asserting a single, comprehensive, and multi-valent principle: look for the man who isn't there.

Throughout the entire twentieth century in America Bibfeldt has been the man who wasn't there, and this quality of not-thereness (a quality which theology has yet to adequately explore, yet alone notice) is the source of the conceptual power of our theory.

1Peoples' theology grows out of Peoples' history, with a single distinction—whereas peoples' history is an attempt to look beyond what people thought to what they actually did [their behavior], peoples' theology attempts to capture a thinker's thought in its purity by paying no attention whatsoever to anything he did. It is an attempt to face human life as it is actually lived (ie, without thinking about it), and then to look to and isolate the totally irrelevant thought that lies behind behavior. It is a large part of Bibfeldt's genius that his life shows the least connection between thought and action of any contemporary thinker. Those interested in pursuing this further should consult Martin E. Marty's forthcoming A Nation of Thinkers.
The history of Bibfeldt scholarship has articulated five ways of understanding the relation of Bibfeldt and his thought to culture. We mean to propose a sixth after demonstrating the inadequacies of these five.

First, those who hold to the concept of Bibfeldt Against Culture have entirely missed the master's flexibility—the theologian who would explicitly take all things into himself could hardly judge the culture that is the exclusive source of his raw materials. The concept, Bibfeldt of Culture is more alluring but no less mistaken—it implies a presence in culture that would never do for our theologian absconditus. Bibfeldt Above Culture has its supporters among those who see his thought as neither affirming of nor judgmental of society, which is a good beginning, but they still want to attribute to Bibfeldt an authority that cannot be justified by any close consideration of his work. Bibfeldt himself has rejected even the concept of Bibfeldt Somewhat Above Culture. Bibfeldt the Transformer of Culture has obvious difficulties, specifically his consistent protestation that his thought is both AC and DC.

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2Obviously, this analysis owes much to the work of Bibfeldt's brother, H. Fritz Bibfeldt.


Bibfeldt and Culture in Paradox comes the closest to our position in its refusal to posit a direct relationship, but its inadequacy is also obvious. Bibfeldt may be many things to many men; he may be enigmatic, abstruse, contradictory, but he will have no truck with paradox. (A recently discovered letter from Bibfeldt to actor Robert Young affirms: "... when I want paradox I watch "Marcus Welby."

Our search for an adequate understanding of Bibfeldt and culture led us first to the construct of Bibfeldt Irrelevant to Culture, but that fails to allow for his influence. Bibfeldt Oblivious to Culture suggested itself, but there we are up against the incredible range of his fan letters and the fact that he clearly believes there is something out there. We needed to find a relationship that takes into account both his love for and his innocence about American culture. Thus we come to a suitable construct, one that incorporates the full compass of Bibfeldt's humble hubris, the total range of his deep shallowness—the construct; Bibfeldt Enjoying Culture.

Let us move now to the evidence of Bibfeldt's familiarity with and interaction with American culture. We begin with consideration of the two most successful and paradigmatic

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5 The fact that the bulk of Bibfeldt's correspondence is not with other theologians and academics, but with the likes of Young, Donny Osmond, Telly Sevalas, and Monty Hall is indicative of what a Bibfeldt scholar is up against.

6 We do not for a moment admit to consideration the suggestion of some of his detractors that the concept should be Bibfeldt Annoying Culture. They are the retained water that swells the ankles of scholarship.
studies of the American spirit of 1975: E. L. Doctorow's novel, *Ragtime*, and Robert Altman's film, "Nashville." First, it must be understood that the fact that Bibfeldt appears in neither of these works, and that no references are made to him in either, is irrelevant to the question of his significance for them. We must remember here Bibfeldt's oft-enunciated principle of anonymous ubiquity.\(^7\)

*Ragtime* captured the imagination of the American reading public as well as that of the literary establishment, at least in part through Doctorow's weaving of real historical characters into a fictional framework that captured the spirit of American life in the 1920's. In the book we meet Emma Goldman, Sanford White, Harry Houdini and other semi-respectable public figures of that time. It can be shown that Bibfeldt was on intimate terms with all these people. Doctorow has obviously left Bibfeldt himself out of the narrative due to (1) his not being dead, and (2) Bibfeldt's well-known litigiousness. However, the sureness with which Doctorow links characters who never met each other and plays fast and loose with chronology

\(^7\)Anonymous ubiquity is Bibfeldt's theological corollary to the Heisenberg uncertainty principle: "I can be there and not be recognized, I can be recognized but not be there; I can even be not there and not be recognized." (Playboy interview, conducted by Howard Hughes, April 31, 1971.) [This meeting led to a continuing association; Bibfeldt found Hughes an extremely provocative interlocutor. His influence can be seen in several consequent Bibfeldt publications, most notably in his essay "Notes on Econo-thanatology—Perhaps We Can Take It With Us", *Lifeline*, June, 1972.]
is ample proof of his familiarity not only with Bibfeldt himself, but with the master's work on "The Problem of the Year Zero." The title of the novel is final evidence of the Bibfeldt influence; had Doctorow not been afraid of acknowledging Franz Bibfeldt as his mentor the book would certainly have been entitled Lagtime.

With "Nashville," the Bibfeldt influence is more on content than on form, and reveals itself most potently in the song lyrics which are an essential element of the film. The opening of the movie, in fact, is a direct quote from Bibfeldt's latest article on the American Bicentennial: "We must be doing something right to last 200 years." Or note the Bibfeldtian lyric that closes the film:

"It don't worry me.
It don't worry me.
You may say that I ain't free,
But it don't worry me."

We need only mention "Nashville"s 1976 academy award winning song, "I'm Easy" to completely establish our point—that Robert Altman is well aware of Bibfeldt's theology of desiring to please, and its influence on American culture.

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9 This also indicates the influence on Bibfeldt of the great American semanticist, A. E. Neuman.
One of the inadequacies of other analyses of Bibfeldt's relation to American culture has been an ignorance of his desperate desire to please, to stand foursquare on both sides of any issue, to try to make everyone happy. It is this very fact—Bibfeldt's concern for the consumers of his work and their feelings that sets him apart from all other theologians, past or present. Giving the public what it wants is both what has attracted Bibfeldt to the American spirit and is the content of his influence on it. We are now ready to explore as few representative details of this life-long interaction.

You may recall that, during the controversy in the late 1960's over whether hidden evidence in their songs indicated that the Beatle's Paul McCartney was dead, it was Bibfeldt who debunked the theory saying, "Paul McCartney is not dead, he's only sleeping." Sleep has been a continuing preoccupation of this most wide-ranging of intellects. His article, "Morpheus and Morphology: Forms of Discourse in Sleep-Talking", led to his acquaintance with Edgar Cayce, whom Bibfeldt once described as "the best listener I've ever had." It should also be noted that, in the face of Cayce's death, Bibfeldt refused to comment, except to say he had wondered why Cayce had never asked him any questions.

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10 The fact that Bibfeldt himself is easy, but never its opposite, has been testified to with regret by numerous disappointed theological groupies around the country.

Many have asked for clarification of Bibfeldt's position during the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy. It appears that his only contribution to the debate was in a letter to P. T. Barnum. In response to Barnum's assertion that "there's a sucker born every minute," Bibfeldt replied, "but they are born again on the half-minute."

