THE FRANZ BIBFELDT FOUNDATION LECTURE FOR 1980

FRANZ BIBFELDT: THE BREAKDOWN OF CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE ORIGINS OF THE QUADRILATERAL MIND


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In keeping with this tradition, exemplified in Landon's "The Quest for the Historical Bibfeldt" and in Dreydoppel's essay on Bibfeldt's innovative methods of pastoral care for the dead, I, too, have endeavored to find an area of scholarship into which Bibfeldt has --- shall we say --- not yet intruded.

Given even a very low standard of academic quality, this was not difficult to do. Indeed, it took only a few minutes' reflection to spot the gaping hole in the literature. Though Franz Bibfeldt has been studied in these lectures biographically, historically, text critically, and even in terms of his implications for pastoral theology, no attention has been given to Bibfeldt's own psychological development. Indeed, apart from that unfortunate episode in the early 1930's, when Bibfeldt was --- shall we say, not to put to fine a point on it --- in residence at a little sanitarium near Basel, very little attention has been given to the dynamics of this unique mind.
Why this should be so is something of a mystery, for we have no shortage of authors in search of a project today, and psychobiography is --- as we say in the technical language of academic publishing --- selling like hotcakes. Erik Erikson's monumental study, *Gandhi's Truth*, fairly begs for a sequel titled *Bibfeldt's Uncertainty*. Bruce Mazlish interpreted the historical role of the leaders of great political movements in a thoughtful book titled *The Revolutionary Ascetic*. Surely the career of Franz Bibfeldt invites exploration in a companion volume titled *The Hesitant Hedonist*.

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I have uncovered one attempt to prepare a psychological study of Bibfeldt's development, however. Unfortunately, it failed due to what we may call "technical difficulties." Earlier this month I reproached my erstwhile teacher, colleague, and sometime collaborator, Jim Fowler, for failing to include Bibfeldt among the subjects for his faith development interviews. Fowler was properly chagrined over the omission, but he complained to me that he had tried to secure a record of Bibfeldt's faith development and failed. The problem was this: Fowler's faith
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The root cause of all these failures should be apparent to anyone who has studied at the University of Chicago. Previous student's of Bibfeldt's psychology have failed not from lack of will nor from want of persistence. They have failed because they lacked a method. Before we can begin a proper study of Bibfeldt's consciousness, we require a methodological prologue, a historico-hermeneutic propaedeutic, a preface to any future scientific system of understanding the mind of this master of modern theological reflection.

Now before you all rush out and submit dissertation proposals on this topic to the Committee on Degrees, let me warn you that, I've already done it. In this publish or perish world, assistant professors are careful not to talk about problems that they haven't already solved --- and, I might add, careful not to solve a problem without talking about it. As one astute poet has put it:

The codfish lays 10,000 eggs,
The humble hen but one ...
The codfish never cackles,  
To show you what she's done.  
And so we loathe the codfish,  
While the humble hen we prize;  
Which only goes to show you,  
That it pays to advertise.

Now with that wise counsel firmly in mind, let us proceed.  
I found the key to a psychological understanding of the work of Franz Bibfeldt while browsing in the writings of Julian Jaynes. Jaynes is a Princeton psychologist who recently wrote a book called The Origins of Consciousness and the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind. Most of you know from some undergraduate psych course or whatever that the human brain consists of two more or less discrete halves, which in ordinary consciousness function in tandem. The right brain, somewhat oddly, controls the left side of the body, and seems to handle the affective, intuitive, conceptual part of our thinking, while the left brain controls the right side, and busies itself with calculations, systems, logic, and problem solving functions. Crudely put, each of us has in his or her head a poet and an IBM executive, and somehow or other they get along well enough to keep us functioning.

All that is a psychological commonplace. Jaynes, however, makes it the center of a startling thesis. If ordinary consciousness results from the coordination of left and right brain functions, then human beings in fact were not conscious until quite recently. Right down into early historic times, Jaynes argues, the left and right brains functioned more or less independently, and the kind of coordination that today we achieve by intuition and imagination happened then much more directly and dramatically. The right brain would "speak" to the left. People in times of stress, crisis,
and decision did not think their ways through problems. They heard voices telling them what to do.

Now you see what Jaynes thinks he's done here. In one bold swoop he's explained the origins of religion and the voices of the gods. And he's explained why the gods stopped speaking and secularization set in. At some point in time --- Jaynes dates it precisely between the composition of the Iliad and the Odyssey--- the left and right brains got hooked together like they are hooked for us; people started to think like we think, the two-sided mind became unified in one consciousness, and the voices stopped. Hence "the origins of consciousness and the breakdown of the bicameral mind.

Now that was the clue that launched my study of the psychology of Franz Bibfeldt. Unlike the Freudian theories of Erikson or the Piagetian theories used by Fowler and Kohlberg, this was a formula that matched the data. Those who know Bibfeldt have often remarked that he seems to be barely conscious. Jaynes' theory leads to the exciting speculation that perhaps he isn't conscious at all. Might it not be the case that in the author of The Unrelieved Paradox and the theologian of Both/And, the left brain/right brain coordination that characterizes us ordinary mortals has broken down?

Perhaps. But there is one problem with that hypothesis. When the gods speak, they tend to be pretty definite about their opinions and quite demanding about what they want. When Bibfeldt speaks, he equivocates. How could we use a theory that Jaynes uses to explain Socrates' demanding, commanding daimon to explain the theologian who answered Barth's thunderous Nein! with a little pamphlet called Vielleicht?
The answer, I think, lies in a proper appreciation of the psychological and physiological foundations of Bibfeldt's theology. This man who has tried so hard to please everybody and who has attempted throughout his career as author and teacher to affirm all propositions simultaneously, in the hope that some of them might be true, and a few of them might even be popular --- this man has obviously developed a specialized brain function that allows him to affirm a proposition with one part of his mind and deny it with another. Following the usual observation of his students and critics that Bibfeldt does all of his theologizing off the top of his head, we may identify the affirmation and negation functions of Bibfeldt's mind with the upper and lower brain, respectively.

Now you see how we arrive at an explanation of the theology of both/and. When Bibfeldt's unique functional separation of upper and lower brain is combined with the usual specialization of left and right brain, we get a four-fold division of labor in the head. The poet and the IBM executive are joined by a composer of TV jingles and a card sharp.

When the coordination between that little team breaks down, we get a return to the pre-conscious condition that Jaynes described: the breakdown of consciousness and the origins of the quadrilateral mind. And we get a reappearance of the oracular voices that Jaynes described. But with an important difference: when, as in Bibfeldt's case, that oracular right brain is further divided into upper and lower functions, a new phenomenon emerges. In Bibfeldt's case the gods not only speak; they bicker with each other.
It is evident, I trust, that the theological world must feel deep gratitude to Prof. Jaynes (and, of course, to me) for providing the clue that enables us to understand Bibfeldt's work. Those who have long stood in awe of the theologian's ability to hold two contradictory opinions in perfect unity, without distinction and yet without confusion, have compared the workings of his mind to that of a great ecumenical council. This, of course, is superstitious hyperbole --- well-meant, but inaccurate. Scientifically considered, Bibfeldt's mind more closely resembles the workings of a small, but fractious, pastor-parish relations committee I once observed in the First United Methodist Church in Compton, Illinois.

Let us, then, push on to a further analysis of Bibfeldt's life and work according to the quadrilateral model I have proposed. (I wish to pass over for the moment the obviously frivolous suggestion that for easy reference we designate these quadrants with the names Joe, Jim, Trent, and Davey --- after the members of the Sawdust Trail Quartet.)

One of the most important features of the quadrilateral model is that it not only helps us to understand the polarities, dualities, and paradoxes in Bibfeldt's systematic theology. It brings order to the apparent chaos in his personal life as well. We all know about Barth's fondness for the music of Mozart, and some of you may have heard of Bonhoeffer's penchant for 19th century Romantic German novels. Several investigators of the left-brain/right-brain hypothesis have suggested that interests like these, apparently unrelated to the professional work of the theologians, in fact provides a special sort of right-brain activity that lays an intuitive foundation for the systematic
work of the left-brain.

This is a fruitful suggestion for Bibfeldt work, too. But remember that with Bibfeldt we have to divide that right brain activity into upper right and lower right --- and we have to expect a certain conflict between them.

For example, Bibfeldt is a philatelist, a stamp collector, in his spare time. He has, in fact, amassed one of Europe's finest collections of postage stamps featuring religious art. This collection would perhaps be more widely displayed at philatelic conferences, except for the unfortunate fact that the stamps in question are attached to one of Europe's largest and most complete collections of obscene post cards. It is not known whether Bibfeldt intended to collect the stamps and acquired the post cards as an afterthought, or vice-versa, but the theology of both/and has clearly crept into his leisure life as well.

I'm sure you wish, as I do, that we could explore these aspects of Bibfeldt's personal life at greater length --- but I see that our time is coming to an end. I suppose it is true that theologically our time is always coming to an end, but at a Bibfeldt lecture that circumstance gives new meaning to the phrase, "not a minute too soon."

I suppose that the overall effect of this exploration of Franz Bibfeldt's psychology is, as always, to tell us something about ourselves --- a circumstance that gives new meaning to the phrase, "I'd rather not know."

But it is true nonetheless. If in Christ we see ourselves reflected as it were in a glass, darkly, then in Franz Bibfeldt
we have an image of ourselves that is plain. When we look at Bibfeldt, the glass is perfectly clear, and we can see that it is we ourselves who are fuzzy around the edges.
Franz Bibfeldt: The Breakdown of Consciousness and the Origins of the Quadrilateral Mind
Robin W. Lovin

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ROBIN W. LOVIN is Assistant Professor of Ethics and Society in The Divinity School. This lecture was delivered to faculty and students at the annual meeting of the Franz Bibfelt Foundation in May, 1979.

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During the early years of the United Nations, according to the "M" (Marty) source, "Bibfeldt gave the United States' U.N. Ambassador Warren Austin the suggestion that an Arab-Israeli dispute could be resolved if only the Arab delegates and Israeli delegates would come out with him into the hall to settle the affair." As this suggestion indicates, Bibfeldt has unusual insight into matters of diplomacy. Yet, strange as it may seem, a thorough investigation of Bibfeldt's influence in this area has not been undertaken before now. Perhaps it would be better if it never were undertaken. However, the one thing all of us as Bibfeldtian scholars have in common, is the insatiable desire to bring to light that which is better left in the darkness. With this in mind, I'm sure you understand why I must proceed.

Bibfeldt's political theory, as my title indicates, falls between that of autocracy and democracy. Autocracy may be described most accurately by Louis XIV's famous phrase "L'Etat c'est moi" (translated "I am the state"). Bibfeldt's problem with this must be obvious to everyone. A diplomacy based upon "L'Etat c'est moi" could be hard for everyone else to live with. Democracy, on the other hand, may be characterized by the phrase "L'Etat c'est nous" (translated "We are the state"). As Bibfeldt has pointed out countless times, too often this, in reality, becomes "We, over against everyone else, are the state." Bibfeldt's political theory, as we shall soon enough see, is best represented by the phrase "L'Etat c'est tout le gratin" (translated "Everybody that is anybody is the state").

Protagoras, the Sophist, taught that "Man is the measure of all things". Democratic theory is philosophically rooted in this statement. Autocracy, however, is philosophically rooted in Plato's reply to Protagoras
that "God is the measure of all things". In autocratic theory, of course, the state is God. When Bibfeldt was asked which of these two political philosophies, autocracy or democracy, he preferred over the other, he replied:

Some of my friends live in democracies and prefer them to autocracies, and some of my friends live in autocracies and prefer them to democracies. As for me, I stand with my friends.

Because democracy and autocracy are diametrically opposed to one another, Bibfeldt sought to find a via media, a middle course. This arises out of his intense belief that no two issues are ever so far apart that they can't be straddled. "When any theologian worth his salt comes to the parting of the ways," writes Bibfeldt, "he goes both ways." Therefore, he set about developing a political theory large enough to include both autocracy and democracy, and act as a bridge between them.

First, Bibfeldt realized that he must apply the guidelines of his Bultmann's hermeneutic and analyze the word "politics" in order to understand what was meant by so ambiguous a term. The first step of this process was to break the term into its components. "Poli". Of course; that means "many". Becoming excited, feeling that he was really on a roll, Bibfeldt discovered that "tics" meant "local and habitual spasmodic motions of particular muscles". Does not that describe international relations? Obviously, by way of his hermeneutic, Bibfeldt got immediately to the root of the problem in all politics. Too many muscles habitually and spasmodically motioning in various locales. Wouldn't it be better, he reasoned, to have just one muscle habitually and spasmodically motioning in various locales? Nations cannot expect to see eye to eye when they are looking down upon one another's muscles. In order to reflect the meaning of his solution to the problem, Bibfeldt called his political theory "unitics", as "uni" connotes one.
Rather than Protagoras' "Man is the measure of all things", or Plato's "God is the measure of all things", Bibfeldt decided that the keynote phrase of his unities theory should be a statement philosophically true to both autocracy and democracy; he came up with the phrase "Hindsight is the measure of all things". This reflects the fact that a unities statesman is one who possesses the ability to foretell what will happen tomorrow, next month, next year, — and to explain afterwards why it did not happen. Bibfeldt further centered his theory around the text Ecclesiastes 4:11 which reads: "So if two lie together, they keep warm; but how can one alone keep warm?" The failure of autocracy and democracy to successfully lie together in the unities bed, Bibfeldt later reasoned, was the chief cause of the cold war.

In this realistically conceived idealist posture, that of autocracy and democracy lying together keeping one another warm, world leaders would be able to drive world opinion in much the same way Bibfeldt used to drive his old mule. In his words: "In order to keep up the appearance of being the driver, I had to watch the way he was going and follow closely." International relations carried on in this way, according to Bibfeldt, would eliminate national rivalries and all diplomacy would move as one giant muscle motioning habitually and spasmodically in various locales.

As an international traveller, it is only natural that Bibfeldt should want to lecture internationally about his unities theory. He set off to do just that in the early thirties. His advance man billed him as "Franz Bibfeldt: the unities theory spokesman." Since, after a stop in his beloved adopted homeland of Switzerland, the tour was to take him first to France and then to Quebec in Canada, the advance billing was done in French. It read: "Franz Bibfeldt: l'unitics thèorie porte-parole." A slight misunderstanding developed in which Swiss authorities became
concerned when they mistranslated the advance billing to read "Franz Bibfeldt: a lunatic theory spokesman". Upon his arrival, Bibfeldt was promptly placed in residence at a little sanitarium near Basel. He was forced to remain for a little more than a year. This ended, rather prematurely, the international lecture tour. However, it did inspire him to write an informative non-theological treatise dealing with the subject of unexpected leisure time entitled Suntan Compound.

During the summer of 1948, an acquaintance of Bibfeldt's from his year at the sanitarium contacted him about an opportunity to lecture at the Annual Kamikaze Pilots Alumnist Dinner in Tokyo, Japan. Because of his already much publicized interest in the Pastoral care of the dead, Bibfeldt readily accepted. The lecture he delivered to his grave listeners eventually grew into his book entitled Die Sprache auf der Widerspruchsgeist (Diction in the Spirit of Contradiction). In that classic work, Bibfeldt describes unitics diplomatic phraseology:

If you were to say to a homely woman, "your face would stop a clock", that would be uncomplimentary and utter stupidity. However, if you said to her, "When I look into your eyes, time stands still", that would be an excellent example of unitics diplomacy.

