

The Bill Gothard Story

In a classic scene from the movie, "Rutch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid", Robert Redford looks at the band of deputies doggedly in pursuit, turns to Paul Newman and says, "Who are those guys?"

A similar scene is occurring in evangelical Christendom. A growing movement in the church is galloping across the Body of Christ, and people are asking, "Who are those guys?" The answer isn't completely clear because "those guys", Bill Gothard and the Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts gang, are somewhat reluctant to be known by those who have not personally been involved with the Institute.

Members of the media struggle for information and "even his birth is mysterious", says the director of a syndicated news service when we asked him about Gothard. But after some research a story unfolds.

The story begins to take shape in 1959. After ten years in youth work, Bill is hit hard with the questions: why do so many teenagers lose their faith during the college years? How can lasting results be achieved in youth work?

In the next five years, certain insights emerge as he spends time in teenagers' homes and as he invests hours in Bible study and prayer. Results are significant with a wide range of youth. And in 1964, he begins to share these insights with fifteen youth workers who meet with him on Saturday for help. During the week, he summarizes the principles taught and works them into a syllabus. The syllabus grows.

The following summer, he's invited to teach a class at Wheaton College. Forty-five pastors, youth workers, educators, and students are in that class. The forty-five share with others and Bill begins his seminar program. In 1966 and 1967, about 1,000 people each attend the seminar. In 1968, he leads his first

out of town seminar in Seattle (at the insistence of a Seattle dentist.) Forty-two attend in Seattle and total attendance for 1968 increases to about 2,000. In 1969, it grows to about 4,000. By 1970, 12,000 show up, and in 1971 the seminar program explodes. 54,000 carry their red manuals through the door in 1971 and in 1972 over 128,000 attend (including 13,000 in the Seattle Coliseum).

During this growth process, Bill put together a Board of Directors under an organization called Campus Teams, Inc. The five man board sponsors the Institute. Bill takes the title, President and Seminar Instructor, and serves as the dominant driving force in the organization.

The Board develops their primary goal: sharing the Principles of a New Way of Life with the Nation and the World. They develop a strategy: Work through the church with an emphasis on the family, especially the father. They develop a "Blueprint" for fathers and an advanced seminar to which only men can attend. (Topics included at Advanced: How to Visualize Achievement and Set Goals, How to Turn Problems into Projects, How to Build Scripture into Daily Living, How to Apply Principles of Discipline in your Family, How to Prepare your Son and Daughter for Engagement and Marriage, How to Build Communication in Marriage, How to Discover your Spiritual Gift [there are 106 "new" insights on how to do this].)

In addition, the brochure tells alumni how to tell others about the seminar. (ABCDE... 'Allow time for the principles to become part of your thinking - may take many months and several exposures to the seminar. Build a library of personal experiences so that you can translate the principles into your own words... don't give out the seminar notebook. Convey the attitude of being a learner rather than a teacher. Describe the seminar in terms of how helpful it was to you. Emphasize the universality of the principles.")

The board is also responsible for the distribution of income that pours into the organization. They set the seminar fees at \$45.00 per person (alumni come free - people must only pay once); \$35.00 per person for those in church groups (minimum of thirty first time attenders from a church); and \$55.00 for couples (the husband and wife must share a syllabus). The large attendance and substantial fee brings the bucks. The

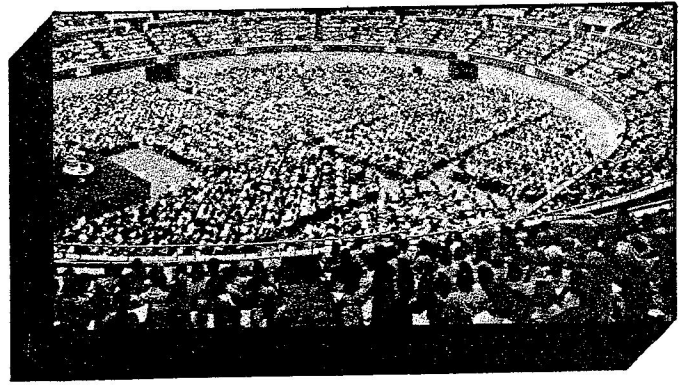
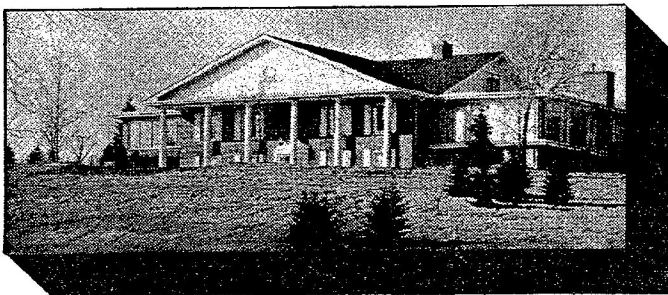
board divides the budget, the Door is told, into 20% for publicity (through alumni), 25-30% staff expenses (staff is used to assist alumni personally in applying principles, to develop materials and present special seminars); and 30-40% for future development (television equipment for closed circuit seminars, land purchase if "God allows" group to build school). 10% is left over, according to Door figures. Presumably, the board decides where that goes also.

The board also consents to the development of forty-nine acre site in the Chicago suburb of Oak Brook. A third building nears completion on the Headquarters and Training Center site. The brochure says, "These and other ministries will be greatly expanded through the training center which is presently being constructed."

Throughout this rapid success, Bill remains the same humble man. He moves from blackboard diagrams, to the use of overhead projector, and finally to a closed circuit television set-up for one of his Chicago seminars. He keeps his chalk talk for late in the week. He still draws a simple monthly salary paid completely by "faithful friends" - a salary currently at \$600.00 per month before taxes. He takes care of his necessities and gives the rest away to mission movements (Campus Crusade is said to be a big recipient of Bill's modest means.)

Slowly Bill builds his staff. Today the organization is a tightly knit, loyal group. The secretaries and staff men are uniformly polite (and somewhat evasive as to what they can discuss with members of the press.) The staff men represent Bill well, even projecting themselves much like their leader - in a polite, concerned, serious voice.

The Oak Brook office staff says Bill practices what he preaches. They see him as the most spiritual man they've ever met. He manifests the fruit of the spirit, they say.



The team projects openness, but seems tied into a fairly closed system. As one man said of the organization, "I'm sure we, like all organizations, have problems, but I don't know what they are." Their attitude toward a person who disagrees with the seminar is in theory, "We'll be happy to discuss it with him. We're learners too and we'll change it if we're doing something wrong." In reality, their attitude is: "Either you don't understand the material, or you're unwilling to practice it." They have found no exceptions in over fifteen years: if a person applies these principles they work. The organization doesn't seem to believe they may not work for everyone.

They also say they're accessible. But it takes three phone calls and one letter to penetrate the head of the California office and six calls and a letter to get to the Number Two man in Chicago. And a telegram and letter can't get us in contact with Bill Gothard himself, after one of his lieutenants suggests that we can.

The group is also very protective of their material. One of the men who reportedly helped write 20% of the Basic and 80% of the Advanced Seminar is cautioned by Bill against using the material - a violation of copyright laws. According to one of Bill's former associates, Gothard "really feels that this is the message and the vision that the Lord has given him to unify the Body of Christ across the country. I think he feels anybody else teaching it is causing confusion."

And the story goes on. 10,000 crowd into the Cow Palace in San Francisco one week, and another large crowd jams the Civic Center in Atlanta a week later. The syllabus grows, and Bill avoids the press.

-D.R. **1**