It is Bibfeldt's studies of Time and its inconsistencies that have intersected most frequently with our popular culture. Bibfeldt was a particularly rabid fan of "Star Trek" (he can be frequently seen at "Trekie" conventions, disguised as a tribble.), and spent a great amount of energy speculating on its implications for his work. He noted, for example, long before other critics had noticed, that the series was a continuing elaboration of the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche. (Captain Kirk, the man of emotion and intuition, represents the Dionysian principle, and Mr. Spock the Apollonian.) But of greater concern to Bibfeldt was the question of the star-ship transporter mechanism—where do the crew of the Enterprise actually go when they "beam down" somewhere? What happens to them between the energization of the machine and their arrival. Is their luggage ever lost? He has come, alas, to no conclusion.

The mystical themes he discovered in "Star Trek" led Bibfeldt into association with various movements for peace of mind, self-actualization, and growth. He experimented with many of the available techniques and movements. He was
Rolfed, audited by the scientologists, had transactional analysis (where it was discovered that his parent, adult, and child were indistinguishable from each other and, what is more, formed the three "selves" of a multiple personality, calling themselves Moe, Larry, and Curly.) Bibfeldt experienced gestalt therapy, having been greatly impressed that Frederick Perls' book was entitled *In and Out the Garbage Pail*, a metaphor, Bibfeldt said, for both my content and my method. Bibfeldt also spent some time studying with Alex Comfort, who commended his enthusiasm, but suggested remedial work. He has most recently been associated with the self-improvement movement known as EST. He found its philosophy (based on the proposition that "what is, is; what isn't, isn't") sufficiently sophisticated, but foundered in his attempt to elaborate that neo-Parmenidean insight theologically. The best he could do was "God either is or is not."

As Bibfeldt first began to experience American television he became the victim of a circumstantial misunderstanding. Due to his very busy and erratic schedule he was only able to catch a few shows: *My Favorite Martian, I Dream of Jeanie, The Flying Nun, Topper, The Girl With Something Extra, My Mother, the Car, Mr. Ed,* and *Bewitched.* They all left him with a slightly warped vision of the metaphysical possibilities of American thought, and the last one mentioned
also left him with a disconcerting assortment of facial tics. I think it is safe to say that Bibfeldt never recovered from this initial exposure.

While on exposure—those of us who are regular viewers of "Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman" are well aware that Bibfeldt has now received the long-deserved honor of a TV character based on himself. I refer, of course, to Mary Hartman's Grandpa Larkin, the Fernwood Flasher.

This brings us, by extension, to the most unfortunate incident of Bibfeldt's career, an incident that should be instructive to all aspiring scholars. You are all well aware of the Master's doctoral thesis on "The Problem of the Year Zero." Obviously, once he had completed it, Bibfeldt went looking for a publisher. Having been turned down by the major publishers he began to circulate the manuscript among the smaller houses, finally attracting some interest at Grove Press. Unfortunately, Bibfeldt knew nothing about that publisher. He took the small check and went on his way. Had he known the ways of publishers and editors he might have been more wary.

The rest you know: Bibfeldt's "The Problem of the Year Zero" was published as _The Story of O_. The error was compounded by the editor's misunderstanding of Bibfeldt's frequent references to the "chains of history," and his insistence that we must "continually submit ourselves to disciplined thought."
A passing reference to "the bondage of the will" didn't help matters any. Bibfeldt was fortunate to have a pseudonym substituted for his name and, needless to say, he receives no royalties from the current movie version of his dissertation.

One realm in which Bibfeldt has not been much in evidence is politics. However Bernstein and Woodward's The Final Days does contain one Bibfeldtian anecdote: During the last week of the Nixon presidency, as the insomnia-wracked president paced the floor of the White House and conversed the the portraits of former presidents, he placed a latenight phone call to Bibfeldt, whose name he found in an HEW listing of theologians. Bibfeldt, ever desiring to please, accepted the collect call, and assured the troubled chief executive that yes, what he was feeling probably was angst. The magnitude of that contribution to our national nightmare may never be fully known.

What finally do we know about Bibfeldt, the man? The quest ends as it begins. His influence on us is immense, but we seem doomed never to view him whole. Even now, as he begins to receive the scholar attention he deserves it is somewhat demoralizing to realize the vast amount of research still to be done. The man who isn't there continues to haunt us and our culture. Our only recourse in the end is to be thankful that he seems to be near us whenever we need him.
FRANZ BIBFELDT

(Jerald Brauer document)

July 4, 1976

Dear Professor Brauer:

Greetings on this holiest of all days. Oh day of light and splendor. Oh moment of revolution and revelation. To think that two hundred years ago a new nation immaculately conceived was brought forth dedicated to the proposition that all people are created equal. Why had I never heard this before? An invitation to a bicentennial celebration changed my whole life, my theology will never be the same. I had to write you my experience. Surely it is a new Turm erlebnitz.

Early in the spring of 1976 I received a special invitation from the President of the United States to attend a bicentennial celebration and deliver the keynote lecture in Washington. My first impulse was to put a nix on [Nix-on] the whole idea. But as I sat on my balcony smoking my pipe and rereading the invitation, it dawned on me that perhaps there was a Ford in my future.

Still in revery, I got up from my chair and as I knocked my pipe on the balcony railing, the ashes streamed downward in streaks of red, white, and blue. Surely this was a special leading, but I was not convinced. Secure in my Schwartwald hideaway, that bastion of true theology, I went in to view the evening Fernsehen (t.v.) news.

Miracle of miracles, it happened. I flicked the switch, a light flashed on the screen, and there was the message, "Ford has a better idea." Suddenly everything came together for me -- first the invitation from Ford, then the red, white, and blue ashes, then a flick of the t.v. switch
and the message -- Ford has a better idea. How I had underrated him. I too wanted to beg his pardon. What was Ford's better idea?

It was to invite Bibfeldt to deliver the main Bicentennial lecture in Washington. I was determined to study the Bicentennial, to note its relation to my theology, and to prepare the greatest theological lecture of my career. America needed Bibfeldt. What else could we poor Germans offer than our humble theological insight?

Systematically I studied the significance of the American revolution -- the bicentennial celebration. True to my time tested method I started by analyzing the word -- bicentennial. First, I broke it into its components. Bi -- that connotes two, or it is a short form of farewell, or it can mean next to. Quickly I became convinced that it means all three in this context. It could not signify only two, or one, because that would contradict our trinitarian heritage; therefore, the three are meaningful in our celebration.

How then were all three meaningful? Again my Bibfeldtian method provided the answer -- Washington. The bicentennial lecture was to be in Washington, Washington was father of the nation, so all three meanings of the word are related to the patriarch. Bi as two -- Washington was president for two terms. Bi as a short form of farewell -- Washington delivered a short Farewell address. Bi as next to -- Washington is next to the Potomac River.

My heart pounded with excitement as all things began to cohere. Furiously I knocked my pipe in the ashtray, but the burned tobacco would not come loose. I paced up and down as the significance of my insights overwhelmed me. The bicentennial was to center in Washington, Washington was the father of the nation, and the doctrine of the Trinity, the root of all our Christian theology, begins with the Father. The parallel was clear; I did not have to proceed
further into an analysis of the word bicentennial. The first syllable was key to our entire understanding.

It was necessary to analyze the key symbol of the bicentennial -- father. Raised and educated in the Lutheran tradition I immediately turned to the bedrock of truth -- Scripture and common sense. The former is clear in every age, so one can easily assume the self-evident truths of Scripture. No Christians have ever disagreed on that. Common sense presents a different matter, for each age has a different view of common sense. I am deeply committed to the concept of relevance so I turned to our contemporary view of common sense, namely, Freudianism.