In still another work, found left behind after his 1970 visit to the Playboy mansion, entitled Unitics: Between Two Impotent Political Theories, Bibfeldt briefly mentions an informative exchange between himself and Reinhold Niebuhr in which Niebuhr credits Bibfeldt with influencing him to view things realistically. The exchange of letters between the two theological giants reads as follows:

Dear Franz,

As you know, I have long been an admirer of your work. When, in 1930, I first heard your unitics theory, I was deeply impressed by the clarity you brought to such a difficult subject. In the fourth chapter of my own book, An Interpretation of
Christian Ethics, published in 1932, I used a phrase of yours ("impossible possibility") to describe both the relevance of love in the human community, and at the same time, point to its difficulties.

You also helped me to realize that neither democracy nor autocracy should be considered as either saintly or demonic; this realization has figured prominently in my work ever since.

Your theology of both/and is obvious even in many of my book titles: The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness, Pious and Secular America, etc. I apologize for not crediting your influence in print, but as you may realize, Americans are somewhat skeptical of German theologians.

Affectionately and with great respect,
Reinhold

Dear Reiny,

Thank you for your kind letter. It gives me the opportunity to remind you to give idealism the same fair shake you always give to realism. Remember, a good theologian has much in common with the mugwump; he should sit on a fence with his mug on one side and his wump on the other.

Sincerely,
Franz

In trying to determine what measure of influence Bibfeldt has had upon Jerry Falwell, I realized that to get the entire story I would have to spend eye-popping-er, I mean, eye-pooping hours researching in the Penthouse archives hoping to turn up valuable historical evidence placed there as a result of the recent Penthouse interview with Falwell. My research did not go unrewarded. I found some good historical stuff as well.

My work at Penthouse uncovered the fact that Falwell has been deeply influenced by Bibfeldt's hermeneutic of reversism. As the P source (Price) discovered, Bibfeldt developed this hermeneutic in order to balance the one sided nature of the sayings of Jesus. According to Bibfeldt: "Reversism operates as follows: Any saying which is too hard to understand . . . is to be understood to mean the opposite of what it literally says." Falwell has found this hermeneutic particularly useful in understanding the sayings
Jesus that happen to have political implications, as the following exchange
between Falwell and Bibfeldt illustrates.

Dear Franz,

Your hermeneutic of reversism is the only higher critical
method that enables me to read the politically oriented words
of Jesus the way I believe they should be read. Therefore, it
must be of God.

In my appreciation of your profound work, I am sending you
your own copy of the Giant Print Faith Partner King James Version
of the Holy Bible. I am confident that you will be most anxious
to pledge the ten dollars a month necessary to become a full-
fledged faith partner in our ministry. It is considered a
tax-deductible donation.

Living in His Will,
Jerry

Dear Jerry,

As a non-American, I do not pay taxes. Therefore, I have no
reason to donate to your "Immoral Minority" (as determined by
the guidelines of my reversism hermeneutic) organization. However,
I have autographed your faith partner Bible and am returning it
under separate cover. You can sell it for a fortune at the
University of Chicago Divinity School annual booksale. Just get
it into the hands of Joe Price, who I believe is a permanent
resident of Swift Hall. He will do right by you.

Sincerely,
Franz

Currently, Bibfeldt is working on two new works in the area of
international relations. The first, soon to be released, is a study of
the world wars entitled Sacred Tournies. The second is a book through
which he is trying his hand at Haigiohraphy. It is a book about the
present Secretary of State, the new so-called "patron saint of democracy".

We have now traced the development of Bibfeldt's political theory
and looked briefly at its impact. In closing, I offer the following:
Si monumentum requiris, circumspice (If you seek his monument, look around
you).
Those of us who have both followed and led the career of Franz Bibfeldt, who have both respected and disdained, 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 Brandeis; 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 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.
"There's No Business:"
Franz Ribfeldt and Alternative Careers for the Ph.D. in Religion
in Show Business

by
Glenn Pollend

for
The 1963 Spring Franz Ribfeldt Festival

March 31, 1963
What can we say about Franz Bibfeldt that hasn't been said already? Theologian, scholar, pastor, social critic, biblical exegete, orthopedic shoe salesman -- Franz Bibfeldt has been all these and more. How may we properly pay tribute to a man who has called the theology of Kierkegaard "nothing that a month in Alcapulco wouldn't cure?" A man who has defined the union of religion and psychology as "a process wherein God tells us we're O.K. and He's the All-Being Creator of Time, Space and Dimension?" A man who regards the Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas as "the finest product of the finest mind of medieval church history, and about as exciting as a turtle race?"

But let us turn to the tribute paid to Franz Bibfeldt by his colleagues. Jerald Brauer once wrote, "I consider Franz Bibfeldt the finest mind of our generation because he always wants to see photographs of my grandchildren." Martin Marty, "the man who found the fun in fundamentalism," has said, "Prof. Bibfeldt has been my inspiration in everything I've ever done, except buying a Nehru jacket in 1967; I don't know what inspired me to do that."

Today we are to discuss Franz Bibfeldt and alternative careers for the Ph.D. in religion. Of course, this is a subject of purely academic interest to those of us attending the Divinity School. We, after all, were attracted here by the ads in the back of Christian Century, showing Jim Lewis in a gorilla suit saying, "If I don't get you a good teaching job in a world-class university, I'll eat the entire Church Dogmatics!" The Divinity School's record for placing its graduates is so good that next year Dean Gamwell plans to institute
the policy of "A Job Upon Graduation or Double Your Tuition Back."

But there are others less fortunate who face a difficult job market, and upon this subject, as upon so many others, the sage words of Franz Bibfeldt are to be heeded.

Our particular interest will be alternative careers for the student of religion in show business. I must confess to a personal interest in this subject since for several years before beginning my graduate studies I was a television writer and certainly got what show people call "the business." Bibfeldt has always been keenly aware of the close association between religion and the entertainment industry. As he wrote in "Comforting Thoughts for Those Awaiting Tenure:" "Every pastor who preaches has something of the actor in him, every scholar of liturgics has something of the stagehand in him, every professor who supervises a Ph.D. dissertation has something of the dog-trainer in him."

The sources for Bibfeldt's dicta on the study of religion and show business are many. Apart from his major opus on the job search, What Color Is Your Parasol?, he has written a series of articles for the Cambridge Journal of Philosophy in India, the Revue des Haladroites Études Bibliques, the Zeitschrift für Verblendjet Theologie, and TV Guide. To those who are concerned with methodology, I hasten to assure you that I shall steer a middle course in dealing with these texts. I shall neither seek to go "behind the text" nor remain "before the text," but will rather stand "beside the text," treating it as a friend and equal whose opinion I may or may not seek. This is of course Bibfeldt's own approach. As my justification I cite his
remark to Langdon Gilkey at a recent Very Important Theologians' Seminar: "Text, shmext! Doesn't anyone read books anymore?"

Franz Bibfeldt was drawn early to show business in the form of the theatre, when his father took him to a production of Oscar Wilde's Salome when he was fourteen. He noted his reactions in his diary:

"The anguish of knowing that the life of John the Baptist hung in the balance was second only to the thrill of seeing Salome's 'Dance of the Seven Veils.' Fraulein Schmidt, who played Salome, is a fine big girl and an excellent dancer. You'd never know from listening to Pastor Vogel's sermons that religion could be so exciting." Thus were born two of young Franz' keenest interests, and religion was soon to become a third.

At university, Franz took an active part in student dramatics, topping his undergraduate career with the lead role in Charly's Aunt. This part won him the first of many academic awards, when his fellow students elected him Queen of the May. He became interested in the cinema as a graduate student. After seeing Intolerance in 1926, he wrote: "Historians of religion tell us that all drama arose from the narration of tribal myths around the communal campfire. The psalms seem to reflect some drama of conflict between the God Jahweh and the chaos monster, resulting in Jahweh's enthronement as King of Creation. European theatre began in passion plays performed outside cathedrals. So why won't Momma let me go to the burlesque in KönigFriedrichStrasse?"

While on the faculty of Union Theological Seminary, Bibfeldt was inspired by the many overtly religious plays presented on the New York stage, including Green Pastures and Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral.
Holland: Bibfeldt – page four

It was always Bibfeldt's opinion, however, that all theatre would benefit from the inclusion of religious themes and concerns, and that it is the responsibility of the student of religion to assist the playwright when necessary with emendations to the text — excuse me, play. He put his theory into practice while serving as faculty advisor to the two theatrical groups at Union, the Protestant Players and the Theatre Guild of St. Jude the Obscure. He was always careful, however, to ensure the "religious" additions were in keeping with the time and spirit of the original play. Thus, in his production of Shakespeare's Henry V, two soldiers spent the night before the Battle of Agincourt comforting themselves with the mystical insights of Meister Eckhardt. Paul Tillich himself appeared as a walk-on character in Bibfeldt's version of A Streetcar Named Desire to explain Stanley Kowalski's existential alienation from God to a skeptical Blanche DuBois. Tillich did it as a personal favor to Bibfeldt, whom he always affectionately referred to as "that noodlehead." Tillich later admitted that appearing on stage not only tested the dynamics of his faith, but it had shaken his foundations a bit as well.

Unfortunately, Bibfeldt's flirtation with adding spiritual dimensions to popular drama was curtailed by the shortsightedness of certain playwrights and archaic copyright laws, and he was forced to pursue new interests. He soon investigated the part religion had to play in other sorts of entertainment, but his first love has remained the theatre. He recently published a paper finding echoes of fertility rites and virgin sacrifice in the Rockettes and other theatrical
displays of feminine pulchritude. His remark that "the kick-line of Forty-Second Street is just another manifestation of sacred prostitution" earned him the admiration of fellow scholars and a stiff letter from David Merrick's attorneys.

Clearly, then, we may see from Franz Bibfeldt's own example that the Ph.D. in religion has much to offer the theatre, and indeed all aspects of show business. Bibfeldt's conviction that this is so is a result of the deep influence of Marxism upon his thought. Although originally hostile to Marxism in the early thirties, by 1939 Bibfeldt saw it as the only way out of the crisis which was to become the Second World War. I know that to associate a scholar of Prof. Bibfeldt's stature with Marxism is to degrade him in the eyes of some, but as Bibfeldt himself put it, "I must bow to the dictates of my conscience. Both my mind and my heart tell me that Croucho Marx is the only hope for the future of comedy, although Chico and Harpo are pretty good too. Zeppo? Ihocey. Couldn't even sing."

This remark underlines the importance that Prof. Bibfeldt attributes to comedy, and anyone who has read much of Bibfeldt's work will agree that there is a fine line between the study of religion and comedy. As he said in a career seminar in Berkeley in 1973, "You show me someone who wants to spend a lifetime studying the Council of Trent and I'll show you a clown." All of us who study religion are aware that there are elements of the ridiculous as well as the sublime, especially if you have to learn Akkadian or Sanskrit. Of course, we also know that it is not right to make fun of anyone's religion, not even that of Ernest Angley or the people we read about...
Holland: Bibfeldt – page six

in Prof. Reynolds' class on religious communities. However, Bibfeldt has pointed out that comedy is a way of "sugar-coating" serious social criticism, as we may see by the examples of Lenny Bruce, Richard Pryor, and Steve Martin, whose comedy will earn you more serious social criticism than anything else you can think of. Comedy may thus provide a vehicle for serious religious discussion. Bibfeldt has shown that the greatest of religious teachers used this technique, as we may see in his articles including "The Lord of Laughter: Christ as Comedian," "The Power of the Boffo One-Liner in the Thought of Confucius," and "The Buddha: One Mild and Crazy Guy?"

In the same way, Bibfeldt sounds the call for the modern student of religion to use comedy to impart his or her message to the untutored masses. "The simplest religious truths become more easily grasped by the lay person when expressed in humorous terms," Bibfeldt wrote in "Pearls Before Swine: Great Religious Insights for the Uninitiated." "Which remark bears more impact: 'God is ubiquitous' or 'God is so ubiquitous that when He sits around the house, He really sits around the house?' The student of religion must somehow learn to combine the hair shirt and the Borscht Belt."

Of course, when most of us think of show business, we think of television, the Muzak in the dentist's office of life. There can be no doubt that religion is a mainstay of contemporary television programming, but the mainline denominations — those that don't practice snake-handling — are not well represented. Franz Bibfeldt has discussed this problem on a number of religious television programs, from "ABC's Wide World of Krishna" to "Monday Night Haddish," but
since these shows were all aired between one and five in the morning, his views have not received the attention they deserve. As he said last August on "Methodists Look At the News," "The capacity of television for disseminating information is enormous, and it is the responsibility of religious professionals - academics, pastors, bartenders - to exploit it to its fullest capacity. The time has come for religious quiz programs." His suggestions for such programs included "Leap of Faith," in which contestants climb up Jacob's Ladder by means of empirical evidence for design in the natural world before making the "Leap of Faith" across the chasm of despair to the postulation of a beneficent divine Creator. Another suggested program was "Zen Fasting," a quiz in which the winner is the first contestant to stop attempting to answer the questions. Bibfeldt was also instrumental in the creation of the short-lived quiz show sponsored by the Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago, "Let's have a novena," in which contestants committed themselves to various devotions in exchange for cash prizes, pilgrimages and various indulgences. The members of the audience would dress as their favorite saints, but a nasty incident arose when the eagle of a St. John the Divine attacked the greyhound of a St. Ferdinand III of Castile, and the host, Fr. Lonty, was soon reassigned to a leper colony in Senegal.

Of course, where the Ph.D. in religion can make his greatest impact is in shaping the minds of the younger generation. An effective medium for this task is children's television. In a speech to the 1979 graduating class of Oecolampadius Institute in Buffalo, Bibfeldt asked, "How many of you are here today because of Captain
Kangaroo's daily admonition to say your prayers? How many first gained a sense of the falleness of man through the brutality of 'Tom and Jerry'? How many first appreciated the 'banality of evil' by means of the adventures of Clutch Cargo? Yet today, the moguls of children's television are content to entertain with puppets and cartoons about shapes, colors and the alphabet. Bert and Ernie are all very well, but they don't bring us any closer to solving the riddle of existence, do they? This question poses a challenge to all of us who are students of religion, a challenge to bring to the children of America the benefits we enjoy in studying religion: the happy hours spent among the archives of obscure denominations, the sense of accomplishment when you've carried a theological point to its logical conclusion and beyond, the joy of mastering a language no one has spoken for two thousand years, the status of being the world's leading authority on Schwankfelder hymnody. In this, as in so many other cases, Prof. Bibfeldt has led the way with his own practical example. It was not long ago that he paid a visit to Mister Rogers' "Neighborhood of Make-Believe" where he had a long discussion with the hand-puppet King Friday the Thirteenth about the problem of Job. An unfortunate accident with a high power cable led to the tiny puppet's wooden head exploding, the puppeteer breaking his leg, and Prof. Bibfeldt's hair going Afro from a 20,000-volt electrical charge. As Fred Rogers himself said at the time to his horrified viewers: "Did you like the way Prof. Bibfeldt lit up? Can you say 'electro-convulsive shock?'"

There is much more we could say about Prof. Bibfeldt's own
contributions to the world of show business: his justification for "My Mother the Car" based on the theory of reincarnation in the Tibetan Book of the Dead; his brilliant analysis of the evolution of Thai Buddhism based entirely on one production of The King and I; his part as spiritual advisor to the cast and crew of Monty Python's Life of Brian; and his contributions to a forthcoming Broadway musical based on Richard Hooker's Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity. What is more important is what you and I, as people trained in the various disciplines devoted to the study of religion, will do to help others gain a better insight into their own and humankind's spirituality. This is a sacred duty which we must not shirk — unless, of course, we find academic positions instead.