Freud had much to teach us concerning the central symbol of the bicentennial -- the father. Strange that everybody has overlooked that in Freud. At least two points stand out -- the Oedipus complex -- the urge of every man to kill his father in order to establish his own freedom, his autonomy; and the father complex -- an unusual attachment of young ladies to their father. Here was a concept grounded in common sense, which, in its essentials, gave equal rights to men and women -- now I was cooking.

What was the bicentennial all about? It concerned the father -- the King who lusted after the money of the sons and the beauty of his daughters in his overseas family. This king and his minions in Parliament demanded obedience from his colonial family, but they were rooted and grounded in Scripture and in common sense. In Scripture they learned they were to bow on knee to none but God in heaven, and they were to call no man king. From common sense -- implicit Freudianism -- they learned about problems with father.
So the daughters of the revolution struck off the shackles of their father complex and left daddy once and for all -- they rebelled against the king and found God. The sons of that revolution had to kill their father to find their autonomy, their freedom. And so they became free for a proper relationship with their mother, Pat, better known as Patria. As I reviewed that tremendous struggle, I was struck with the fact that on Washington’s left hand was that great French patriot General Lafayette. But on his right hand was that freedom fighter from Greece, General Oedipus. These two combined -- Lafayette and Oedipus -- to conquer the king at a great battle symbolic of their two nations -- Brandywine.

You note, Professor Brauer, that everything coheres in the Bibfeldtian hermeneutic. So we are brought to the center of my discovery based on the Bicentennial-theology of Revolution. I am convinced that some day theologians will learn to appreciate not only Scripture but also Freud, not only authority but also revolution. Who knows, at some distant point in the future there may develop a theology of revolution that is now receiving my full attention and is the basis for my great bicentennial lecture.

Permit me to recapitulate in one paragraph the essence of the lecture. My first great book was an answer to Karl Barth on the paradox resolved. My next book is really an answer to Karl Marx (I seem to be hung up on Karl) on the paradox returned. All this I owe to the American revolution. Hannah Arendt reminded us that the word revolution really means to revolve, to turn back to, to return to, actually to come full circle. Americans were the first to learn this in their revolution -- they have been going in circles ever since. I learned it from them, and so I have moved from paradox to paradox resolved (anti-Karl B.) to paradox returned (anti K. Marx) and I too have come full circle. As another great man once said -- ‘I have returned.’
Instead of being on a linear straight and narrow, my head is now spinning with new ideas. Barth is wrong -- history is not senkrecht von oben, moving but into a final judgment. Marx is wrong -- history is not moving in a straight line toward the paradise of the proletariat. You might mention this to your colleague Eliade who could get a new book out of that idea. The American revolution is right -- history itself is a great revolution, a constant revolving in a mad whirl of freedom and creativity, on into the wild blue yonder. Ezekiel called it a wheel within a wheel, and that is proved by the fact that only in America can one find countless wheelers and dealers.

Unfortunately, my dear friend, I was unable to deliver my bicentennial address. As I hurried from my apartment in the Schwartzwald so I would not miss my plane, I suddenly recalled that I had forgotten my shaving equipment. I rushed into the bathroom to gather up everything, but when I reached for my toilet water the seat hit me on the head, and I was knocked unconscious. The slight concussion left me in bed for two weeks. Alas, no bicentennial lecture.

I must close now. Please give my special greetings to two of your colleagues. When I first discovered my great idea, horse geschichte, it was Professor Robert Grant who spread it in America with such fertile results. I cannot wipe him from my memory. But I have special feelings for your colleague, Martin Marty. I owe so much to his splendid book, Righteous Vampire. It was a thrilling --even blood-curdling-- monograph. Truly I consider Marty my father in God. Greet the sisters with a kiss.

Dein,

Franz Bibfeldt
Nov. 30, 1992

**Extra note from Judith Lawrence

In Robert Grant's talk, he has an occasional pun (Preus, Price) and Hitchcock Schnell (a pun on two dormitories at the University of Chicago).

Also, Prof. Brauer has at least one pun (on Nixon).

I've placed these in brackets, to call them to your attention. Editor's note(s) may need to be added.

J.
THE BIBFELDT HUSTLE,

or

SATURDAY NIGHT PLAGUE:

SOME RECENT THEORIES
OF PASTORAL CARE

W. Mark McLemore

3 May 1977
The explication of the theories of pastoral care originated and espoused by our own dear Franz Bibfeldt leads us at the outset to a brief re-examination of the best recent semi-auto-biographical data available. You will recall, I am sure, the colorful expositions of the "G" (Grant), "B" (Brauer), "M" (Marty), "L" (Landon), and "P" (Price) sources. While mighty contributions to the history and lore of Bibfeldtiana, each of these sources by itself cannot stand up to the careful and continuing scrutiny of scholars such as we fancy ourselves to be. In short, they are not the best exemplifications of the total spectrum of Bibfeldtiologie today. If we are to examine the evolution of Bibfeldt's theory and practice of pastoral care, we must glance briefly at the life of this great man—a life he himself has characterized, in a phrase reminiscent of Socrates' "gadfly of Athens" statement, as "a pimple on the nose of modern theology." We shall thus turn to these sources and commence our brief sketch with them, secure and confident that we have authority for so doing in the directive of the "L" source to "look first to the sitz im leben—and then ignore it."

Bibfeldt, you will remember from the "M" and "P" sources, was born in the trundle seat of an 1892 Volkswagen Rabbit on November 1, 1897. His life is sketchily attested; however, we know some reported incidents to be true. Bibfeldt, for example, did write his doctoral thesis on "The Problem of the Year Zero", a continuing concern that causes him to this very day to arrive either a year early or a year late—and sometimes both—for any appointment. He achieved some fame through the publishing of The Relieved Paradox, the masterwork that sets forth his theological method
of Both/And, Bibfeldt's way of achieving what he saw as the theological task: to reconcile all opposites and make things come out right. Furthermore, we know that he has visited America at least twice, once gracing Swift Hall with his presence and leaving a graffito on the wall of the basement men's room. This graffito was erroneously reported in the "M" source to have been the cryptic statement "God grades on the curve", the epigraph from Bibfeldt's book The Crooked Way. Recent archeological investigation, however, indicates that the graffito in its entirety is somewhat longer. It reads: "God grades on the curve. For a demonstration, come to the third stall from the left between 4-6 P.M., August 4, 1970. Use foot signals." Needless to say, all those who tried to keep this appointment were disappointed. And we do not know if Bibfeldt ever returned to Swift Hall after what he saw there.

But enough of a chronological account. We shall return to any significant details of Bibfeldt's life as the occasion arises while interpreting his thoughts on pastoral care. However, we must ask one final biographical question: what has become of Herr Bibfeldt today? The "M" source leaves Bibfeldt at Esalen sometime in the early 70's. The "L" source claims that Bibfeldt comforted Pres. Nixon during his famous "prayer with Kissinger" episode over the telephone, undoubtedly demonstrating Bibfeldt's involvement in the "Dial-a-Prayer" movement of that era. The "P" source—here spurious, no doubt—alludes to Bibfeldt's residence at an unlikely place called the Brandenburg Home for Indigents and Crazies, Brandenburg, W. Germany. Obviously, nothing is clear. But one simple fact stands out: Bibfeldt is now 81 years old. And at this
point a serious question must be asked: Is Bibfeldt still alive?

Let us attempt an answer. A short two years past, Mr. Dennis Landon stood before us and enunciated his theory of "Bibfeldt enjoying culture" and proposed his hermeneutic of "looking for the man who wasn't there" in order to join the quest for the historical Bibfeldt in culture. We affirm this principle; we have witnessed its fruitfulness in that short span of time and we shall use it ourselves. Yet, as Bibfeldtians good and true, we are shocked in retrospect at the ease with which this one-sided hermeneutic was accepted. We must follow the Bibfeldtian program through to its end; we must not allow ourselves to rest with either affirmations or negations. In short, if two years past we looked for the Bibfeldt who wasn't there, this year we must look for the Bibfeldt who is. And so doing, we assert: Bibfeldt is both here and not-here. He is alive (and yet, we must add, in some strange manner dead); and, more important to today's topic, he is participating in the general theological discussion and his participation centers around the area of pastoral care.

Enough questions have been raised so far to satisfy the most skeptical doubting Bibfeldtian; we no longer will question the facticity of his life. However, in order to balance the scale, we will now turn to the evidence of his life among us today. First, we must recall the motto to his recently-released essay on the lack of creativity in boring theological titles. This essay is itself entitled in a masterful piece of irony *Beating the Whirlwind into the Ground*. The motto, Bibfeldt's favorite Scriptural citation, reads "Lo, I am with you always," to the close of
the age." (Matthew 28:20b, RSV) In this motto to his incisive essay, Bibfeldt gives clear indication of his intent to haunt us for many years to come.

Two further data—in this instance, two songs from popular culture—will be adduced as evidence of Bibfeldt’s continuing life among us. Each of these tunes has topped the charts in the past 6 months; both are blatantly Bibfeldtian in form and content. The first is a bland and innocuous little number: "You light up my life", performed by Debbie Boone. Ostensibly dedicated to her father, Pat Boone, popularizer of white bucks, the song reveals itself under analysis by the renowned Bibfeldtian hermeneutic of bullgeschichte. In fact, it is a paean of praise to Ms. Boone’s personal and musical mentor, our Franz. For who else but this utter genius of adaptation and coincidentia oppositorum could put the word "light"—known to describe the combination of all colors—into the lyrics of a song sung by so colorless a performer as Debbie Boone? Additionally, the presence of the word "life" also reveals Bibfeldt’s handiwork in this cleverly serious joke. Surely he is aware of our quandary over his continuing existence and is making a statement of this quixotic sort in partial reply. The second pop hit to which we point is a part of the soundtrack from the surprise movie hit of the year, Saturday Night Fever. It is obvious—one need not even be an experienced practitioner of bullgeschichting to see this right off—that Bibfeldt is making as clear a statement as possible of his continuing productive theological existence in the song "Stayin’ Alive." The context of this song is crucial to understanding the present-day Bibfeldt; but we
shall return to that later.  

We can now take it as conclusive that Bibfeldt is alive and "with us", as the Scripture says. But what of his work in pastoral care? We have ample evidence for Bibfeldt's contributions in this field, and here, obviously, is the place to give this great man his due.

Again, you will recall that Bibfeldt was "for some time a parish pastor." Furthermore, we know that on his second American visit he made a pilgrimage to the Playboy Mansion in Chicago—surely a Mecca of the healing arts for millions of American males. The "M" source tells us that Bibfeldt visited Esalen, and we learn from the "L" source that he had much experience with the human potential movement. But his first serious work in pastoral care theory is surely represented by Bibfeldt's attempt to come to grips with the non-directive, client-centered therapy of Carl Rogers. Bibfeldt's adaptation of Rogers, spelled out in his famous book I Hear What You're Saying, But I Just Don't Care (see catalogue entry card attached) has come to be known as Self-Centered Therapy, or as some hostile reviewers scornfully described it, the "new narcissism." In this work Bibfeldt presents his discovery that the phrase "I hear what you're saying" has a peculiarly soporific quality to it. Thus he advocates incessant repetition of that phrase, by client and therapist in turn, until the point at which both fall into a sound, trance-like sleep. Bibfeldt, of course, was firmly convinced of the therapeutic value of sleep in "helping one forget one's troubles"; he has set forth further
research into the historical antecedents of this technique in an unpublished essay entitled "Rip Van Winkle as the Father of Modern Psychotherapy." Case studies of his use of the self-centered method in pastoral care and its relations to his theological stance are presented in the now out-of-print classic _Theology after Van Winkle_. Bibfeldt was forced to abandon this self-centered model of pastoral care due to its general ineffectiveness, particularly in working with the deaf, since he felt that the phrase lacked integrity for them.

During a brief stint of pure academia, Bibfeldt read Don Browning's work _The Moral Context of Pastoral Care_ and flirted briefly with a James-styled pragmatic approach. He left us with but one judgement concerning this school of thought: "Pragmatism is all right, as long as it works."

The "L" source tells us that Bibfeldt was also drawn to the "human potential" or "self-actualization" movement—rolfing, est, scientology. He underwent Transactional Analysis, "where it was discovered that his parent, adult, and child were indistinguishable from each other and, what is more, formed three 'selves' of a multiple personality, calling themselves Moe, Larry, and Curly." But the "L" source does not tells us how Bibfeldt was also excited by his discovery of the multiple uses of the phrase "I'm OK" and its various permutations—"I'm not OK"; "you're OK"; "you're not OK"; "I'm OK but you're not so hot"; et alia. The flexibility of this phrase "I'm OK" thrilled Bibfeldt at first because he suspected that its various forms might produce sleep-inducing qualities similar, or perhaps superior, to the phrase "I hear what you're
Furthermore, the possibilities of the phrase's permutations fit well into the methodological stance of Both/And: e.g., "I'm not OK and that's OK", and so forth. However Bibfeldt became disillusioned with the possibilities of this method of care when he found that repetition of this phrase had a definite grating and unsettling effect on client and therapist alike, especially when spoken in Bibfeldt's own native tongue. I here quote Bibfeldt:

Imagine, if you can, the auditory effect of these phrases: 'Ich bin OK; du bist OK; er, sie, es ist OK; Ich nicht bin OK!' It was not OK!! After several attempts with this therapeutic technique, I learned always to hold my sessions in a basement room, as both client and therapist were often driven to emulate lemmings and attempted to throw themselves from the office window. Not quite the desired effect!!

Needless to say, Bibfeldt abandoned this model as well in some desperation.

The past month has seen the reporting in two major newsweeklies and even the Chicago Sun-Times of May 2, 1978, of a new form of Bibfeldtian psychotherapy known as "paradoxical therapy." This new therapeutic model represents the next stage on life's way for the Bibfeldtian in search of his/her mentor's influences on present-day pastoral care. Psychiatrist Allen Fay has published the book Making Things Better by Making Them Worse (Hawthorne Press, $7.95). Paradoxical therapy was pioneered three years ago by Bibfeldt himself in an early attempt at injecting his theological method of Both/And directly into pastoral care technique. I quote here from the Sun-Times:

The paradoxical technique is a reverse psychology of sorts. The therapist agrees with a person's assessment of himself, or of his situation. Instead of telling the person that his assessment is nonsense, which usually makes him more angry and frustrated because he believes no one understands him, the therapist agrees with the assessment. Then the person sees how silly he is.
We gladly affirm that Bibfeldt is at the source of this therapy of agreement and joke that so well fits his life's work; after all, he has put all his energies into proving to himself and others just how silly he is!