I would like to conclude this essay as I began it, with a personal note. While I was studying at Oxford I happened to meet Prof. Bibfeldt in the Bodleian Library, where he was researching a book about the Oxford Movement and its influence on the British incense and candle industry. I spoke to him not only about my respect for his massive contribution to scholarship, but also of my own ambitions. When I finished, he flashed me a kindly smile and said something I would like to share with all of you as a parting thought. "Remember," he said, "no matter what wealth may come to you, it is easier for a rich man to pass through the eye of a needle than it is for a camel to... than it is for a camel to."
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Bibliography - page two

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AN EXEGESIS OF

FRANZ BIBFELDT'S

THE FOOD CONTEXT OF PASTORAL CARE

Dale Richesin
The past year has been a busy one for Bibfeldtian scholars. Scholars of this generation, the post-modern Bibfeldtian age, have not been content to explore just the important issues of the past; issues that I am sure you remember well: the existential problem of the year 0, the interpretative dynamics of the both/and theory, as well as the very important work in the hermeneutics of bullgeschichte. These problems have certainly laid the basis for Bibfeldtian research in the past. In this year, we have seen many new advances in these areas as well as the emergence of Bibfeldtian scholarship into new and challenging areas beyond those originally set down by the great founder of our movement. Franz Bibfeldt has now broadened his theology into many new areas. His basic appeal at present is to a broader, more secular audience. On the heels of Langdon Gilkey’s latest work, Reaping The Whirlwind we were quite pleased to see the epic film produced by Franz Bibfeldt and Associates, “Gone With The Whirlwind” which will be released this August. The hit musical single from that movie is already receiving some airplay, “Blowing In The Whirlwind.” The disco version, however, “Staying Alive In The Whirlwind” is receiving much more popular acclaim.

But by far the most important development of the past year among the post-modern Bibfeldtians is the development of a Bibfeldtian concept of pastoral care. The writings of Franz on this subject have just recently been catalogued, although regretfully, all are now out of print. Being a true scholar, I checked the circulation department at Regenstein only to find that all the volumes of this valuable collection had been checked out to a boldly scrawled, ‘M. Marty.’ Undaunted, I went to the LSTC Library only to discover the same thing. At this point I made a copy of the Bibfeldtian bibliography on pastoral care and set about to apply the Bibfeldtian hermeneutic (bullgeschichte) to a study of the titles of this newly discovered, but as yet unread, collection. (A footnote here, I understand that in the Franz Bibfeldt will, this important collection is being left to the Divinity School Bibfeldt Society, otherwise called Limen Lovers, Anonymous, as soon as they can
locate the collection.)

The first item in this bibliography that caught my eye was an article published in the Rhinelander Quarterly, April, 1961, entitled, "Pastoral Care and the Problem Drinker." The article was 2 2/3 pages long and began on page 26. This being all the information that I could gather from the bibliography, I began to work back from the text as it were, to discover the article behind the text. I checked the index to that particular issue of Rhinelander Quarterly and discovered that the article behind the text was an article published by a certain B. Brown entitled "Pastoral Care and the Problem Pizza." I was able to find a copy of this article about a week ago crumpled under my seat at the Medicci. Fascinated by this find, I began to read it with anticipation. The article was essentially a condensed version of a longer paper entitled "The Problem Pizza and the High Church," (an ecclesiastical study which partially meets the requirements for the D.Min. degree).¹ This article contained little that was useful in the area of pastoral care except for a footnote of another title that was in the Bibfeldtian bibliography on pastoral care. This item was a book entitled The Food Context of Pastoral Care, published in 1976 by the Browning and Brown Publishing House of Bangkok, India, edited by B. Mahan. After glancing over the rest of the items in the Bibfeldtian bibliography on pastoral care, I quickly discovered that this book was central to the bibliography. Having discovered the existence of this valuable text, although not having yet read it, I set about to understand it through the basic Bibfeldtian hermeneutic of bullgeschichte.

According to this hermeneutic, Bibfeldt goes back to scripture for an understanding of the true nature of the pastoral care of Jesus. The increasing doubt that the modern age has placed on the miracles of Jesus has demanded a new understanding of his true pastoral abilities. Modern medicine has cast questionable

¹This is not to be confused with the Catholic Study Report entitled "The Problem Pizza and the High Church in Human Sexuality," Vatican II, venatae sensoriom pizzariom, 28 Oct., 1965.
glances as to the ethics of the healings of Jesus. So if you take away the validity of the healing miracles, what is left? A few cliches which were the bulk of his teachings, and his food miracles. If one looks closely at the accounts of Jesus in relationship to food, an understanding of the true nature of his pastoral activities becomes apparent. The first miracle occurs at the wedding feast at Cana. Anyone who has run low on wine during a party, or a sherry hour knows the danger of unsatisfied guests. Jesus’s miracle at this point was a sincere act of pastoral care to the host of the feast. Although most people cast serious doubt as to the validity of the miracles of the feeding of the 4000 and the feeding of the 5000, anyone who has cooked for more than five people, (say a luncheon of some sort) knows what a miracle it is when everyone is finally fed, and how easy it is to have many baskets of food left over. Not only is food seen as important to the pastoral care context of the ministry of Jesus, but it reflects upon his personal life as well. When told of the illness of Lazurus and the illness of the magistrate’s daughter, did he rush immediately to their side to heal them. No, he waited around to collect a few meals that people owed him. An early drawing of Jesus that was recently unearthed in Samaria that dated back to the first century indicated that it was most probable that Jesus weighed from 180 to 240 pounds, was about 5' 6'', and contrary to tradition, did not sport a beard, but was clean shaven and slightly balding. Food was obviously very important to the ministry of Jesus. In the command of Jesus to his disciples concerning their mission activity, he instructed them 'to stay at one house before you leave a village.' His reference of course was to the importance of adapting to the cuisine of a particular location rather than changing quickly from one type of food to another. If received poorly in any village, in other words, if the food was not adequate, 'one should shake off the dust of that village.'
The food context of pastoral care of Jesus clearly draws upon a similar emphasis in the Jewish tradition. The strict dietary laws of the Jewish people indicate the importance of their concern for this aspect of life. The ancient Semitic root for the word Rabbi comes from the word rabbitar which means great eater. The rabbinic school arose not, as usually understood, as a school of scholars and teachers of the old tradition, but as great hosts of the banquet. Their knowledge of all the particular details of the dietary laws gave them much authority in the Jewish community. This stature in the community was later broadened to include more general authority over morality, history, and the heritage. In the Jewish tradition a great emphasis is placed on the feasts and banquets that mark various holidays. This is only natural since the authorities who preserved these traditions, the great eaters, placed much emphasis on the pastoral care aspect of food in the community.

At the time of Jesus the Jewish rabbinic tradition had lost its rabbitaric emphasis. His general ministry was an attempt to recover this tradition of the rabbitars, the great eaters. His fame as a rabbitar was widespread. While dining with a famous publican, he was anointed with oil and his feet were washed in ointment as a sign of his authority over the banquet. When he was not received which such acclaim he rebuked his host for failing to acknowledge him as a great eater. The most original teachings of Jesus were those that reflected food imagery: the parable of the mustard seed, the leavened bread, the sower, the master of the vineyard, the great catch of fish, the fig tree, etc. In Matthew, Jesus speaks of himself as "opening my mouth in parables," indicating the metaphoric parallel between food and wisdom. In John, the imagery becomes even more apparent. Jesus says, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst." This passage foreshadows the eucharist injunction to 'eat of the flesh and drink of the blood of Christ.' The imagery
of the church is also cast in terms of food, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit." The believers are referred to as the 'salt of the earth and the light of the world.'

The feast of the last supper has always been regarded as a central and important point in the Christian tradition. The service of the last supper is one of the few elements of the worship that is incorporated in almost all churches of the Christian tradition. The love feasts of first century Christianity show how important the early church regarded the celebration of this feast. Jesus's command to 'eat of my body and drink of my blood' was taken seriously. This literalistic enthusiasm is probably much closer to the actual teaching of Jesus than the vitamin pill wafers and half shot of cheap wine or watered down Welch's grape juice that typifies so many of the modern celebrations of this feast.

In the post-Ressurection appearances of Jesus, food once again becomes an important symbol. We have seen how important food was to the whole ministry of Jesus. Food became a symbol that indicated even the presence of Jesus. Food became a paradigmatic motif of grace. In the Luke account, Jesus appears to the disciples outside of the town of Emmaus. He walks with them into town, but they do not recognize him. He finally reveals himself to them and they touch his wounds, but they still do not believe. In desperation, he asks them for a piece of broiled fish and begins to eat with them. They finally recognize him as their Lord, and bow down to praise him. In the gospel of John, Jesus appears on the shore while the disciples are fishing in a boat on the lake. He tells them where to cast their nets and they haul in a great catch. As they come to shore, Jesus is cooking breakfast for them, and their eyes are opened and they recognize him. He then gives them the missionary charge to go into the world in the simple phrase, "Feed my sheep."
We see, according to Bibfeldt, the importance of food in the pastoral care context of the ministry of Jesus. Theologically, we see in Bibfeldt a discovery of profound importance. The food context of Jesus's ministry reflects both a scriptural and a common human experience basis for faith. Separated for centuries, these two sides of the Christian tradition have finally been brought together in the thought of our own Franz Bibfeldt. For Bibfeldt this rabbinic tradition has been preserved in the modern church through a matriarchial tradition of church suppers, picnics, food baskets to the needy, and bake sales. The patriarchal structure of the church has preferred to think of the message of reconciliation and grace in broad, symbolic terms. The matriarchial tradition of the church, however, has preserved the true rabbinic teachings of Jesus.

The implications of this important volume of the Bibfeldtian bibliography on pastoral care are quite important. Pastoral counseling and pastoral psychotherapy can receive important new directions from this study. The theological implications are also quite important. The conclusions that Bibfeldt draws concerning the matriarchial tradition in preserving the rabbinic emphasis have similar importance to modern feminism. The implications that can be drawn from this book are really quite staggering. And bear in mind that this modest study has merely been an exegesis of the title. Once the book is actually located, a study of a similar nature on even just the table of contents could be quite fruitful and offer much food for thought.
"FRANZ BIBFELDT AND THE FUTURE OF POLITICAL THEOLOGY"

It is indeed a singular honor to appear before you for the second time as the Franz Bibfeldt lecturer, charged with the awesome — if unenviable — task of bringing this community of scholarship up to date on the latest work of this master of modern theological reflection. Indeed, this occasion is so — how shall I put it, overwhelming — that I am somehow reminded of Mark Twain's remark that "I would not want to join any club that would ask me to be a member." To which Bibfeldt reportedly added, "But if the food was good enough, I would join anyway." And so, here I am.

There is, however, one important difference between this appearance and my last Bibfeldt lecture in 1980. In 1980, I was an unknown, impoverished assistant professor, without tenure. Today, I am an unknown, impoverished associate professor, with tenure. This is what people in the business school call a "career trajectory."

And it is that career trajectory, really, that brings me back before you again today for this second appearance as a Bibfeldt lecturer. You see, once you have tenure at this institution, you are, not to put too fine a point on it, stuck. M.A. students come and go, even Ph.D. students eventually finish their degrees and move on, but once you are a tenured member of this faculty, you're sentenced to an eternity of cheeseburgers and beer at Jimmy's, waiting in line at the bank, and running around the fieldhouse track like lost souls in some
lower circle of Dante's hell.

To be sure, other institutions may try from time to time to lure you away, but by the time you get tenure, you're addicted to the odd combination of high-level intellectual discussion and devastating peer pressure that characterizes University of Chicago. This is the only place I know that has a book of the month club where the members write the books.

So sooner or later it occurs to you that once you've got tenure, the only way you're going to get out of here alive is somehow to get rid of it. And according to university statutes and the AAUP standards, the only way to get rid of tenure is to be found guilty of gross incompetence or moral turpitude.

That is where the Bibfeldt lecture presents a unique opportunity.

You see, most forms of moral turpitude require considerable competence to pull them off. So if you try to get out of here by committing moral turpitude alone, the authorities will probably just say, "Aha --- that proves it! We can't fire you. You're too competent." And if you try to get out by displaying gross incompetence, they'll just pat you on the shoulder and say, "That's OK. At least you haven't committed moral turpitude."

This is what is known as "Catch-22."

Now in that context, an invitation to deliver the Bibfeldt lecture is a singular opportunity, because a Bibfeldt lecture is one of the few human activities in which you can display both gross incompetence and moral turpitude at the same time.
With that prefatory statement of purpose, then, I proceed to our subject for the day, "Franz Bibfeldt and the Future of Political Theology."

Things have been remarkably quiet in Bibfeldt studies since 1980. It is as though this great master of modern European thought were exhausted by the labors that gave us his seminal dissertation on the problem of the year Zero, the epochal theology of both/and, and the innovative methods of pastoral care for the dead. Perhaps, some of you had thought, the time has come at last for Bibfeldt's retirement — a well-deserved rest in his little chalet at the foot of the Swiss Alps, surrounded only by his books, the memorabilia of his distinguished career, and world famous collection of pornographic post cards.

But if you had thought that, you would be wrong. The elusive Bibfeldt has not been retired. He has been extending his work into yet new areas of study. The master of history, biblical studies, systematic theology, practical theology, and religion and psychological studies has been traversing the globe, looking for a new orientation for his theology — and, of course, for a good glass of beer.

Bibfeldt's research methods for defining a new area of theological studies may be of interest to those of you who are looking for a dissertation topic, or for the large number of you who just happen to be methodology junkies. Whatever your purposes may be, it's worth my taking a few moments to describe it. Here I borrow heavily from a recent treatise on the subject by Kent Dorsey, who has done extensive research applying the Bibfeldt method to the definition of dissertation topics in ethics.
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The transition to political theology was not easy for Bibfeldt, for political theology, as we all know, requires fundamental choices and cannot remain neutral about the social conditions and ideological conflicts that divide persons in today's world. Bibfeldt, by contrast, had always been neutral to the point of blandness. Other theologians have built their careers on John 3:16 —— "Sic enim Deus dilexit mundum" —— for God so loved the world. Bibfeldt's theological motto, by contrast, is Revelation 3:16 —— "Sed quia tepidus es, et nec frigidus, nec caldus, incipiam te evomere ex ore meo." —— "Because thou art neither hot nor cold, I will spew thee out of my mouth." Bibfeldt is the theologian of "both/and." His answer to Barth's thunderous "Nein!" to the natural theology of Emil Brunner had been a conciliatory little pamphlet entitled "Vieleicht?" His hermeneutical methodology, as I suggested in the Bibfeldt lecture of 1980, had always been to affirm all propositions simultaneously, in the hope that some of them might be true, and a few of them might even be popular. Choice, particularly controversial choice, runs against the grain of Bibfeldt's theology.
But his Third World experience changed him profoundly, and after several weeks of reading the major works of the Latin American theologians, he discovered his own angle of vision on the problems of political theology. Bibfeldt surveyed the possibilities, made his choice, and affirmed it boldly. He announced a new theology, based on a fundamental option --- for the rich.

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These premises have now been made clear in a brief article which has not received the attention it deserves, partly because it was rejected by most of the major journals and finally appeared in print in the March issue of Penthouse, where, for reasons that will suggest themselves, it was largely overlooked.

On the supposition that most of you will not have seen it, I will venture to summarize the major points. Bibfeldt's "fundamental option for the rich" begins, like much political theology, with social theory, in particular with Max Weber's analysis of the role of religion in the shaping of modern capitalism. Bibfeldt, however, goes beyond Weber, for Weber simply noted an "elective affinity" between capitalist
acquisitiveness and Protestant religion. Bibfeldt turns this into a normative theological position. Unlike the classical Calvinists, who believed, so Weber suggests, that material success was a coincidental mark of divine favor, so that those whom God loves become rich, Bibfeldt offers us a more Arminian theology that leaves room for human action in the divine plan. For Calvin, those whom God loves are apt to become rich. For Bibfeldt, those who become rich, God is apt to love.