Bibfeldt, however, has now moved on to even greener pastures than those opened by his brilliant exposition of paradoxical therapy. You will remember the mention we made earlier of the brief stint of pure academia in which Bibfeldt read Prof. Browning's little book on pastoral care. Bibfeldt also found himself called at this time to begin to get back to his earliest theological roots in order to confront the problems of an adequate theory of pastoral care. His first move in this direction was to re-investigate his family tree, a fairly common preoccupation. But Bibfeldt's family crest and coat of arms offered him a delightful surprise when he recalled that the motto on this coat of arms was "I dance to the tune that is played." Bibfeldt thought that this represented a thrilling root, and he decided to hang onto this precept as a part of his forthcoming works. He next attempted to recapture his theological roots. To this end, he returned to a study of Søren Kierkegaard, from whom Bibfeldt had derived his theory of Both/And in response to SK's own stance of Either/Or. Bibfeldt finally understood SK's thoughts on "infinite reflection" when he visited the House of Mirrors at a travelling carnival that stopped nearby, and he determined to hold onto this aspect of SK's thought as a precept as well. Finally, Bibfeldt found himself intrigued once again with trinitarian doctrine. Here he felt truly both three-in-one and one-in-three! at home! This classically Bibfeldtian doctrine was drawn out fur-
ther in a pseudonymous article published recently in *Christianity & Crisis*, an article in which Bibfeldt presents the fruits of his investigations into the actual three-in-oneness and one-in-three-ness of the person we know as Martin E. Marty, but who is known elsewhere as Harvey Cox or Andrew Greeley. Armed with his discovery of the possibility of actuality in trinitarian economies—and when Bibfeldt saw "Marty-Cox-Greeley's" combined royalty checks and honoraria he took the word "economy" seriously!—Bibfeldt felt equipped to take on the problem of pastoral care again.

Bibfeldt then faced up to his task. The problem was this: how to relate and accommodate these three precepts—trinity, "infinite reflection", and "dancing to the tune that is played"? How does one put these roots (or "root metaphors" as they are sometimes called) together in a way that allows everything to come out right? Bibfeldt was led to one inescapable conclusion: that any true Bibfeldtian pastoral care could only be performed in singles bars and discotheques. Only there, in the discos, did everyone "dance to the tune that is played." Only there, amidst the flashing of the strobe lights and the hissing of the fake fog machine, could be found enough mirrors for an infinity of infinite reflections. And there he would find singles—a representation of the the unitary pole of a trinity necessary for any trinitarian theorist. Or if he found couples, he, Bibfeldt, would make them a threesome! And everyone would be then providing infinite reflections of both three-in-oneness and one-in-three-ness, all the while dancing to the tune that was played!
Bibfeldt was thrilled by the possibilities. But his work "in the trenches" has left him precious little time in which to publish about his findings. What we have concerning this necessary and loving labor are several hints. We know that Bibfeldt suffered an unfortunate and embarrassing injury while attempting to acquire a duel scar as a young man. He acquired the scar, but it was in a place that he could never expose. Thus we have heard that he is planning to publish his definitive work on "discotherapy" under the title _Ungenerative Man_. We also know that Bibfeldt has had difficulty relating to his dancing clients the possibilities of eternal punishment, and that he has resorted to the medium of popular music, turning out the hit disco single "Disco Inferno." And we have had strong indications that Bibfeldt is attempting to develop specific style and modes of interaction with his clients that are correlative and consistent with his _Both/And_ theological stance. He has characterized this style as "In/Out Interaction", but we hear that he has not had much success in refining his techniques clinically.

How, in the end, do we characterize our odyssey? We have moved from men's rooms to discos; from Rogers to paradoxical therapy. We are tempted to agree with the Grateful Dead in a line from their now-classic song _Truckin_': "What a strange, strange trip it's been!" Or, as does the Bibfeldtian TV reporter in the comic strip _Doonesbury_, we might close with the phrase "Life goes on." However, when it comes to Bibfeldt, ever, we feel inclined to agree with the attitude of the Sufi Mulla (teacher) Nasrudin who, after moving to a new address, was approached by his mailman.
The postman called and said: "I hope that you are satisfied with the mail deliveries."

"More than satisfied," said Nasrudin, "and, in fact, from tomorrow you may double my order."
FOOTNOTES

1 Even this point is in question. Debate yet rages among some Bibfeldt scholars as to whether Bibfeldt's father drove a Mercedes, a BMW, a Honda Accord, or a VW Rabbit. The most recent argument for the Rabbit birthplace, presented for mass consumption and judgement in documentary film form, is presently showing in theatres nationwide. It details the tribulations of Frau Bibfeldt's lengthy labor and, featuring Joan Rivers in the starring role, is appropriately entitled Rabbit Test.

Other scholars yet debate Bibfeldt's birthdate. Was Bibfeldt born on All Saints Day in prefigurement of his future theological stance? Or was he in fact born late in the evening of October 31, Halloween? The argument for the October 31 date has been discredited largely due to another film presentation of the Bibfeldt birth-drama, this a poorly-conceived-and-produced, thinly-disguised allegorical attempt entitled Rosemary's Baby. Happily, the public was not fooled.

2 This essay was published in Idiot Wind, the Journal of Loquacious TV Meteorologists, June 1977. Incidentally, it is worth noting that another reason Bibfeldt liked this Scriptural text so well was that it precisely represented his theological positions in relation to the major philosophical and theological movements of the 20th century. In keeping with his motto of Respondeo Ergo Sum, Bibfeldt felt the need to respond accommodatingly to any philosophical or theological position with which he came into contact over the years, no matter how contradictory. To them all--
classical theological liberalism, neo-orthodoxy, social gospel, existentialism, process thought, liberation theology—he responded with cunning simplicity and foresight, "I am with you always, to the close of the age" knowing full well just how long that would be! The role of Bibfeldt in academic prophecy is one that cannot be covered here; suffice it to say that he has predicted that the title of Bernard McGinn's next book will be *Have Pen, Will Travel*. It will be a travel diary in which Prof. McGinn, during a year of trips to and from South Bend, Indiana, will attempt literal, allegorical, anagological, and tropological analyses of drinking and fight songs of the construction crews of the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris from the 11th century.

3 We will here pass over quickly in a footnote Bibfeldt's sure involvement with two recent films, *Oh God!* and *Annie Hall*. God as played by George Burns is a direct esthetic depiction of the doctrine of the relative quantitative similarity of God, a doctrine Bibfeldt developed in response to Barth's doctrine of the infinite qualitative distance of God. (Cf. "M" source). And at the outset of *Annie Hall*, Woody Allen quotes a joke that he mistakenly attributes to Groucho Marx, that he would never belong to a club that would have him as a member. This statement, in fact, is a description of Bibfeldt's own interaction with his contemporary theological communities; the phrase is taken from the recently-released biographical novel about Bibfeldt's life entitled *A River Runs Through the Forbidden Forest*, or why I never walk in dank, dark woods, co-authored by Mircea Eliade and Norman Maclean.
Let us note and remember Bibfeldt's fascination with things both three-in-one and vice versa. It proves to be a crucial point in his theories, both theological and pastoral.