In place of the austere, Calvinist deity who inexplicably allocates election and damnation to a helpless humanity, Bibfeldt offers us a god who, not to put too fine a point on it, toady's up to the rich! In place of a God who sides with the poor and the peasants, Bibfeldt offers us a god who likes to hang out around the yacht club. This theology has the immense practical advantage that it eliminates almost all of the inconvenient discrepancies between Euro-American popular culture and the requirements of Christian faith. Once this is clearly understood, it is certain to catch on.

Bibfeldt, never shy about his own innovations, quickly moved to put the fundamental option for the rich into practice by opening a neo-conservative think-tank in Washington D.C. It is, of course, important for those who advise major political figures to keep themselves out of the limelight, so few people have been aware of the importance of the work that has gone on the Wahlverwandschaft Institute in recent years, but Bibfeldt's impact in administration circles has been widely felt. It is a little known fact that Lt. Col. Oliver North was once a student at Yale Divinity School, and you can be sure that when he had to
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taken care of gross incompetence, and I now have a full year to work on moral turpitude.
Franz Bibfeldt and the Future of Political Theology

Robin W. Lovin

INTRODUCTION OF PROFESSOR ROBIN W. LOVIN 1987 BIBFELDT LECTURER

The Divinity School is distinguished in many ways—by its faculty, its scholarship, its domination of the applications and job markets. It is also of course distinguished by its reverence for Franz Bibfeldt. This year, the Divinity School distinguishes itself even further in that regard by having for the first time in recorded history a return—shall we say—bout from a previous Bibfeldt lecturer. Can a dubious achievements issue of Criterion be far behind?

Now some skeptics no doubt think that there is no method in the Bibfeldt madness. What nonsense! Are we not the University of Chicago? Do we not maintain—and rightly so—that once method is determined, all the rest is mere plumbing? So it is of course the case that in connection with these festivities a rigorous selection process is involved, during which the candidates' qualifications are hashed and rehashed, extensive interviews are held, and all past work—published and perished—is reviewed. So let me review for you some of the reasons Mr. Lovin was selected to be this year's distinguished Bibfeldt lecturer.

His academic distinctions are of such caliber that he recently attended the 350th anniversary celebrations of a small and admittedly marginal university in a small town somewhere to the east—the University of Chicago of the East, in fact—in the company of no less a scholar than His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, the first member of the British Royal Family to receive a college degree.

His reputation among the various publics in which he moves is yet small, but swelling. For while Mr. Lovin has not yet been featured on the cover of either the New York Times magazine, or the Chicago weekly Reader, he was once interviewed on Christian Education for The Ladies' Home Journal.

Closer to home, he is noted for lecturing on Karl Marx' classic Das Capital while wearing a 3-piece gray pinstripe suit, an act of solidarity which bears directly on his topic this afternoon. Two years ago, in keeping with his deep interest in eth-
ics and public policy, he graced this platform with a classic Wednesday luncheon talk titled "The Divinity School and the CTA: Ethics in Transit." And least but not last, in 1979 Mr. Lovin presented a lecture on this very occasion which was a landmark even among Bibfeldt lectures. Under the title "Franz Bibfeldt: The Breakdown of Consciousness and the Origins of the Quadrilateral Mind," Mr. Lovin explored, not the connection with Methodism which the title suggests. His mind is too subtle, not to say devious, for that. Instead, he boldly went where none had gone before: into the shallows of Bibfeldt's psyche. Those of us who have not been so well, perhaps fortunate isn't the word, to have been at the Divinity School for eight years are perhaps not familiar with that work. In the best tradition of the Chicago school, in that lecture Mr. Lovin laid the ground for all who would follow him on these occasions in setting forth — and I quote — "a methodological prologue, a historic-hermeneutic paedaeutical, and a preface to any future scientific system of understanding the mind of this master of modern theological reflection." With such a grounding, is it any wonder that the lecture was published in no less a publication than Criterion, which, I am told, had to battle for the rights with The National Enquirer? Is it any wonder there have been so few Bibfeldt lectures since?

Of course the Bibfeldt Foundation also considered Mr. Lovin's other publications. Among them is a work on the social ethics of Barth, Brunner, and Bonhoeffer. While that book was widely acclaimed at the time, no doubt, it did not pass the notice of one astute reviewer — myself — that one theologian had been omitted, despite his great affinity with the others therein represented. After all, his name too begins with a B. I refer, of course, to Bibfeldt. It is an indeed lamentable lacuna. Today, Mr. Lovin presents his second Bibfeldt lecture. Dare we hope that this is the necessary addition to the previous work? The mind trembles at the thought.

Now, all these and other qualifications fed directly into the Foundation's choice of Mr. Lovin to be this year's Bibfeldt lecturer. But the finally determinative factor had to do not with Mr. Lovin's qualifications, but as is only fitting, with the great Bibfeldt's theology, indeed his life itself. For like the estimable Bibfeldt, Mr. Lovin has the distinction of being the right person in the right place — at the wrong time.

Mr. Lovin's topic today bears directly on our life at this University, which after all takes so seriously its location in this city noted for its practical approach to the religion of politics. Mr. Lovin's title this afternoon is "Franz Bibfeldt and the future of political theology." It is a truly humbling experience, the most humbling so far of many in my career at the Divinity School, to introduce Mr. Robin W. Lovin, this year's distinguished Bibfeldt lecturer.

— Ellen Wondra

It is indeed a singular honor to appear before you for the second time as the Franz Bibfeldt lecturer, charged with the awesome — if unenviable — task of bringing this community of scholarship up to date on the latest work of this master of modern theological reflection. Indeed, this occasion is so — how shall I put it, overwhelming — that I am somehow reminded of Mark Twain's remark that "I would not want to join any club that would ask me to be a member." To which Bibfeldt reportedly added, "But if the food was good enough, I would join anyway." And so, here I am.

There is, however, one important difference between this appearance and my last Bibfeldt lecture in 1980. In 1980, I was an unknown, impoverished assistant professor, without tenure. Today, I am an unknown, impoverished associate professor, with tenure. This is what people in the business school call a "career trajectory."

And it is that career trajectory, really, that brings me back before you again today for this second appearance as a Bibfeldt lecturer. You see, once you have tenure at this institution, you are, not to put too fine a point on it, stuck. M.A. students come and go, even Ph.D. students eventually finish their degrees and move on, but once you are a tenured member of this faculty, you're stuck — sentenced to an eternity of cheeseburgers and beer at Jimmy's, waiting in line at the bank, and running around the fieldhouse track like lost souls in some lower circle of Dante's hell.

To be sure, other institutions may try from time to time to lure you away, but by the time you get tenure, you're addicted to the odd combination of high-level intellectual discussion and devastating peer pressure that characterizes the University of Chicago. This is the only place I know that has a book of the month club where the members write the books.

So sooner or later it occurs to you that once you've got tenure, the only way you're going to get out of here alive is somehow to get rid of it. And according to university statutes and the AAUP standards, the only way to get rid of tenure is to be found guilty of gross incompetence and/or moral turpitude.

That is where the Bibfeldt lecture presents a unique opportunity. You see, most forms of moral turpitude require considerable competence to pull them off. So if you try to get out of here by committing moral turpitude alone, the authorities will probably just say, "Aha — that proves it! We can't fire you. You're too competent." And if you try to get out by displaying gross incompetence, they'll just pat you on the shoulder and say, "That's OK. At least you haven't committed moral turpitude." That is what is known as "Catch-22."

Now in that context, an invitation to deliver the Bibfeldt lecture is a singular opportunity, because a Bibfeldt lecture is one of the few human activities in which you can display both gross incompetence and moral turpitude at the same time.

With that prefatory statement of purpose, then, I proceed to our subject for the day, "Franz Bibfeldt and the Future of Political Theology."

Things have been remarkably quiet in Bibfeldt studies since 1980. It is as though this great master of modern European thought were exhausted by the labors that gave us his seminal dissertation on the problem of the year Zero, the epochal theology of both/and, and the innovative methods of pastoral care for the dead. Perhaps, some of you had thought, the time has come at last for Bibfeldt's retirement — a well-deserved rest in his little chalet at the foot of the Swiss Alps, surrounded only by his books, the memorabilia of his distinguished career, and
his world famous collection of pornographic post cards.

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Bibfeldt’s research methods for defining a new area of theological studies may be of interest to those of you who are looking for a dissertation topic, or for the large number of you who happen to be methodology junkies. Whatever your purposes may be, it’s worth my taking a few moments to describe it. Here I borrow heavily from a recent treatise on the subject by Kent Dorsey, who has done extensive research applying the Bibfeldt method to the definition of dissertation topics in ethics and society. The method, known as the method of “cognitive integration through randomized deflection,” is subtle, and difficult to grasp on first hearing, but it will help if you try for a moment to visualize the intellectual universe as a very large pinball machine. What happens next is best expressed in Dorsey’s own words, from which I quote:

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FRANZ BIBFELDT AND THE USES OF THE DOCTORAL EXAMS

All of us who spend our lives running around in academic circles are intimately acquainted—to the point of boredom and nausea—with the debates about the purpose, content, goals, and philosophy of higher education in our times. From the "Because we say they're great" books debate and ruminations over whose mind is closed—or is it whose mind is American?—, to dictionaries of cultural literacy which enable us all to "pass" without knowing a thing, to our own debates about whose narratives are pure and impure, to conferences on collections of papers from symposia responding to reports of studies on the implications and effects of curricula on communities and their many characters: we are sunk, indeed mired, in weighty and learned considerations of the social purposes of our work. The culturally literate scholar cannot help but think of Socrates—the first academic to drink himself to death.

And the astute theologian cannot help but think of Bibfeldt.

For if ever an academic was sunk and mired...

Indeed, we turn to Bibfeldt because, as so often, we find that he has rushed in where others fear to tread. For this debate, about the meaning of our work and the rationale for our paychecks, requires all the methodological legerdemain, exhaustive research, incisive analysis, clarity of expression, and originality of insight which students of Bibfeldt have long sought in his work—but so seldom found.

And yet. And yet. Perhaps in this debate our long-expressed confidence in Bibfeldt as a contributing scholar will
be vindicated. For only recently a new manuscript has come to light, serendipitously recovered from the botany library of a small community college in northern South Dakota, where Bibfeldt’s weighty considerations were being used. Apparently, as a leaf press.

But, thankfully, we have it now: Bibfeldt’s own Long Discourse on the Study of Theology, Philosophy of Religion, Scripture, Church History, Liturgy, Hymnody, Folk Music, Interpretive Dance, Pastoral Care, Parish Administration, Haberdashery, and Etiquette. Apparently the transcription of a filibuster by Bibfeldt at a faculty retreat high above Cavuga’s waters some twenty years ago, the Long Discourse gives us a detailed look at Bibfeldt’s vision of an educational institution suited to a theory of both—and and a praxis of suffering.

And though it is somewhat daunting for a mere student such as myself to make her AAR debut by presenting material from the illustrious Bibfeldt, surely the advance of knowledge is more important than self-interest—as Bibfeldt has certainly taught us in his own life and practice.

I shall confine my reading of the Long Discourse to the section that shows surprisingly original thought on Bibfeldt’s part. Here, in abbreviated form, the discussion of “The Five Uses of the Doctoral Exams.”
Introduction

We must do everything to establish the doctoral exams, and we must require work. We say that doctoral exams are good and useful, but only in their proper use. The doctoral exams are a light that illumines and shows, not the compassionate understanding of the faculty or the knowledge of the students, but the wrath of the faculty, the stupidity of the students, and their condemnation in the sight of the faculty, and their possible expulsion. That is as far as the doctoral exams go. After that, the advisor and the job market take over.

1. Restraint of sin and from challenging the faculty

First, the university has ordained doctoral exams, indeed all exams, to restrain sin by pre-empting all the students' waking time and any of their sleep beyond a mere five hours. When students abstain from sin, they do not do this voluntarily or from the love of virtue but because the length of the bibliographies and their fear of failure leaves them no time to sin. Therefore restraint from sin is not cleverness but rather an indication of stupidity. The doctoral exams make it abundantly clear that those who desire to take them are not clever but stupid and insane.

This restraint is extremely necessary and was instituted by the faculty, for the sake of faculty time for research but especially to prevent the wisdom of faculty counsel from being hindered by the tumults and seditions of arrogant and ambitious students. This is particularly necessary because, when (through
Ellen K. Wondra

the doctoral exams) the students' stupidity, and the wisdom and
judgment of the faculty are revealed to them. It is impossible
for them not to become impatient, murmur, and hate the faculty
and its superior wisdom. Students cannot endure the judgment of
the faculty and their own possible failure, and yet they cannot
flee, not if they wish to be gainfully employed. So they
inevitably falls into blasphemous criticism against the faculty.

So the first function of the doctoral exams is this: at
least by fear of punishment to restrain certain students who are
untouched by any respect for their betters unless compelled by
feeling the dire threat of the doctoral exams reading lists.

2. Destroy false confidence in own knowledge and ability

What, then, is the second function of the doctoral exams?
The destruction of self-confidence. Really a lovely function!
This is the primary purpose of the doctoral exams; that through
students' recognition of their stupidity might grow and
become pervasive. Therefore the chief and proper use of the
doctoral exams is to reveal to students their inability.
blindness, misery, wickedness, ignorance, arrogance, and contempt
of the faculty, the university, and the hiring, tenure and
promotion system. Yet this use of the doctoral exams is
completely unknown to the masters students, and to all second
year students who go along in the presumption of their own
knowledge. But the entire group who have finished course work is
crushed with fear. For since student rationality becomes haughty
with presumption of knowledge, and imagines that on account of
this it is pleasing to the faculty, therefore the faculty has to send some Hercules, namely, the doctoral exams reading lists, to attack, subdue, and destroy with full force this monster, which is a rebellious, stubborn, and stiff-necked beast, and must learn that it has been destroyed and damned by its workload. Hence this use of the doctoral exams is extremely beneficial and very necessary. For as long as the presumption of knowledge remains in a student, there remain immense pride, self-trust, smugness, hate of the faculty, contempt of faculty teaching schedules, and ignorance of the wisdom of the faculty.

The length of the doctoral exams reading lists takes away from the students all self-esteem. While it shows the faculty's knowledge, that is, the knowledge alone acceptable to the faculty, it warns, informs, convicts, and lastly condemns every student of his own ignorance. For students, blinded and drunk with self-love, not to mention cheap booze, must be compelled to know and confess their own feebleness and impurity. If students are not clearly convinced of their own ignorance, they are puffed up with insane confidence in their own mental powers, and can never be induced to recognize their inanity as long as they measure themselves by a reading list of their own choice. But as soon as they begin to compare their reading lists with the faculty's lists, they have something to diminish their bravado. For, however remarkable an opinion of their intelligence they formerly held, they soon know that they are panting under so heavy a weight of books, articles, commentaries, encyclopedias, and notebooks, as to stagger and totter, and finally even to fail
down and faint away. And they discover that they are a long way from wisdom, and are in fact teeming with a multitude of misconceptions, presuppositions, assumptions and fallacies, of which they previously had not even heard. Thus students slough off the arrogance that previously blinded them and encouraged us to admit them in the first place.

3. **Drive into the counsels of the faculty**

Therefore, third, the doctoral exams are a preparation for true understanding. For then the faculty can be the guide of the humble, the miserable, the afflicted, the desperate, and of those who have been brought down to nothing at all. And it is the desire of the faculty to exalt the humble, to enlighten the blind, to comfort the miserable and afflicted, to educate the stupid, to give money to the deserving, and to send those who are desperate and depressed to some other institution.

For we must say to the students: "After the doctoral exams have humbled, terrified, and completely crushed you, so that you are on the brink of despair, then see to it that you know how to use the doctoral exams correctly; for its function and use is not only to disclose your stupidity and the justified disgust of the faculty but also to drive you to the faculty for guidance and a research topic." For the faculty's advice is a light that illumines minds and makes them productive. It discloses what the beneficence and the mercy of the faculty are; and what the benefits of tenure are; and how we are to attain these.

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While by the dread of faculty judgment students are restrained at least from outward rebellion. with minds yet untamed they progress but slightly while studying for exams. yet become partially broken in by bearing the burden of all those books. As a consequence. when they are hired, they are not utterly untutored and uninitiated in academic discipline as if it were something unknown. Though they still have need of a bridle to restrain them from so slackening the reins on the pursuit of pleasure and relaxation as to go to the movies more than once a year. So the doctoral exams are to the pleasure principle like a whip to an idle and balky ass. to arouse it to work.

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understanding of it. And not one of our students should escape from this necessity. For no student has heretofore attained to such wisdom as to be unable, from the daily instruction of an advisor, to make fresh progress toward a purer knowledge of the discipline. The teaching assistant will also avail himself of this benefit: by frequent meditation upon the influence of his advisor, to be aroused to obedience, be strengthened in it, and be drawn back from the slippery path of self-assertion. In this way the students must press on and lay hold not only of the texts, but the accompanying promise of future success, namely a tenured full professorship in a university with no intercollegiate athletic program.

Thus the wisdom of Bibfeldt. But we, who are veterans of doctoral exams, know that Bibfeldt was wrong. Doctoral exams have but one, sole, and exclusive function: instruction in true knowledge of the good, the true, the beautiful and the holy. And concomitant with this knowledge comes the sure conviction that justification can never be attained by work. Now Bibfeldt’s colleagues at the time recognized the severity of his error in greeting his proposals with a resounding “We’ll think about it.” Subsequently, another faculty member proposed a system quite different from Bibfeldt’s, which uphold the one use of the doctoral exams, and it is this system which prevails in all graduate programs in religion even today. As many of can and do attest from our own experience. Really. We do.
FRANZ BIBFELDT AND THE USES OF THE DOCTORAL EXAMS

All of us who spend our lives running around in academic circles are intimately acquainted—to the point of boredom and nausea—with the debates about the purpose, content, goals, and philosophy of higher education in our times. From the "Because we say they're great" books debate and ruminations over whose mind is closed—or is it whose mind is American?—, to dictionaries of cultural literacy which enable us all to "pass" without knowing a thing, to our own debates about whose narratives are pure and impure, to conferences on collections of papers from symposia responding to reports of studies on the implications and effects of curricula on communities and their many characters: we are sunk, indeed mired, in weighty and learned considerations of the social purposes of our work. The culturally literate scholar cannot help but think of Socrates—the first academic to drink himself to death.

And the astute theologian cannot help but think of Bibfeldt. For if ever an academic was sunk and mired... Indeed, we turn to Bibfeldt because, as so often, we find that he has rushed in where others fear to tread. For this debate, about the meaning of our work and the rationale for our paychecks, requires all the methodological legerdemain, exhaustive research, incisive analysis, clarity of expression, and originality of insight which students of Bibfeldt have long sought in his work—but so seldom found.

And yet. And yet. Perhaps in this debate our long-expressed confidence in Bibfeldt as a contributing scholar will
be vindicated. For only recently a new manuscript has come to light, serendipitously recovered from the botany library of a small community college in northern South Dakota, where Bibfeldt's weighty considerations were being used, apparently, as a leaf press.

But, thankfully, we have it now: Bibfeldt's own Long Discourse on the Study of Theology, Philosophy of Religion, Scripture, Church History, Liturgy, Hymnody, Folk Music, Interpretive Dance, Pastoral Care, Parish Administration, Haberdashery, and Etiquette. Apparently the transcription of a filibuster by Bibfeldt at a faculty retreat high above Cavuga's waters some twenty years ago, the Long Discourse gives us a detailed look at Bibfeldt's vision of an educational institution suited to a theory of both-and and a praxis of suffering.

And though it is somewhat daunting for a mere student such as myself to make her AAR debut by presenting material from the illustrious Bibfeldt, surely the advance of knowledge is more important than self-interest—as Bibfeldt has certainly taught us in his own life and practice.

I shall confine my reading of the Long Discourse to the section that shows surprisingly original thought on Bibfeldt's part. Here, in abbreviated from, the discussion of "The Five Uses of the Doctoral Exams."
Introduction

We must do everything to establish the doctoral exams, and we must require work. We say that doctoral exams are good and useful, but only in their proper use. The doctoral exams are a light that illumines and shows, not the compassionate understanding of the faculty or the knowledge of the students, but the wrath of the faculty, the stupidity of the students, and their condemnation in the sight of the faculty, and their possible expulsion. That is as far as the doctoral exams go. After that, the advisor and the job market take over.

1. Restraint of sin and from challenging the faculty

First, the university has ordained doctoral exams, indeed all exams, to restrain sin by pre-empting all the students' waking time and any of their sleep beyond a mere five hours. When students abstain from sin, they do not do this voluntarily or from the love of virtue but because the length of the bibliographies and their fear of failure leaves them no time to sin. Therefore restraint from sin is not cleverness but rather an indication of stupidity. The doctoral exams make it abundantly clear that those who desire to take them are not clever but stupid and insane.

This restraint is extremely necessary and was instituted by the faculty, for the sake of faculty time for research but especially to prevent the wisdom of faculty counsel from being hindered by the tumults and seditions of arrogant and ambitious students. This is particularly necessary because, when (through
the doctoral exams) the students' stupidity, and the wisdom and judgment of the faculty are revealed to them. It is impossible for them not to become impatient, murmur, and hate the faculty and its superior wisdom. Students cannot endure the judgment of the faculty and their own possible failure, and yet they cannot flee, not if they wish to be gainfully employed. So they inevitably falls into blasphemous criticism against the faculty.

So the first function of the doctoral exams is this: at least by fear of punishment to restrain certain students who are untouched by any respect for their betters unless compelled by feeling the dire threat of the doctoral exams reading lists.

2. Destroy false confidence in own knowledge and ability

What, then, is the second function of the doctoral exams? The destruction of self-confidence. Really a lovely function!

This is the primary purpose of the doctoral exams. That through the students' recognition of their stupidity might grow and become pervasive. Therefore the chief and proper use of the doctoral exams is to reveal to students their inability, blindness, misery, wickedness, ignorance, arrogance, and contempt of the faculty, the university, and the hiring, tenure and promotion system. Yet this use of the doctoral exams is completely unknown to the masters students, and to all second year students who go along in the presumption of their own knowledge. But the entire group who have finished course work is crushed with fear. For since student rationality becomes haughty with presumption of knowledge, and imagines that on account of
this it is pleasing to the faculty, therefore the faculty has to send some Hercules, namely, the doctoral exams reading lists, to attack, subdue, and destroy with full force this monster, which is a rebellious, stubborn, and stiff-necked beast, and must learn that it has been destroyed and damned by its workload. Hence this use of the doctoral exams is extremely beneficial and very necessary. For as long as the presumption of knowledge remains in a student, there remain immense pride, self-trust, smugness, hate of the faculty, contempt of faculty teaching schedules, and ignorance of the wisdom of the faculty.

The length of the doctoral exams reading lists takes away from the students all self-esteem. While it shows the faculty's knowledge, that is, the knowledge alone acceptable to the faculty, it warns, informs, convicts, and lastly condemns every student of his own ignorance. For students, blinded and drunk with self-love, not to mention cheap booze, must be compelled to know and confess their own feebleness and impurity. If students are not clearly convinced of their own ignorance, they are puffed up with insane confidence in their own mental powers, and can never be induced to recognize their inanity as long as they measure themselves by a reading list of their own choice. But as soon as they begin to compare their reading lists with the faculty's lists, they have something to diminish their bravado. For, however remarkable an opinion of their intelligence they formerly held, they soon know that they are panting under so heavy a weight of books, articles, commentaries, encyclopedias, and notebooks, as to stagger and totter, and finally even to fall
down and faint away. And they discover that they are a long way from wisdom, and are in fact teeming with a multitude of misconceptions, presuppositions, assumptions and fallacies, of which they previously had not even heard. Thus students slough off the arrogance that previously blinded them and encouraged us to admit them in the first place.

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Therefore, third, the doctoral exams are a preparation for true understanding. For then the faculty can be the guide of the humble, the miserable, the afflicted, the desperate, and of those who have been brought down to nothing at all. And it is the desire of the faculty to exalt the humble, to enlighten the blind, to comfort the miserable and afflicted, to educate the stupid, to give money to the deserving, and to send those who are desperate and depressed to some other institution.

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attest from our own experience. Really. We do.
This festival is a tribute to the widening field of Bibfeldt studies. While I cannot promise that my own reflections will add one whit more to Todd’s analysis of Bibfeldt, they will I hope prove helpful in some fashion that is not too gerrish but that appeals to you in a scholarly way. But I’ll make no Betz about that.

I will Grant you that recent lectures at our annual meetings have paid special attention to the texts of Bibfeldt--Professor Lovin’s insightful analysis of recent Bibfeldt texts dealing with the liberation of the rich being only one example. Parenthetically, let me suggest that while it is not my topic for the day, Dr. Lovin’s analysis is intriguing reading for anyone attempting to assess Bibfeldt’s possible preferences among this year’s presidential candidates. Who—might he support? Quoting Lovin’s text now:

Bibfeldt’s hermeneutical method...has always been to affirm all propositions simultaneously, in the hope that some of them might be true, and a few of them might even be popular.

If you combine that basic method with Bibfeldt’s "fundamental option for the rich," it seems to me that George Bush could well be Bibfeldt’s candidate. But I’m reluctant to judge so quickly. You, I’m sure as much as I, have noted Bibfeldt’s silence during this campaign. If you’ll recall, around last September there were reports in the Times that Bibfeldt might announce his support for a candidate, but that never materialized. Now, given the similarity of Bibfeldt’s language with that of such figures as Martin Marty and Gerald Brauer, with whom he is often discussed, my hunch is that Bibfeldt may have felt a close affinity for the campaign of Joe Biden. One reason for my suggesting that possibility, is, and I think this came out in The Quest for the Historical Bibfeldt, that Franz was the first
Bibfeldt in perhaps a thousand generations to attend the university. After Biden dropped out of the race, Bibfeldt may have lost interest.

Well, that's an interesting possibility, but we need to move on to the more enduring, academic concerns involving Bibfeldt.

Rather than fix our attention on any one particular work of Bibfeldt today, I will attend instead to what I consider the correct approach to reading the texts of Bibfeldt--texts which I believe to be uniquely enigmatic in our studies here at Chicago. In the brief time allotted me, I will attempt to articulate a method of reading the Bibfeldt texts--a method that addresses quite specifically the unique Bibfeldtian phenomenon of, what I call, "the vanishing text."

I mentioned at the outset that this festival is a tribute to the widening field of Bibfeldt studies. Now, I think it is a truism that as secondary materials increase the primary text tends to actually recede from view (i.e., one reads the commentaries and not the text); the case of Bibfeldt, however, offers a profound anomaly. These Bibfeldt texts do not recede--they vanish!--the world of study they have engendered being their only trace. (How fortunate that we at Chicago have a hermeneutical Holmes, as it were, but appropriately for us, named Tracy to follow that trace! Whether Bibfeldt's work constitutes a "classic" in the broad Tracian sense only time will tell, but perhaps in these quarters we need to invoke a new category--that of the "local classic."

The result, however, of this vanishing phenomenon is that the Ricourian "world" in front of the text is empty of content, leaving only the world of readers, who must devise a strategy for following the text in its vanishing. In their attempt to decipher these vanishing (or the now synonymous Bibfeldtian) texts, many of these readers have alluded to the
correspondence between Bibfeldt and Martín Marty. No doubt analysis of such correspondence is helpful—yet a further trace, perhaps, but a trace that also vanishes—like the hair on Marty’s head.

The widening field of Bibfeldt studies is due in part, I believe, to the rapid deployment of literary-critical/philosophical/ and theological understandings of reading and writing. And in a deconstructive world these Bibfeldt texts are, I argue, classic models of the sleight of hand that is writing, models of *scriptura* sophistication which do not take themselves seriously and which model for us an uncanny *ares morandi*, an art of dying, of passing away—wryly smiling, as it were, at our attempt to separate argument from artifice.

How then, finally, ought one to read Bibfeldt? I do not want to default to the time-worn expression—imagination. No doubt a good bit of that helps the Bibfeldt experience. But I think one should start with several shots of Jim Beam—this to provide whatever *proof* one needs to feel grounded in this task. The Beam gives a new twist to the notion of "prooftexting," which is what I call my method of reading.

Several more shots of the Beam will begin to shift that ground—projected now into the Licurrian world that flattens the text on its face, in which the self feels itself as an analogous vanishing trace and so a formal, if artificial repetition of the vanishing text.

Several more shots and one can experience the blurring of boundaries of primordial language receding into itself, and this move to intoxication—to the Dionysian—of passing out beyond the self, will itself leave a certain trace in the morning!

This fluid method of reading Bibfeldt, pouring over the text, pursues the vanishing trace, and ultimately reveals the *text* to be what every
student or professor has always known it to be: a headache! This view of the text as headache, as hangover, of its Dionysian, ecstatic vanishing into nothingness is exemplified per excellance in the vanishing texts of Bibfeldt. The reading, mind you, is pure pleasure—the pleasure of the text, as one reads in excess and enjoys the intoxicating pursuit of Bibfeldt's presence. But the end of our jouissance is sobering; Bibfeldt is the paradigm of the text that escapes us; the paradigm of our loss.

But let us gather courage at this our annual celebration, which celebrates itself—the world of Bibfeldt readers, to carry on, to play the Gam—well, I mean the game well, and to do the best we can to follow the trace. I hope you will join with me now in pursuing that method which leads to the jouissance of the Bibfeldtian insight!

Pros!
Franz Bibfeldt: The Life, and Scholarship on the Life

Some of us, I know, have rather thin knowledge of Bibfeldt's life and work -- excepting, of course, anyone who has taken qualifying examinations, where Bibfeldt is truly and often magnificently omnipresent, and not merely on bibliographies.

This lack of awareness is easily accounted for. Contrary to the theory of the faculty that this has to do with the revisions in the Master's level curriculum, I submit that simple statistical analysis provides the answer.

In the 70s, a Divinity School student took an average of 12.5 years to complete the doctorate. This translates somewhat roughly into 8.465 years of residence in Swift Hall. Using Bibfeldt's personalized equation for turning years of graduate residence into Bibfeldtian awareness, we arrive at a BF factor -- not to be confused with the BS factor, a later Bibfeldt invention -- of 9.

Now in the 80s, a Divinity School student has taken an average of 9.4 years to complete the doctorate. This translates, again somewhat roughly, into 7.982 years of residence in Swift Hall, for a BF quotient of 1.6.

My efforts today are directed to raising that quotient through a brief excursus on Bibfeldt's life and the first Forschungsbericht, or summary of the scholarship, ever attempted. This material is the result of a thorough investigation of the Bibfeldt files in the Foundation Offices -- located at random around Swift Hall.
The facts are astonishingly complex. Bibfeldt was born on November 1, 1897, at Sage-Hastbei Groszenkneten, Oldenburg, Niedersachsen, Germany, one day prematurely, having been conceived in the back seat of an 1892 Volkswagen following a Candelmas party. His early education was at Turnverein, where he flunked Indian Clubs and had nothing left to do but go into theology. These difficult years were, however, formative for his theology. For example, during a duelling match in gymnasium, Bibfeldt jumped during a thrust. Years later he would draw upon this experience in his definitive contribution to Jewish-Christian relations, "Empathy with the Circumcised."