Since Bibfeldt frequently has difficulty finding a publisher for his ground-breaking works, he must often work through semi-respectable ghost writers. The public is thus forced to wait several years to find out what Bibfeldt is really thinking and then only receives it in watered-down form. E.g., Bibfeldt's seminal study on sado-masochism, whips, chains, and bondage as a form of "Primal Scream" therapy entitled *The Agony and the Ecstasy*.

Bibfeldt's duelling scar first led him to suspect an affinity with the "punk rock" movement, which itself affirms such actions of minor self-mutilation. Bibfeldt's reluctance to expose his scar, however, caused him difficulty in relating to the punk rockers. The one time that he did expose his scar, he tells us, "left him cold." He also had difficulties in assuming the punk rock look. As Bibfeldt tersely put it: "I used to have a crew cut, but the crew bailed out."

Here we need only note the Bibfeldt-inspired figure from the movie *Saturday Night Fever*, the priest-brother who had recently left the church behind for a life of secular ministry to the disco-theque. This character also seemed to have trouble refining his therapeutic technique, and left the disco post haste when the
fake fog began to spread across the floor, thinking that the room was being gassed.
Dear Friends in Christ,

During this last month, I have been vacationing all over the east coast, visiting family and friends I have not seen since I moved to Madison. One of the persons that I met for the first time was a cousin, about 37 years old, who is an economist. I told him that I was on my way to Washington, D.C. to participate with the Lutheran Church in America contingent at the rally for the Equal Rights Amendment. We fell into an intense conversation about my participation in the march, and his, for he was going, too. He saw himself as a kind of lone ranger ethicist, apart from any church, who mostly unsuccessfully, and at best frustratingly, was raising social concerns to the people he worked with. How, he wanted to know, could I, could he, bear to be involved with social justices issues, when the odds were so much against their working out "in Justice's favor", as he put it? Even more specifically, if the Equal Rights Amendment failed, how would he have the energy to pursue any social justice issue again? And, he asked, how would I, as a woman, be able to continue to live with the weight of the nation saying that equality under the law could be abridged according to sex?

There was an intensity about his questions and a sadness about his self disclosure which said to me that the failure or success of the E.R.A had precipitated a crisis of meaning for him. He was on the verge of being burned out, an imminent casualty of a desire for justice.

The most serious questions he had for me, had to do with why I, who was as concerned about social justices issues as he, was not on the verge of exhaustion, was not planning to give up concerns about civil rights even if the E.R.A. was defeated. The question was a most appropriate one. To count back ten years in my own life, would have found me raising the same kinds of questions as I began my plans for the ministry. I, too, could not let any moment by to push whatever issue was alive for me at the moment, and certain events such as the killings on campus at Kent State, and Jackson State, and the invasion of Cambodia had the power over me to shake my Christian commitment in a major way. Such a situation was not true for me anymore. I began to think about why I wasn't saving the world singlehandedly anymore, and how I might communicate to him what had given me the strength to change. It was then I thought of my experience with a person of some reknown, Dr. Franz Bibfeldt.

Dr. Bibfeldt is an imaginary Lutheran theologian created by the Rev. Dr. Martin E. Marty, an imaginative Lutheran theologian in his own right. Bibfeldt came into being at Concordia Seminary when Marty and his colleagues wished to discover whether their professors ever really read the footnotes at the bottom of the student's papers. Bibfeldt came forth as the author of a magnum opus known as "The Theology of Both/And"; alternately titled, "The Importance of All of the Above", and subsequently appeared in book
reviews, and was duly entered in the card catalogue. Marty and his cohorts risked expulsion for their activities, and it looked like dear Dr. Bibfeldt was destined for oblivion upon Marty's graduation. But, Bibfeldt was rediscovered in 1970 at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago where I was a student. Conferences and parties were held in his honor where his theological slogan "both/and" or a rousing "maybe" became known to all. Some said that Bibfeldt's rediscovery was occasioned by Marty's presence at the Divinity School, where this National Book Club Award winner did his teaching, but Bibfeldt's loyal following, of which I am one, would prefer to say that he always really did exist in the hearts of students of the Gospel, if not always in their minds.

Two of Bibfeldt's favorite Bible passages are those we read as Scripture today. In the epistle, the first 10 verses of Romans Chapter 13, Paul discusses Christian obligations to the governments that surround us, the civil authorities that make possible life in community. One is not to deride, Paul says, the structures that God offers to bring order and justice to all persons, Christian and non Christian alike. At the same time in Matthew's Gospel, beginning at the 15th verse of the 22nd chapter, Jesus lets us know that he was concerned that we not set Caesar over against God, either. Jesus uses the denarius that the Pharisees hand him, as they try to trap him, as an occasion to expand their understanding of the obligation to civil government and to God. The Pharisees are expecting to catch him in being anti-Roman if he says no tribute is owed Caesar, or anti-Jew if he says that taxes are owed to Caesar. But Jesus turns the whole issue around, by responding in a way that Bibfeldt always loved, "Give, both to Caesar what is due Caesar, and to God what is due to God!" The Pharisees are taken by surprise and leave Jesus. They had expected "either/or" statements from Jesus about civil government. Judas had expected the same from the Lord; Either Jesus was to be Messiah-Revolutionary, or he was in some way against God's people. The high priest Caiaphas had the opposite expectations of the faith. Either one compromised with the occupying forces of Rome, or one couldn't save Judaism.

Bibfeldt meditated on these passages and was inspired to create the theology of "both/and". Jesus and Paul demonstrated for Bibfeldt four key relationships necessary for the faithful to understand: Both this world and the next, both Church and State, both sinful and righteous. (A fifth relationship had to do with Scripture itself. Bibfeldt offered the thought that believers were required to read both the chapter before the passage they were studying and the chapter after.)

The reaction to Bibfeldt, as Martin Marty records it, was both a strong and mixed one. There were many who were relieved to find "both/and" as part of the theology of the church. But others in the believing community were most uncomfortable. They professed a theology of "either/or" as central to the Good News. These persons stood for either law or gospel, either this world or the next, either sinful or righteous. America: either love it or leave it, either convert or be damned, either the church shall rule the state entirely, or the church shall have nothing to do with the state, either one is Christian or a politician, either fight in this war or stop calling yourself Christian! The points where people could be
Rev. Robin D. Mattison

upset were endless.

Bibfeldt in response to his readers hastened to assure them that there were both situations where "either/or" theology might be appropriate, and plenty of situations where it was a detriment to faithfulness. It was his observation that "either/or" theology tended to make people unhappy, anxious, defensive and frustrated because it posited life as a win/lose situation where one had to achieve certain status, viewpoints, life styles etcetera, before one was truly loved by God or anyone else. Life was a Darwinian competition to be the fittest; to marshal the most resources to one's cause, whatever that might be, with winning being the proof of righteousness.

I shared with my cousin that I saw him in the midst of the "either/or" struggle for fitness with his dividing line close to points of civil justice. In a way he was saying, "Either the E.R.A. passes or there is no justice". Because of this position, he was on the verge of departing from the realms of the committed into the realms of the apathetic. Not because he didn't want to be involved, but because the penalty was too high. The loss of the E.R.A. cause would be so intimately tied into a loss of personal worth, that there would be no safe area in his existence free from the threat of failure.