Bibfeldt received his D.D.T. -- Doctorate of Digressive Theology -- in 1929 from the University of Worms. His doctoral dissertation was on "The Problem of the Year Zero" -- there is no year between 1 B.C. and 1 A.D. -- and this existential fact has confused Bibfeldt; thrown off, he arrives one year early or late for events, and has left a trail of nothing but graffiti in the bathrooms of Swift Hall. Throughout the 70s, it was generally thought that Bibfeldt worked only in men's rooms, but in 1981 Katie Dvorak demonstrated that Bibfeldt had in fact infiltrated women's rooms as much as five years earlier. Basing her thesis on the assertion that Bibfeldt's linguistic experiments never got past the first four letters of "analysis," and on a close reading of Bibfeldt's definitive contribution to early church history, Getting to the Bottom of Early Christian Literature, Dvorak proves that the early fencing incident had more decisive
consequences for Bibfeldt than chauvinist interpreters supposed: it was no problem for Bibfeldt to dress in drag and enter the womens' rooms. The result was his typology of graffiti, later applied to his Bullsgeschichte theory of biblical hermeneutics: Profanity, Declaration, Dialogue, Fradulents, and Accretals.

As you can see from the already digressive direction of this summary, pinning down anything about Bibfeldt is difficult, and so in 1976 an earlier session of this sometimes annual and always unsystematic conference dedicated itself to "The Quest for the Historical Bibfeldt." Joseph Price presented the latest findings on Bibfeldt's massive commentary on the Epistle to Philemon. Published in 1933, Philemerbrief devotes one full paragraph to each letter of each word of the Epistle, resulting in at least one chapter on each verse. Bibfeldt's most renowned chapter is his 12th, on verse 12, which he interprets as "Oneismus, Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels..." Price also discovered a manuscript by Bibfeldt, A Pragmatist's Paraphrase of the Sayings of Jesus. Operating on a hermeneutic of reversism, in which "any saying which is too hard to follow is to be understood to mean the opposite of what it literally says," Bibfeldt reinterprets the Sermon on the Mount. Time does not permit a detailed presentation of this work, but selected translations should give you a sense of its general thrust:

Matt 5:3: "Blessed are the rich in money, for they can build bigger and better churches. Who cares about the Kingdom of God?"
Matt 5:8: "Blessed are those whose external appearance and behavior are impeccable, for they shall look nice when they see God."

Dennis Landon took a more pessimistic view than Price. He argued that the definitive illustration of the quest is found in the poem of 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."

Landon characterizes Bibfeldt as theologian absconditus, noting the unpublished but definitive popular biography of Bibfeldt written by Gay Talese, Blessed Sage for Hire. It is Landon, too, who provides us with Bibfeldt's principle of "anonymous ubiquity," his 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."

Landon also cites Bibfeldt's devotion to the half-asked question and the publication of Bibfeldt's dissertation by a pornographic French press as The Story of O.

1979 may prove to be the richest year ever for our understanding of Bibfeldt; no less than three significant contributions to scholarship on the great man arrived in this year. Otto Dreydoppel and Janet Summers presented discussions of work on Bibfeldt's theories of pastoral care. Dreydoppel
concentrated his attention on Franz's theory of the pastoral care of the dead -- truly a ground-breaking achievement -- which begins with the insight that the dead are the truly silent majority and thus the definitively oppressed group. As the one theologian alive to the dead issue, Bibfeldt, out of gratitude to the dead for their adaptability to his theology, lavished his attention on their needs. He argues that the dead are excellent Rogerian therapists, since their ability to listen patiently is unexcelled; they are also perfect EST clients since they can sit still, not just for twelve or sixteen hours, but for really long stretches of time. Bibfeldt also addressed particular pastoral problems of the dead, such as their ennui and their extraordinary tendencies to depression, and extended his sense of pastoral care to social justice: Bibfeldt sponsored several housing discrimination suits on behalf of the dead, noting that they were almost always confined to one-room basement apartments and that previous writings on this matter all had terrible plots. The result was Bibfeldt's definitive work, The Minister as Mortician.

Finally, Dreydoppel underscores Bibfeldt's particular empathy for the evangelical dead who practice the gift of inert healing and whose slogan is "died again."

Janet Summers presents a detailed analysis of Bibfeldt's approach to the living, as summarized in his popular text, I'm Okay; You're a Cretin, or a Slob, a careful analysis of how Bibfeldt's model of pastoral care is best applied to people who could care less. Summers also notes Bibfeldt's innovative use of
a hermeneutic of suspicion, based on his assertion that the baby Jesus sought to fool people, as seen in Luke 2:12: "...the baby Jesus was lying in a manger." The scrupulous text critic also notes the hint of conspiracy three verses later: "Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger..."

1979's third contribution came from the first contributor in our midst today (and so, for the first time, I am bound to some moderate semblance of accuracy in my account). Then Assistant Professor Robin Lovin presented "Franz Bibfeldt: The Breakdown of Consciousness and the Origins of the Quadrilateral Mind." As Ellen Wondra noted subsequently, the title is a fooler: it refers not to Methodism, but to Bibfeldt's personal cerebral composition, in which the usual two-sided brain is in fact four-sided, combining the usual occupants of poet (right side) and IBM executive (left side) with a composer of television jingles (upper lobe) and a card shark (lower lobe).

This, my survey leads me to believe, is one of the great major breakthroughs in Bibfeldt scholarship. You see, Bibfeldt's is the theology of Both/And, constructed in response to Kierkegaard's Either/Or; when negative reviews of Both/And appeared, Bibfeldt responded by publishing Both/And And/Or Either/Or -- which received mixed reviews. It was Bibfeldt who answered Barth's thunderous Nein! to natural theology with a timorous Vielleicht?. Bibfeldt seeks agreement with everyone and wants to make everything come out right to ensure that he is always relevant. His coat of arms is Proteus rampant on a
weathervane; his motto is Spanish, "I Dance to the Tune that is Played."

Now it seems to me that Professor Lovin's thesis about Bibfeldt's cerebral composition makes the greatest sense of all this nonsense, and I can do no better in this context than to cite his own conclusion: "Unlike the Freudian theories of Erikson or the Piagetian theories used by Fowler and Kohlberg, this (the quadrilateral mind, you remember) was a formula that matched the data. Those who know Bibfeldt have often remarked that he seems to be barely conscious. Jaynes' theory leads to the exciting speculation that perhaps he isn't conscious at all."

After keeping a low profile during the years of his tenure review, now Associate Professor Lovin returned to the podium for an unprecedented second lecture one year ago, in the Spring of 1987. On this occasion his topic was "Franz Bibfeldt and the Future of Political Theology." This more recent event constitutes the sole part in the 1.6 BF quotient which most of you possess, so I will be brief: suffice it to say that here Lovin traces the emergence of Bibfeldt's empathy for the third world as arising from a two-week junket to Cancún, which resulted in his new political theology, a preferential option for the rich. Lovin also traces Bibfeldt's clandestine political activity in tantalizingly indirect fashion -- suffice it to say that when Robert MacFarlane makes a clean breast of it about the source of that key-shaped cake and the inscribed Bible that went to Iran, Bibfeldt will be in the news yet again.
Now we turn to today's contributions. In closing, however, I would like to offer a brief, insincere observation. This review of Bibfeldt has, inappropriately, reminded me of Schweitzer's *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*. As you no doubt recall from your reading of this text in its original German edition, it is Schweitzer's thesis that Biblical scholars who devoted their efforts to understanding who Jesus was almost always wound up with a Jesus who was precisely what they and their generation fancied themselves to be. Might it not be the case that the same is true with Bibfeldt? Do we not make Bibfeldt in our own image? If so, then what we are told about Bibfeldt in fact tells us more about the speaker than it does about Franz. I think we should keep that in mind as we listen to today's contributions.

Richard A. Rosengarten

March 30, 1988
LANDMARKS AND LANDMINES IN BIBFELDT SCHOLARSHIP

American Academy of Religion
November 21, 1988

Robin W. Lovin
University of Chicago

"In the first place, I put for a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire of power after power that ceaseth only in death."

Contrary to what you might suppose, those lines were not written by Franz Bibfeldt. They appear in Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*, first published in 1651.

Bibfeldt has on more than one occasion claimed that he wrote those lines, but this claim is now regarded, in the most informed scholarly opinion, as extremely dubious. I was once myself inclined toward the theory of Bibfeldtian authorship by a psychological argument, since it seemed to me that what we might call the schizo-schizophrenic characteristics of the text could only have been produced by Bibfeldt's uniquely structured quadrilateral mind, which I have, brilliantly, if I do say so myself, described in one of my early contributions to Bibfeldt scholarship. (That essay first appeared in the *Jahrbuch für Analyse und Motocycle Maintenance* in 1979. Some of you may be familiar with the English translation in the University of Chicago's *Criterion* magazine.)
A conclusive refutation of Bibfeldt's claims to authorship appears, however, in a report of archival research conducted by a team of scholars working in the public library in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin. The point to a copy of *Levithan* which contains a card recording that the book was charged out to an "F. Bibfeldt" for sixteen days in 1952, and that he paid — under protest — an overdue fine of 6¢. 

Bibfeldt himself has published a detailed reply to the findings of the Oconomowoc archivists, in which he alleges that the Hobbes text is a forgery and offers an elaborate proof that he is himself the original author. Bibfeldt's case, however, rests on a dubious use of carbon-14 dating techniques according to methods which, were they generally accepted, would date the Shroud of Turin during to reign of the Pharoah Amenhotep IV.

Despite Bibfeldt's own persistent references to Hobbes as "the pseudo-Bibfeldt," it seems best to conclude that the citation with which I began this lecture is an example of, not to put too fine a point on it, plagiarism. It is, however, nonetheless interesting for that. For Bibfeldt's claim is that the account of the war of all against all, which Hobbes' *Leviathan* presents as an explanation human life in the state of nature, is in fact his own participant observer's report on an AAR Annual Meeting held in New York in the late 1970's.
Just how Bibfeldt would know this remains unclear, since he is not known ever to have actually attended an AAR Meeting. Not that he hasn’t tried. But Bibfeldt suffers from an inability to master the modern, Gregorian calendar system. I don’t mean that he can’t tell what day it is. I mean that he can’t tell what year it is. The problem, as many you know, stems from his dissertation at the University of Worms, on "The Problem of the Year Zero." The problem is, as Bibfeldt became the first person in nearly two thousand years to notice, that there is nothing between 1 B.C. and 1 A.D. One minute you’re a full year before Christ, and then, boom, one minute later, you’re into the first year of the Christian era, with nothing in between. Bibfeldt was so distraught by this discovery that his health failed, and he was unable to complete his Habilitationschrift. While in the sanitarium, Bibfeldt did write a series of short essays on wine and cheese that were published as a sort of Rehabilitationschrift after his discharge.

The residual problem, however, is that Bibfeldt remains to this day unable to focus on the question of what year it is, and so inevitably arrives either a year early or a year late for events. Just this week, he has been reported wandering aimlessly between the Marriott and the Sheraton in Boston, and according to a phone call I received very early this morning, he was ejected
late last night from a hospitality suite at a podiatrists convention in Anaheim, where he had wandered in under the impression that it was the University of Chicago reception. Dennis Landon’s depiction of Bibfeldt as the theologian absconditus points to the deeper theological meaning of the Bibfeldt’s mysterious presence absence that has marked these gatherings of the AAR, but the management of a string of convention hotels and sixteen angry podiatrists who lost their wallets last night in Anaheim have offered a more concrete, experiential account of the absconditus part.

Surely, though, Bibfeldt is, at the AAR, always present even though perpetually absent. Otherwise, how could we account for the sensitive description of the personal relationships at the heart of academic life which he, not to put too fine a point on it, stole from Hobbes’ Leviathan: “Grief for the calamity of another is pity, and ariseth from the imagination that the like calamity may befall himself, and is therefore called compassion. ... Grief for the success of a competitor in wealth, honor, or other good, if it be joined with endeavor to enforce our own abilities to equal or exceed him, is called emulation; but joined with endeavor to supplant or hinder a competitor, is called envy.”

Or this observation, drawn from hours of field work in the receptions of learned societies and the cocktail lounges of con-
vention hotels: "Sudden glory is the passion which maketh those grimaces called laughter; and is caused either by some act of their own, that pleaseth them; or by the apprehension of some deformed thing in another, by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves."

Or this, which can only have been arrived at by spending time listening in on interviews at the placement center: "The vainglory which consisteth in the feigning or supposing of abilities in ourselves, which we know are not, is most incident to young men, and nourished by the histories, or fictions, of gallant persons; and is corrected often times by age and employment."

In modern times, as we all know, and as has been so well demonstrated by the high level of argument attained in the recent presidential campaign, the art of politics has achieved a level of refinement that transcends the crude political passions that Hobbes discusses. Bibfeldt's -- how shall I put it -- appropriation of Hobbes' text cannot be relegated to the tawdry realm of ordinary plagiarism. His is the more subtle purpose of pointing out to us the residual value of Hobbes' now outdated political thought as an introduction to the sociology of knowledge in academic communities. We are all familiar, for example, with Hobbes' characterization of the life of man in a state of nature
as "poor, nasty, brutish, and short." Bibfeldt's important contribution has been to develop those terms into a typology for classifying the presentations and responses at the AAR.

Most familiar, according to Bibfeldt, is the combination which he refers to as the "Type A Session," characterized by a poor paper, followed by a nasty response. There is also, however, the "Type B Session," in which a brutish paper is followed by a short response, and of course, less familiar combinations, such as the short paper with a poor response, the nasty paper with a nasty response, and so on. The four types yield sixteen different possible combinations, and Bibfeldt's writings suggest that steering committees could add zest and variety to the section meetings by assigning a type to each paper proposal, and to the personality of each prospective respondent, and then arranging the sessions so as to maximize the number of different combinations presented. Publishing these ratings in the program book would enable Academy members to plan their attendance at sessions more efficiently, and would also remove much of the air of mystery which now surrounds the question of why some paper proposals are accepted and others are rejected.

Now, I want to pause for just a moment in this exposition of Bibfeldt's, how shall I put it, re-pristinization of Hobbes, to
say how much I know the great theologian himself would personally appreciate the warmth of your reception of his ideas this morning. Bibfeldt, as Professor Richard Rosengarten has observed, "seeks agreement with everyone and wants to make everything come out right to ensure that he is always relevant." Bibfeldt, not to put too fine a point on in, likes to be liked.

Those of you who understand this trait in the great man will appreciate how unpleasant he found the controversy that surrounded his recent attempt to enter the field of Third World theology. Some of you will have read in Criterion of Bibfeldt's "preferential option for the rich." Those of you who followed the subsequent developments in this line of thinking were, I know, shocked at the Vatican inquiry into Bibfeldt's teaching on these points, and outraged at Cardinal Ratzinger's order silencing him for a period of, as the Cardinal put it, "Oh, six or seven years ought to do it."

Bibfeldt, who tries desperately to avoid offending anybody, was deeply distressed by this conclusion to the inquiry. I think what bothered him most about the silencing order was that he isn't even Catholic. Bibfeldt's own Lutheran Bishop attempted to clarify the situation in a conciliatory statement which, while noting that silencing orders are not customary practice in the Lutheran communion, added that we musn't be too hasty in judging
our brethren, and that this might just prove to be one of those situations in which the Lutherans could learn from the Catholics. The Bishop added, and I quote, "I mean, here I stand and all that stuff, but there's gotta be some limits, for crying out loud."

Given the deep and painful divisions caused by the preferential option for the rich, it is important to remember Bibfeldt's earlier and more broadly accepted contributions to modern theology. Indeed, given Bibfeldt's penchant for plagiarism, we might also appropriately speak of his contributions to ancient and medieval theology as well. But surely none of these rank quite so high as the war of all against all that Bibfeldt has so vividly described at the heart of our academic enterprise, the perpetual and restless desire of power after power that, ceaseth only in death, tenure, or promotion to a named chair; and the penetrating insight of the typology of "poor, nasty, brutish, and short" for describing scholarly contributions.

We must not mistake the magnitude of Bibfeldt's achievement at this point. We are in the presence of a breakthrough comparable to his innovative theory of pastoral care for the dead. At a point in the development of Western scholarship in which the anthropologists have robbed us of Rousseau's noble savage, and the historians have disabused us of the notion that the Germanic tribes ever actually lived in a state that preceded the develop-
ment of the social contract, Bibfeldt has rediscovered the state of nature, let loose in the halls of the Chicago Hilton and Towers. In the words of the immortal Pogo, "We have met the enemy, and they is us."
The Bibfeldtian Origins of the Pseudo-Thomistic Literature

To: Dean Lewis  From: Todd Whitmore  For: Bibfeldt Day, 1988

Shortly after Vatican II, there were great efforts to retrieve the original texts of Thomas Aquinas in order to challenge the moral rigidity of neo-scholastic casuistry. Finding original texts of the Thomistic corpus which would support such a venture would open up Roman Catholic moral theology to new horizons. The liberal left of the Catholic Church was excited.

On January 4, 1968, sixty-five years after the death of Pope Leo XIII, a heretofore unknown text was found in Leo's crypt in the basement of St. Peter's in Rome by a snoopy cleaning lady. The fact that the text was in the crypt of Leo, the pope who made Aquinas the official theologian of the Catholic Church, lent considerable authority to the document.

It was entitled: Summa Contra Lex Mea, or, loosely translated, The Summa Against Everything Else I Ever Wrote.

The liberal left of the Church was ecstatic.

The authenticity of the text was later cast into doubt by careful linguistic and historical analysis because the word "K-mart" appeared seven times. A quote from renowned medievalist, Professor I.M. Obscure:

"The multiplicitous occurrence of the term 'K-mart' definitely indicates that the text in question is pseudepigraphic. Such numerous references suggest that the concept of discount stores had already shaped the mental outlook of the Middle Ages. This is impossible. Analysis of the finds of archeological excavations has irrefutably demonstrated that shopping malls only began to appear on the European scene during the fourteenth century, a full one hundred years after Aquinas, being brought in from the East by Muslim bedouins."

The liberal left of the Church was depressed.

Still, it is worth studying these texts. Here, apparently, is an early dissenting voice from within the community of the faithful. The following excerpt, written in the disputational form of Aquinas' Summa Theologica, is from the Pseudo-Summa, first part of the third part of the ninth part of the sixteenth part, question forty-two, article six, entitled, "Whether Jesus was a Woman, or Who is the Head of the Family Anyway?":

Objection 1: The Apostle states that, "The head of a woman is her husband" (1 Cor 11:3) and "The husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, his body" (Eph 5:23). Therefore the husband is the head of the family.

On the contrary, it is stated that a woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle (traditional source).
I answer that procreation of the male offspring requires an 'x' and a 'y' chromosome, while that of the female requires no 'x' [Editor's note: Indications of knowledge of modern genetics also cast doubt on the authenticity of the document]. Now chromosomes are made up of both form and matter, the type being the form, while the substance being the matter. As stated elsewhere, God does not consist of a material substance. Therefore, there is no matter through which an 'x' chromosome can be transmitted to Mary. Hence, with no 'x' chromosome, Jesus must necessarily be a woman.

Furthermore, the Apostle states (1 Cor 11:3) "The head of every man is Christ." Since Jesus Christ is a woman, then the head of every man is a woman. Moreover, since the meeting of man and woman leads to holy matrimony, the woman is the head of the family.

Reply to Objection 1: The term "man" or "husband" can be understood in two ways, to refer to the chromosomal distribution of 'x' and 'y', or to whoever wears the pants of the family. The first definition is restricted to material substance, while the second refers to the form. The Apostle here intends the latter meaning. Either male or female material substance—that is, chromosomal distribution—can take the form of wearing the pants of the family. Now it is stated that "the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, his body" (Eph 5:23). Clearly then, since Jesus Christ is the head of the Church in both form and substance, and she is a woman, the material substance of the woman must be the head of the family in form also, that is, she must wear the pants of the family.

In addition, because the woman is the head "as Christ is the head of the Church," this means that a person bearing the substance of a woman must therefore also take the form of the head of the Church (cf. also Col 1:18 and Eph 1:22).

All passages which refer to the relationship of man and woman, husband and wife, both in scripture and in the Holy Christian Church must be understood in this way.

Finally, this also means that the male material substance must take the form of the woman. That is, for instance, he must do the dishes, and the laundry, and if there be offspring, change the diapers at four in the morning.

This suffices to answer all further objections.

The early 1980's witnessed a resurgence of the dispute over the authenticity of the document. Certain critics seized on the fact that the text in this last reply refers to diapers and not to pampers, a much later development in the material aspect of child rearing. This reopened the debate. The liberal left of the Church was hopeful.
The excitement, I am afraid, was a bit premature. Recent evidence—dug up by a Divinity School research assistant for five dollars and hour (I have been meaning to talk to Dean Gamwell about the wages)—suggests that the true author of the pseudo-Thomistic document is none other than Bibfeldt.

Now, before I go on to detail the evidence, I first need to say that I find it incredible that this man, Bibfeldt, has written hundreds of articles, scores of books, has a full teaching load, trots around the globe giving talks, writes his own weekly column in the widely read journal The Christian Millenium under the acronym, "B.I.M.B.O." — Bibfeldt does all of this, and still he has time to create a theologian who does not even exist! This is amazing. I have tried to reach him for comment, but, oddly enough, I cannot seem to locate him.

Still, the evidence of his authorship is hard to refute. First of all, an early draft of the document was found on a floppy disc in Bibfeldt's IBM PC. This fact is coupled with the recent disclosure that at the time of the discovery of the document in the crypt of St. Peter's, Bibfeldt, even though Lutheran, was on Fr. Francis Mulligan's five-day package pilgrimage trip to Rome. Finally — and this is probably the most conclusive evidence—Bibfeldt is the majority stockholder in the K-mart company. It appears that the document was intended as a means of subliminal advertising. It is clear that Bibfeldt is here living out his political theology, so well explicated by Robin Lovin last year on Bibfeldt day, of the "preferential option for the rich."

Incidentally, Bibfeldt is now negotiating with T and T Clark publishers to have K-mart advertising inserts put into Barth's Church Dogmatics. Honest. And it is really not a bad marketing strategy. Right after we read about hearing the immediate and specific command of God, we turn the page to hear that athletic socks are now on sale for only ninety-nine cents a pair.

I close by leaving you with the assurance that even though the authorship of the pseudo-Thomistic literature is all but certain, the controversy continues. Yes, the Vatican has taken it upon itself to silence Bibfeldt for a year (despite the fact that he is Lutheran). But it is only one year, that is, only until Bibfeldt day, 1989.
FIRST ANNUAL HILDA BRAUNSCHWEIGER-BIBFELDT LECTURE

Held at Weston School of Theology, Cambridge, Ma. on April 28th, 1989.

The introduction was given by Peter Schineller, S.J. Associate Professor of Systematic Theology. He first ran into the writings of Franz Bibfeldt through his studies at the University of Chicago (Ph.D. 1975). In this lecture, he introduces Weston School of Theology to one of its most infamous or notorious alumna (we think) namely, Hilda Braunschweiger-Bibfeldt.

The inaugural lecture was delivered by Alvaro Ribeiro, S.J., about to complete his STL at Weston.

The audience was Weston students, faculty, friends. The setting was the end of the year Weston Talent and Theo Awards Show. This inaugural lecture was one of the highlights of the evening.

Taped music of Wagner helped put the audience into the correct mood for this lecture. Both Schineller and Ribeiro wore their academic gowns (Chicago and Oxford) to befit the occasion. Alvaro delivered the lecture splendidly, and several times during the presentation, the audience spontaneously (or with a little prodding) burst forth with the appropriate response: eg. "it was the best of times, it was the ... wurst of times." And the audience helped complete the title of her recent work, "What are they Saying about ... Wurst?" There was sustained laughter during the presentation and sustained applause at the conclusion. Franz and Hilda would have been proud.

[Signature]

Peter Schineller
Introductory remarks by Peter Schineller, S.J.

Gentlewomen and Gentlemen; Meine Dame und Herren.

Today is an historic moment in the history of the Weston School of Theology. As a highly esteemed theological center, with a highly acclaimed, if sometimes hard to find, faculty, in keeping with this tradition, we inaugurate this evening the first annual Hilda Braunschweiger-Bibfeldt Lecture. By your presence here, I'm afraid you are automatically members of the H.B.B. Society.

Why, you may well ask, hold this lecture? Who is this all too hidden scholar whom we try to resurrect? Her story begins at the University of Chicago Divinity School, where eminent historian Professor Martin Marty unearthed some better or well-unknown manuscripts of her husband Franz Bibfeldt. Since that hateful --FATEful day (excuse me), scholars have bored --POURED over his manuscripts, and have done Franz more justice than is his due. They have plumbed the depths of his superficiality and discovered at times the accidental profundity of his thought. By now, Franz is internationally acclaimed and an annual lecture in his honor is delivered to the theological community of Chicago.

What about Hilda? and Weston? Fragments of Franz led to Harvard Square and to the previously hidden works of his one and only love, Hilda, as we will shortly discover. We are privileged (or perhaps underprivileged) to have this evening the first annual Hilda Braunschweiger-Bibfeldt lecture.

But who could unearth or undermine this treasure? Who could expose us to Hilda's immense corpus? Stanley Marrow was invited, but gave Luke 14:18 as his excuse. Judith Dwyer is in Germany at this moment, tracing the roots of Hilda's thought. But we do have with us, a wise man from the east, one pigheaded enough to do two degrees at Weston, in addition to a doctoral degree from Oxford, one who has opened to a yawning --YEARNing world the letters of Dr. Charles Burney, a book sure to make the bottom of every best seller British sh -- HIT list. Who else could we invite, or even command, to give this inaugural lecture than our own, now in the 34th and last year of his education -- Doctor of Philosophy, Master of Divinity, and soon to be Licensed in Theology, Alvaro Ribeiro !!!
THE VERY FIRST HILDA BRAUNSCHEIGER BIBFELDT MEMORIAL LECTURE

Let me begin by saying how honoured I am to be invited this evening to deliver the Very First Annual Hilda Braunschweiger Bibfeldt Memorial Lecture. "Memorial" in this context is, of course, entirely appropriate, for Frau Bibfeldt's life and theological opacities have most undeservedly suffered eclipse, so eminently forgettable are they. Allow me then to begin with the old paedagogical ploy of reminding you of what you never knew. As you recall, the University of Chicago claims to have discovered the theology of Franz Bibfeldt, ministry purveyor of pastoral care for the Dead and to the as-good-as-dead, namely the Filthy Rich for whom Franz Bibfeldt developed a preferential option. The locus of his ministry was the Yacht Club.

But to compare small beginnings with great developments, I have to claim with all due immodesty that while Chicago might have discovered Franz Bibfeldt, we at Weston have discovered Frau Bibfeldt! (do I hear cheers?) Frau Professor Dottoressa Hilda Bibfeldt, née Braunschweiger, whose manuscripts and foul papers were -- for reasons that shall become apparent during the course of this inaugural lecture -- unearthed some short time ago by excavators in Harvard Square under the Wursthaus. To be precise, in the sewage-works thereof.

To understand her works, we shall recall briefly the lowlights of her totally undistinguished career. Fraulein Braunschweiger came to these United States to study at the Weston School of Theology planning to investigate the theology of the Wild West. She emerged from the T-station and landed...
in the Wursthaus. It was the best of times, it was the wurst of times. For there in the Wursthaus by happy coincidence sat Franz Bibfeldt on sabbatical from Chicago, consuming his customary stein of theological dissipation. Hilda ordered a knockwurst, and Franz obliged. It was love at wurst sight. This was Hilda's conversion-experience to wursttheologie . . .

On the assumption that with every right there comes a corresponding responsibility, Hilda in the Wursthaus (as a reply to "animal formulated rights theology")/the theology of animal responsibility to provide sausages to the human race. Encouraged by her paramour, now husband Franz, Hilda prepared her earth-shattering thesis in which she proved the/text of Mark 5:13 to be corrupt. The correct reading, and the basis for her subsequent wursttheologie, goes as follows: "The herd of about two thousand swine went rushing down the mountainside and into the Gadarene slaughterhouse, emerging as an endless link of sausage. Matters went from bad to wurst."

Upon the basis of this doctrine, Hilda Bibfeldt published with Vanity of Vanities Press the following works: Geist in Wurst, a flatulent performance; her study of Vatican II finally entitled Gaudium mit wurst; and What are they saying about WURST? a tome of which the reviewers observed: "once you put down her book, you never want to pick it up again." She also gained notable notoriety for her review of John O'Malley's Praise and Blame in Renaissance Harvard Square, in which she found little to praise and much to blame. Her unpublished universal catechism states as its first article of faith: "This little piggy went to market . . . ."
Hilda Braunschweiger Bibfeldt's wursttheologie of animal responsibility inevitably developed over the years into her theology of scatology (there is a LINK of course, between the two), reckoning that eschatology is too long a word. In this she complemented Franz Bibfeldt's doctrine: Franz Bibfeldt embraced all theological positions simultaneously in the hope that some might be true. Hilda Bibfeldt embraced Franz Bibfeldt in many positions in the hope that some might others be fun and/fruitful of bratwurst.

This, then, is merely the briefest of introductory inaugural lectures, to alert this academy to the existence of and further exploration needed into the manuscripts and foul papers of Hilda Braunschweiger Bibfeldt, who departed this life prematurely just as her career bottomed-out in the fullness of forgettability.

Yet from beyond the grave, from the Great Wursthaus in the Sky, I am privileged to present to you the following barely-legible fragment culled from her literary remains: she says, "All shall be wurst; and all manner of thing shall be wurst."

The wurst shall be last; and the last wurst; for
A Faith for Franz: The 1992 Bibfeldt Lecture

In this Columbian year we are reminded that the importation of Western European characters and cultures to these shores has been a dubious achievement. As we gather here on this occasion, we commemorate yet another of those questionable extensions of Europe, namely the person of Franz Bibfeldt. Born November 1, 1899, Herr Bibfeldt would be on this April 1, 1992, exactly 92 years of age. (I note that Dean Richard Rosengarten places the birthdate in 1897, an unfortunate error in his otherwise admirable summary of the Bibfeldt scholarly output). ¹ The coincidence of age 92 and year '92 suggests a numerological phenomenon of singular significance, though I'll be damned if I know what it is. I can only share that the coincidence was sufficiently off-putting to cause Shirley MacLaine to decline my invitation to be with us today. I had thought to ask Ms. MacLaine to channel Franz that we might make this event a bit more memorable. But I could not assure Ms. MacLaine that Franz is actually deceased. Then she reminded me that as an Episcopalian, I should recall that Bishop Jim Pike shares this distinction of status with Franz and that unless I am prepared to share like fate with each of them, I might reconsider the whole idea. I have.

I am aware, as I stand in this hallowed place and invoke the name, Bibfeldt, that I hold something of a distinction. Being often in this Divinity School, but only erstwhile of this Divinity School, and then only in interim capacity, I speak of Bibfeldt from a different perspective than those who have preceded me at this podium. I am particularly grateful for this occasion since it marks a significant anniversary for me. I have been among you ten years now. And since I hold no hope of either a degree or tenure, I consider this anniversary a measure of sheer love of God. There are those uncharitable sorts who consider the concept of campus ministry at The University of Chicago a classic oxymoron.