As we talked, I shared with him how Bibfeldt's theology of "both/and" had changed my conception of the church. The church had become for me the community where "both/and" is the realm of discourse, an arena for the blending of both the past experience of Israel with God, and the in-breaking of Christ's kingdom in the present moment in the interests of a holy future. A community where one attends to both the glamour and the terror of one's traditions. A community where all the traditional antagonists of creation: races, sexes, old and young, healthy and ill, educated and illiterate, are called together by a God who can be found in the symbols of all of them. I told him how the church in intercessory prayer offers petitions for both the seemingly clear cut issues of social justice and for the casualties to be found on both sides of the issue no matter what disposition is made of the central concern. I shared with him how my ministry to the pained and questing would remain the same whether the E.R.A. passed or not. Not because its passage isn't most important and to be supported by the church as it has been by the ALC and the LCA, but because new situations bring new casualties. The men and women who have been aggrieved before by lack of equality will switch places with those whose identities have been based in domination and subordination and who will feel pain on the E.R.A.'s passage. I shared with him the freedom one experiences in a community committed to the support of all persons where lone rangers, such as I had been, are seen as the lonely folk they are and offered the love and support needed for their compassion to prosper. I told him of the relief to be found in setting aside "either/or" win/lose definitions of self and task and be able to talk about social justice and pastoral care; the Union and the funeral. I did not disguise from him the slowness of the church's action on many issues, but I identified it as the result of wanting to minimize the casualties of change.
on both sides. He understood that, for he had been a casualty of his own desire for change.

My cousin listened carefully. A dialogue began. He did not return to the fold at that moment. I had not asked that, though I prayed for him. It would have been a violation of his integrity as a God-child to belittle his serious questioning with a "either come back to Jesus or else". But the seeds were sown on receptive soil; the denarius was seen both as Caesar's and as God's. A way to wholeness was pointed out, by virtue of the Bibfeldt humour. The comfort and strength of the believing community was identified: those who are willing for God's sake to point out the little murders of the human spirit that occur apart from any infringement of the law and the mass murders of human souls that occur with the law's permission.

Through the Gospel's power, I offered my cousin hope: the possibility of moving back from the intensity of seeing human decision-making as eternal and hanging forever on him. The possibility of being committed to the best of his energies and abilities without having one's soul, one's identity, being the wager on the outcome. The possibility of peace and health and joy within the midst of struggle for change.

I know he understood that much of what Bibfeldt was about. I know he understood the freedom of "both/and", the thoughtfully considered "maybe", over against the diatribes of right or left. My prayer is that it leads him to a faith which wants to let him be bothbeliever and struggling with unbelief, both a critical lover and a loving critic, both committed and delighted.

I believe that's possible. For him, for me, for you. Luther knew it, as Bibfeldt did:

This life, therefore, is not righteousness, but growth in righteousness, not health but healing, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise... This is not the end, but it is the road. All does not yet gleam in glory, but all is being purified.

Martin Luther
FRANZ BIEFELDT AND PASTORAL CARE:

THE THEOLOGIAN OF THE DEAD

Otto Dreydoppel, Jr.
May 10, 1973
Theology has in recent years accepted the responsibility for responding to the situation of those who are oppressed: Blacks, the Third World, gays, women, Hamilton Jordan. Alongside all these discriminated-against minorities stands—or perhaps I should say, lies—a group which has in the past had few advocates. I refer, of course, to the dead, the true "Silent Majority" in Christendom.

Most of us became aware of the crying problem of the dead only late in 1975 when reports of the ongoing terminal mortality of Generalissimo Francisco Franco began to be widely circulated. With that the dead-consciousness movement was born. The movement has been concerned recently not only with trying to arouse its constituency, but also in the effort to gain passage of anti-discrimination ordinances in several large American cities. Alas, the deads-rights opponents have carried the day in Miami, St. Paul, where electorates were swayed by their emotional campaigns. In those cities the pro-life forces saturated the media with such slogans as "Would you want your child taught by a dead person?" and "They want to recruit us all!" The issue has even found its way into the pop music scene where an anti-dead-rights hymn called "Stayin' Alive" was for several months at the top of the charts. Another recent song has sought to make plain the groundlessness of prejudice against the dead by deliberately exaggerating it. This is, of course, the pop short "Dead People!"

Dead People got no reason,
Dead People got no reason,
Dead People got no reason
To Live.

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They got clammy hands  
And glassy eyes.  
They lie around  
Just drawin' flies.  
They don't boogie much,  
And they lie so low  
You got to dig 'em up  
Just to say hello.  

Don't want no dead people  
Round here.

This truly sums up the existential crisis of the dead.

Long before the current dead-consciousness movement, however, there was one man alive to the dead issue: Franz Bibfeldt.

Professor Bibfeldt has long been sympathetic to the problems of the dead. His doctoral work, you will recall, treats "The Problem of the Year Zero." This study of the radical contingency of temporal location is a perfect theoretical basis for ministry to those who have entered Eternity. Furthermore, Bibfeldt has distinguished himself as the theologian of the "Both/And," the insight that all things can be made to come out right, that nothing should be excluded, and that the scholar's task is to adapt so as to be relevant in every age and circumstance. According to Bibfeldt, it is therefore wrong to exclude someone from our field of concern merely because he or she happens to be dead. Dead people have serious problems which deserve to be addressed. Moreover, dead people themselves perfectly exemplify the Bibfeldtian method. Who, asks Bibfeldt, is better able to adapt to new conditions and to do so quietly and without fuss than the dead? Out of his continuing desire to please everyone, not just the living, and in gratitude to the dead for their adaptability to his system, Franz Bibfeldt therefore spent several of his most creative years seeking to devise a pastoral therapy suitable for ministry to the dead.

Bibfeldt first began the attempt to craft a system of pastoral care especially for the dead in the early 1950s when Rogerian counseling was
in vogue. On the advice of colleagues at the Universität Treblinka he sought out Rogers, and finally found the great non-directive counselor in a public television studio outside Pittsburgh. After several months of clinical training with Misterogers, Bibfeldt was ready to go public with his method of counseling the dead: "It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood... Hi neighbor!... Can you say "thanatology"... I thought you could!"²

Back at Treblinka Bibfeldt soon learned that he had the wrong Rogers. He finally did meet the author of Client-Centered Therapy, and eagerly began to adapt the concept of reflective listening to the problem of ministry among the dead. Non-directive counseling, however, quickly proved to be ineffective with these clients. Bibfeldt discovered that while the dead make excellent Rogerian counselors—their ability to listen patiently is unexcelled—they somehow lack the necessary willingness to state their problems and provide the terms for meaningful counseling interchanges. Besides, none of the dead with whom Bibfeldt worked really ever had felt threatened by a directive pastoral counselor! Bibfeldt's project on pastoral care for the dead was to be dormant for another decade.

In April of 1966 Time magazine announced the death of God, and Bibfeldt's pastoral therapy was given new life. How better could one inspire faith and practice ministry among the deceased, he thought, than by constant reference to a Deity who was himself dead? The God-is-Dead theologians were, of course, only trying to make the point that God is wholly immanent. According to the Bibfeldtian both/and, however, this

² Bibfeldt published an account of this experience as "Neighborhood Ministry in Forest Lawn," Presbyterian Life After Death XX (1953).
implied that God was also wholly transcendent. Dead people were therefore well in touch with this wholly transcendent God, since they too transcended time and place. Bibfeldt briefly considered suicide in order to facilitate his ministry among the dead in the name of a dead God, but cowardice prevailed, and the Master began to cast about for better therapeutic techniques.

At about that time pastoral counseling was being influenced by what has come to be known as the Human Potential Movement. These were the advocates of group-grope and encounter sessions, Transactional Analysis, and Transcendental Meditation, Arica, and est. This movement seemed promising to Bibfeldt in helping the dead get in touch with themselves. Dead people proved perfect clients for the Erhard seminars, since they were willing to sit still not for a mere twelve or sixteen hours, but for really long stretches of time. Unfortunately, few of the dead clients who participated in est "got it." Bibfeldt also discovered that his dead clients were unable to repeat a mantra, and Th had to be abandoned also. At first Transactional Analysis seemed to offer a most useful therapeutic technique. In all of his transactions with the dead Bibfeldt never found a single one who was not OK, which was a hopeful sign. But when it came to charting life scripts—or, in this case, death scripts—Bibfeldt found so little variety in the existence of his various clients that he gave up the effort, and moved on in his quest for the perfect therapy for the dead.

There was the brief promise of a new pastoral theology in the early 1970s with the emerging theology of future hope. The eschatological

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theologians spoke of "the draw of the future" and of the creative possibilities of a "God who is in front of us." Dead people, of course, have nothing but future. And the idea of a "novum" which would break in seemed perfectly suited for providing new meaning structures for the dead, since their chief problem was one of boredom: nothing new ever happened. The promise of future theology for the dead died, however, when Bibfeldt confused future theologian Carl B. Raanten with rock star Johnny Rotten, and said menacingly, "I won't listen to that punk!"

Professor Bibfeldt was much taken with the "Life After Life" movement of the mid-1970s. Life-After-Lifers Elizabeth Kübler-Ross and Raymond Moody detailed the experiences of those who, having been clinically dead, were resuscitated and then were able to discuss the beauty of the afterlife: brilliant colors, a feeling of wholeness and peace, and the presence of a comforting "Being of Light." These people and their out-of-body experiences convinced Kübler-Ross and Moody that life after death existed "beyond the shadow of a doubt." If, reasoned the theologian of the both/and, there is life after life, there must also be death after life. His resolve to formulate a therapy of ministry for the dead was renewed.

At this point Bibfeldt sat down and began to think systematically about the pastoral problems which ministry to the dead should meet. Beyond the previously mentioned problem of ennui, of the awful sameness of the day-in-and-day-out life of the dead, it occurred to Professor Bibfeldt that dead people were extraordinarily prone to depression. This is not only because of the loneliness and rejection they experience daily (dead people

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4. Bumper stickers even began to appear which said: "Dead People Never Have a Nice Day!"
are usually allowed to associate only with their own kind), but also because the dead are condemned to sedentary lives and are denied meaningful work, and therefore, any sense of accomplishment.\textsuperscript{5} This became abundantly clear to Professor Bibfeldt when he attempted to discuss with a late colleague what future work Bibfeldt could expect to see him produce.

"\textquotedblright; replied the dead friend. Professor Bibfeldt discovered that the dead suffer from incredible housing discrimination. They are, for the most part, consigned to small, dark, subterranean one-room apartments.

The problems of inadequate housing launched Professor Bibfeldt on a several months' study of what should be done with the remains of the dead. Burial was aesthetically unacceptable, and, besides, cemetery space was becoming more and more scarce. Bibfeldt searched the pastoral care literature, but found little of help there.\textsuperscript{6} Then while reading the \textit{Dialogues} of Alfred North Whitehead, Bibfeldt came across the insight that "The English never abolish anything. They put it into cold storage."\textsuperscript{7} This led Bibfeldt to consider dealing with the dead cryogenically, by quick freezing. Empathy has always been the keystone of Bibfeldt's life and work, however,\textsuperscript{8} and since he shivered at the thought of being frozen himself, he couldn't stand the idea of freezing anybody else, living or dead. The cryogenic option

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{5} One notable exception is the late King Tutankhamun, who, even in death, has proved to be expert at fundraising.
\item \textsuperscript{6} Most of the books he read had terrible plots.
\item \textsuperscript{7} This is the obligatory Whitehead citation for this paper.
\item \textsuperscript{8} It has been suggested that it is this trait which makes him so well suited to ministry to the dead.
\end{itemize}
Bibfeldt his final insight on the pastoral care of the dead. Since, according to Ms. Sheehy, one should develop coping mechanisms to face these crises, Bibfeldt sought ways for dead people to come to terms with the state of being dead. The professor then realized that the dead, merely by being dead are in fact already coping with their condition. The best therapy for the dead, therefore, is the advice of the nursery Rhyme, "Leave them alone and they'll come home."11

After the success of his book, Bibfeldt threw himself with new vigor into the dead-rights movement. One of the churchly causes he became involved in was the demand for ordination of the dead. Since Mormons baptize the dead, he reasoned, why shouldn't the dead also be ordained? Not everyone agreed, however, and the ordination issue threatens to split the Episcopal Church. Likewise, Roman Catholicism, though it has shown admirable willingness to keep the dead alive through hagiography, shows little sign that dead Catholics soon will be ordained.

The rise of dead-consciousness has, inevitably, found dead people in the Evangelical wing of Christendom. They have, in fact, their own caucus within the Church Triumphant, usually referred to as "Died Again." Of this Bibfeldt, the affirmer of everything, is a charter member. Church growth has been spectacular among dead Evangelicals, since their evangelism techniques are highly refined. People join the "Died Again" movement literally

11. Professor Bibfeldt is still trying to come to grips with the problem of those who have been coerced into the ranks of the dead against their will. Many of these, especially young people, can be seen mooning around on street corners selling flowers. Attempts at rescuing such unhappy dead have been, at this writing, inconclusive. One thinks, for example, of Sir Charles Chaplin and recent efforts of Missouri Fundamentalists to bring a deceased believer back to life. See Professor Bibfeldt's guide on deprogramming the Righteous Vampire.

10. It is clear that Franz Bibfeldt's pastoral theology didn't evolve rationally, it just grew like Thanatopsis.
minute-by-minute. But even among the mainline Churches the roll of dead members grows daily.12

During the late 70s deadism has proved itself to be the most lively of issues. Franz Bibfeldt is now in his 82nd year and thus looks forward soon to joining the dead for whom he has been a faithful pastor. It is therefore fitting that Newsweek recently profiled him in a cover story. (I.e. was he?)

Franz Bibfeldt has finally begun to receive the recognition he has long deserved as theologian of the dead.

(Subject to revision as I am moved by the Spirit. Or Franz.)

12. See Dying Churches Are Growing! Franz Bibfeldt's answer to Dean Kelley's gloomy study on the decline of the mainline churches. Here he advances the "absolute value" theory of church growth: it doesn't matter whether your membership increases or decreases, as long as the numbers change.
Dyed-in-the-wool Died Againers are not, of course, content with Professor Bibfeldt's laissez faire pastoral therapy for the dead. Dead Evangelicals find more comfort in the charismatic psychotherapy propounded by Ruth Carter Stapleton usually referred to as "The Gift of Inert Healing."

Franz Bibfeldt leaves us finally with cautionary words about those stars of the Died Again movement who have become larger than life. These dead evangelists are media celebrities, and they tend to draw money and vitality away from local congregations. Their vehicles are such TV shows as PTL (that means, "pushing-up the lilies") and the 666 Club. By using space age electronics and technology these Died Again superstars become powerful beyond the range of mere mortal dead preachers. Beware, Bibfeldt warns us, of the BIONIC CHURCH!