That we have all persevered and even thrived is a tribute worthy of celebration on this day when we commemorate the person of Franz Bibfeldt, the most lavish perennial in this garden of academic delights.

If you will indulge my extension of the herbiferous metaphor, my earliest investigations into Bibfeldt confirm my premonitions that Bibfeldt is the kudzu of this theological community. Like the tenacious vine that grows in abundance throughout the Southern regions of this country, Bibfeldt and his influences cling to every untended place in the otherwise tidy and methodically methodological minds associated with this school. And like the vegetative kudzu, Bibfeldt’s abundant presence is not nearly so lamentable as his seeming uselessness. I say “seeming,” for there are many things of God’s creating the value of which is not readily apparent. Like the hemorrhoid. I have divined at least one salutary property of that humble tumor. I have it on good authority that in order to be elevated to the rank of Bishop in my own Episcopal Church, one must have gray hair in order to look distinguished. And one must have hemorrhoids in order to look always deeply concerned. But I digress.

I was addressing the merits of kudzu. While kudzu vines are not edible, they do prevent the erosion of soil from roadside embankments. I suppose we might be grateful that, in similar fashion, Bibfeldt’s signal contribution to our life here prevents the erosion of such sense of humor as remains after this institution and the rigors of theological inquiry have completed their excavations into our souls.

It is my purpose today to do two things. First, I wish add a note to the corpus of Bibfeldt scholarship. Not a mere footnote, mind you, but a genuine milestone. Indeed, I propose to share with you momentarily what I believe to be the very cornerstone of a promising new direction for Bibfeldtian biographical research. Secondly, I wish to advance a proposition or indulge a fantasy, which is what many gathered here today do all day long, some for a good wage.
Let me attend to the first of these purposes by building upon the work of my friend and colleague, Robert Grant. It was Professor Grant who shared some years ago his own findings in “The Quest for the Historical Bibfeldt.” Having only lately completed my reading of John Dominic Crossan’s *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, I well appreciate the laborious task of such historical exploration. Since I have never seen Professor Grant’s paper, I can neither reinforce nor refute his findings. But I do come today prepared to make a substantive contribution to the important and ongoing quest for the historical Bibfeldt.

I begin with the confession that my doctoral studies were in ministry. Nevertheless, I am informed that in order to secure scholarly respect, I must share with you my method. Trained in ministry and honed in the school of experience, I drew upon the most practical of practical theology and adhered to the bulwark of my discipline which is the inexorable truth that it is not what one knows but who one knows that matters in this life. My method was simple. I called the Reverend JoAnn Leach, a dear friend who serves as Episcopal Chaplain to the University of Utah. I asked her to hire herself over to the Mormon Archives and dig up anything she could on the name Bibfeldt. Enlisting the aid of another Episcopalian in the employ of the Latter Day Saints, JoAnn and her colleague searched the computer records. What I am about to share is, unlike much of the Bibfeldt corpus, verifiable: I assure you that I am not making this up! We can now put to rest any and all claims that Franz Bibfeldt is nothing more than an extensive figment of an expansive imagination aided by expensive education.

The Mormon Archives record that a Henry and a Margaret Bibfeldt did reside in Prussia, in the town of Bosseborn, in the region of West Falen. Henry and Margaret baptized five children in the local Catholic church, from whose baptismal records in the original Latin these facts are derived. The eldest of their children, Catherine, was baptized in 1652. Then followed John, Gertrude, and Margaret. Young Fredrick, baptized in
1665, was the last born. This much of the family, was are assured, has been baptized and sealed by the Mormons in the Salt Lake City temple.

There exists, then, a considerable gap from the records of this family to the notation in the Marty papers that trace Franz Bibfeldt’s origins to a baptismal record in Niedersachsen, Oldenburg, Germany. I shall leave the genealogical task to future historians, but am happy to be able to offer a landmark for future research into the fascinating matter of the Bibfeldt family tree. I am devoting my honorarium to further research, since I am told that the Mormons will want more money for further investigation. Should the honorarium prove insufficient, I suggest that several of us band together and request suitable funding from the Lilly Endowment, or a similarly high-minded benefactor. I detect the beginnings of a new institute.

In the interest of time, I move to my second purpose, namely the advancement of a proposition. It seems to me that Bibfeldt scholarship has been too long silent on the matter of the theologian’s personal faith and worship. I realize that confessional theology is not the strong suit of this Divinity School. After ten years as a denominational chaplain at this university, I can personally attest that objectivity can be carried to extremes. One can be so open-minded that one’s brain falls out. One can also be so religiously diffuse that the soul evaporates. Sad to say, both conditions can be met on this and many other campuses. It’s a particularly lamentable occasion when both conditions are met in a single person. But I digress again.

Marty has maintained, with an assurance one expects of the teutonic spirit, that Franz Bibfeldt is, by virtue of his baptism at Niedersachen, a Lutheran. I remind us all that baptism confirms only that one is Christian — and not even that convincingly. I have proven with hard evidence that the Bibfeldt progenitors were actually Catholic. That a Franz Bibfeldt may have been baptized at a Lutheran font in Germany at the turn of the

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2Martin E. Marty, “About Franz Bibfeldt,” a memo circulated to a limited audience.
century indicates a liberal tendency in the family. Still, this assertion by Professor Marty, while it may tell us everything about the faith of Franz Bibfeldt’s parents, reveals nothing of Franz Bibfeldt himself. Dean Rosengarten’s note that Franz was conceived in the back seat of an 1892 Volkswagen following a Candlemas party is at the same time questionable and revealing.3 We must reject the Volkswagen, that vehicle having been invented some forty or so years later. The Candlemas party, however, has much to commend it suggesting as it does both the liberality and the high-church leanings of the parents. I should point out, however, that the date of Candlemas being February 2, Franz Bibfeldt’s reputed birthdate of November 1 suggests a gestation of ten months. But then, Franz was nothing if not cautious.

It is my thesis that Franz Bibfeldt continued the liberal leanings of the family. An exhaustive consideration of Bibfeldt’s work suggests that Franz Bibfeldt was, by faith, an Anglican. And who better to advance this proposition than an Episcopal priest of Sicilian and Swiss ancestry? If I can be an Anglican, why not Franz?

That Franz resisted the Anglicanization of the family name may be attributed to a mixture of pride and prudence. The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology indicates that the prefix “Bib” is from the Latin *bibere*, meaning “to drink.” The suffix “feldt” is, of course, the German word for “field.” No nation whose geographical nomenclature includes a place called “Spitalfields” could be trusted to render a felicitous equivalent to the rich cadences of Bibfeldt. Thus did pride intervene to prevent a most unhappy alteration. Moreover, no theologian desirous of living off publication royalties could want for a more impressively brooding Germanic moniker than “Bibfeldt.” Thus did prudence make her contribution.

Bibfeldt was likely drawn to the Anglican tradition for the same reason that the Church of England has proven haven for successive generations. The Church of England

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3 Rosengarten, p. 2.
is, as one member of the faith put it, "all that stands between us and Christianity." That Franz Bibfeldt emerges as one of the premier exponents of the Anglican tradition is evinced by a simple review of his life and impressive output.

According to Marty, "Bibfeldt is ... the compleat theologian because he is capable of engaging in complete reversals of positions depending upon the Zeitgeist." This facility for reversal must surely have come early to Bibfeldt and may have been derived from experience with the English educational system. My dear friend, Caroline Cracraft, of the British Consulate General in this city and product of the English educational system, recently shared a scholarly technique often deployed for survival in the English academy. Like all children of imagination, of which number we must surely count Franz Bibfeldt, daydreaming is a classroom liability. One must early learn defense or perish. My English friend offered that students can survive handily if they have mastered a time-honored device. When caught off-guard by a professorial question the student must be primed to respond with a question, and preferably one that matches the countenance of one too quickly snatched from reverie. It was likely in just such setting that Franz learned the very British technique of tilting the head winsomely and answering any professorial inquiry with the palpably engaged retort, "But couldn't it be the other way around?" From this beginning we trace Bibfeldt's penchant for reversals.

Bibfeldt's first American appearance, says Marty, was in a published book review in 1951. It was an auspicious beginning, this review of Bibfeldt's work entitled The Relieved Paradox. The title alone suggests those Anglican tendencies that shun conflict and seek a middle way. Those tendencies are further evident in his dissertation on "The Problem of the Year Zero," wherein Bibfeldt explored the missing year between 1 B.C. and 1 A.D., an exploration that took him quite literally into the temporal via media and thus established his lasting fascination for the middle way.

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It is Bibfeldt’s response to Kierkegaard’s *Either/Or* that truly established Bibfeldt’s central place in Anglican theology. Bibfeldt’s *Both/And*, and his sequel, *Both/And/And/Or/Either/Or* remain, to my mind, the quintessence of Anglican thought. Evidently, the present Archbishop of Canterbury agrees and offers his portrait on this occasion in token of his esteem for Bibfeldt’s rightful claim to the title Defender of the Faith. Parenthetically, do note the expression on the face of his Grace, and recollect my earlier comments on episcopal prerequisites.

Joseph Price generously shared in his own lecture upon Bibfeldt the discovery of a rare manuscript entitled “A Pragmatist’s Paraphrase of the Sayings of Jesus.” Employing what was identified as a “hermeneutic of reversism,” Bibfeldt offered that “any saying [of Jesus] which is too hard to follow is to be understood to mean the opposite of what it literally says.” This work has obviously exercised far-reaching influence. One need only study the history of Anglican homiletics to see the practical application of this principle at work. Or just drop in next Sunday to any Episcopal parish. Odds are good you won’t be disappointed. Of course, there is evidence that the influence has spread beyond the Anglican communion, but ours is an ancient and hallowed experience and I doubt one could find earlier evidence than is posited in our history. Indeed, there are hints that Bibfeldt may have arrived at his own thoroughgoing reversism from a close study of Henry VIII’s application of these principles to Roman canon law, a process undertaken six times, obviously to satisfy the demands of the empirical method.

It was this hermeneutic of reversism that gave rise to Bibfeldt’s foundational translations of sacred scripture. He rendered Matthew 5:3 as “Blessed are the rich in money, for they can build bigger and better churches. Who cares about the Kingdom of God?” Anglican architecture, though rivalled in this city by Catholic structures, still claims the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine in New York City and the Washington

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5 Rosengarten, p. 3
6 Rosengarten, p. 3
National Cathedral in the nation's capitol as stunning exemplars of this beatitude in action. Bibfeldt’s reading of Matthew 5:8 yielded “Blessed are those whose external appearance and behavior are impeccable, for they shall look nice when they see God.” Need I say more?

Robin Lovin, for his part, traced the course that led to Bibfeldt’s political theology which propounds God’s preferential option for the rich. This theological bent, of particular interest to Anglicans, enjoyed notorious popularity in the Reagan administration and perseveres in the mind and legislative agenda of President Bush. Bibfeldt’s contribution, however, was the backbone of Mrs. Thatcher’s administration, an indebtedness acknowledged in the contribution of her photograph to our precious archival collection of Bibfeldtiana.

It was also Robin Lovin who contributed a paper entitled “Franz Bibfeldt: The Breakdown of Consciousness and the Origins of the Quadrilateral Mind.” While Professor Lovin aimed to explore the cerebral composition of Bibfeldt, I wish to note here the remarkable coincidence that there exists in the archive of Anglican history a most important ecumenical document called The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral 1886, 1888. This document sets forth the four-fold principles this communion holds essential to the unity of the divided branches of Christendom. I suggest that Mr. Lovin revisit his earlier treatise. Given the dates of the document's composition in Chicago in 1886 and its ratification at Lambeth in 1888, we must entertain an earlier source and date for the breakdown of consciousness and the origins of the quadrilateral mind, or attribute to Franz Bibfeldt a precocity normally reserved only for the persons of the Trinity. Of course, it may well be that Professor Lovin’s thesis was sound, but his information insufficient. Could it be that the Bibfeldt whose influence shaped this important Anglican document was father or grandfather, mother or grandmother to the man we revere today?

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7Rosengarten, p. 4
8Rosengarten, p. 7
In 1979 Otto Dreydoppel offered important insight into Franz Bibfeldt’s theory of the pastoral care of the dead. Bibfeldt advanced the “insight that the dead are the truly silent majority and thus the definitively oppressed group.”9 One cannot fully appreciate this insight, nor its incarnation, until one lead worship in an Episcopal congregation. I shall be forever indebted to Bibfeldt’s definitive work in this area, his magnificent book, The Minister as Mortician. It has guided me on many occasions and made me a far more effective pastor, especially upon those occasions when I have been invited to visit congregations in the suburbs.

In one regard, however, Franz Bibfeldt distinguishes himself, even amongst Anglican theologians. It is not characteristic of our tradition to write much down. That we have such rich resources by which to trace the trajectory of Bibfeldt’s ascendency (or one may maintain, his descendency) into Anglican theological history is due not abundance of primary resources, but rather to a extensive catalogue of secondary materials. That so much theology could be derived from so little script is a distinctly Anglican characteristic. Still, Franz Bibfeldt remains the perfect antidote to those Anglicans who seem to have maintained for centuries that the only guarantee of safe theology is to do no theology.

Indeed, in researching this paper today, I found among the archives, scribbled on the back of a scrap of paper, some random notes in the unmistakable hand of Bibfeldt. The script is unmistakable because, in a characteristic act of solidarity with adolescent women for whom he held abiding respect and morbid fascination, Herr Bibfeldt always dotted his “i’s” with a small open circle. The notes were scrawled on what appeared to be a matchbook cover from a pub named The Trojan, or perhaps a fragment from a box of prophylactics. It is hard to tell. In either case, our hero was obviously smitten by the theological muse even in such unlikely circumstances as the evidences suggest. He seems to have been pondering the terrifyingly modern challenge of doing “safe theology.” The

9Rosengarten, p. 5
notes sketch a campaign for safe theology, with posters, CTA placards, television spots and music videos featuring comely scholars demonstrating the proper use of conundrums. The campaign slogan is worthy of even this august university and reflects something of its scholarly philosophy. It reads, rather fetchingly, I think, “Practice Safe Theology: Put a Propaedeutic on your Hermeneutic.”

In conclusion, let me remind that, as Martin Marty himself has written, “In the world of Bibfeldt, not what happened but what everyone believes happened, matters.”

Dear friends, dare I suggest that this truth extends beyond the world of Bibfeldt and is the basis of most, if not all, religion? Bibfeldt, then, invites us into the world of faith. In these times such invitation is seldom taken. Though those of us who confess faith offer open invitation to this wonderful world, few accept. Could it be that we fail in our evangelical task because we have it backward, or if I might borrow from Franz Bibfeldt, because we do not have it backward enough? Could it be that we need to apply that unerring Bibfeldtian reversism even to evangelism itself?

If so, then we are mistaken to begin our evangel with the presumption that others must in the first necessity love our God. Instead, our evangel begins with the proclamation of our God’s abiding respect and love for every person. Thus, in a true reversal of evangelical mission, I do not demand that Franz Bibfeldt embrace Anglicanism, but rather affirm Anglicanism’s affectionate embrace of Franz Bibfeldt. While I cannot know if Franz loves my God, I can and do affirm that my God loves Franz, and me, and you, and all who struggle to get it right.

I may not have succeeded in convincing you of my thesis that there is a faith for Franz, that faith being my own tradition of Anglicanism and the Episcopal Church in particular. I have had my chance and taken my chances. I thank you for allowing me this special opportunity. Having thus used my time and yours, I conclude with the wisdom of

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W. C. Fields who — perhaps in an unattributed paraphrase of Bibfeldt himself — said, “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again, then quit. No use being a damn fool about it.”

Sam Portaro
April 1, 1992
The University of Chicago

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11 Plimpton, p. 57.