CHAPTER II

HERMENEUTICAL ASSUMPTIONS AND EVALUATION

One of the most overwhelming features of the seminar is the quantity of Scripture verses that accompany and support the insights Gothard offers. In the 157 pages of the manual, not including the lecture notes, more than 480 Scripture passages appear in reference, in partial quote, or complete quote. It appears from superficial observation that the Bible is the central input factor for the entire seminar. Every concept is presented as coming from the Bible. The insights offered are presented as biblical insights, the principles are presented as biblical principles. In order to understand the IBYC from a presuppositional point of view, it is important to study Gothard's hermeneutic.

Hermeneutics is the study of the methodological principles of interpretation. According to Ramm (1970):

Our responsibility to understand the Bible can only be accomplished if we have carefully, thoroughly and systematically formulated a system of Biblical interpretation that most efficiently
will yield the native meaning of the Bible. [p. 2]

A system of biblical interpretation has two basic needs. The first need is to know what God said, i.e. the meaning, and the second is to span the linguistic, cultural, geographical and historical gaps which separate our minds from those of the biblical writers (Ramm, 1970).

Analysis of the seminar material reveals that Gothard has developed a comprehensive hermeneutical system that fulfills the two basic requirements. The focus of this chapter will be the identification and explanation of these hermeneutical assumptions along with an evaluation regarding the adequacy of the system.

ASSUMPTIONS

One very strong appeal made to the seminar student is that a unique system of interpretation is being presented which is changing lives by the thousands. Gothard is presenting "life from a new point of view," a view that has been given to him from the Bible. Many people are impressed by what they consider to be Goth-
ard's unique, fresh, and practical insights into interpreting and applying biblical truth. This uniqueness can be seen as a special understanding of the biblical genre.

Genre or the generic conception as used in this thesis corresponds to the meaning offered by Hirsch (1967). Genre is the complex system of shared experiences, usage traits, and meaning expectations the speaker uses. It is the understanding of the whole, the idea of the meaning. Genre can be further defined here as the author's intended meaning for his readers.

Assumptions regarding generic conception are critical factors in the interpretation of the Bible. The genre of the Bible, however, is not easily determined. Throughout history widely divergent interpretations have been expressed by earnest biblical scholars approaching the same text. Hirsch (1967) identifies the crucial role in interpretation of understanding genre. "...disagreement about interpretation is usually a disagreement about genre [p. 98]." He goes on to indicate its importance for valid understanding: "Valid interpretation is always governed by valid in-
"reference about genre [p. 113]." Interpretation and especially implication are based primarily on the interpreter's understanding of the whole, the idea, the intent, i.e. the genre, of the author. Change in a person's generic conception will also change the interpretation, the application, and the implication.

To ascertain the meaning of the Bible, Gothard makes various assumptions regarding the genre of the entire Bible. A basic assumption in his understanding assumes the Bible is a book of divinely given, divinely inspired, timeless, inviolate, and absolute principles. Throughout the seminar he continually refers to the importance of these principles he has found in Scripture. An introductory brochure says:

This seminar is the result of 15 years of youth work. It is based on the fact that there are underlying principles of life set forth in Scriptures and that there is a clear relationship between violations of these principles and the conflicts that both youth and adults are facing today.

The centrality and importance of these principles is also suggested in the subtitle of the manual: "Research in the Principles of Life."

When Gothard refers to principles, he is actually making statements that come from two areas of
observation. The first area of observation are the cause and effect relationships that exist either in his own experience or those that exist in the Bible. Issues such as the personality differences between siblings due to birth order, the effects of an angry employee on an employer, or the effects of the changed dynamics in a home due to unresolved issues between parent and child, are examples of observable cause and effect relationships referred to as principles. The second area of observation is that the direct commands or teaching of the Bible are also called principles.

Said another way, principles arise either from observations made in historical, descriptive passages in the Bible and life's situations, or observations made from ethical statements in Scripture. When Goethard refers to these, however, he does not make a distinction between the descriptive principles and the ethically binding ones. Both are normative because cause and effect relationships -- seen through the causal hands of God (Chapter I) -- are viewed as God's tools. God's ways of working according to the seminar have the same emphasis as the direct commands
of Scripture.

The conception of principles is foundational to Gothard’s hermeneutical system. This hermeneutical system is basically a search for biblical support (via example) for the cause and effect relationships which he has observed. Searches are then made for additional life principles that complement those that have previously been identified. Identification of the cause and effect principles enables Gothard to locate the source of a conflict and offer a solution. Knowing the cause of a conflict enables the student to change behavior so that a conflict can be avoided. The IBYC is dedicated to conflict avoidance so it is easy to see why principles are so crucial to the whole system.

The importance for and the extent to which Gothard identifies cause and effect relationships was demonstrated in a personal interview March 28, 1974. At that time Gothard specifically made a causal connection between the mild winter America had been experiencing and the military aid America had given to the nation of Israel. The verse he cited to support his view was Genesis 12:3, “And I will bless those who
"bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse."

The importance of these principles is found in the lecture: "Jesus' success was because He discovered the principles of life." The prophetic voice of Jesus is interpreted by understanding the principles: "Underlying every basic teaching of Christ there is a significant principle essential for successful living."

Gothard's generic conception of the Bible is more than the principles; Gothard weaves his theology in with these principles. The generic conception is a unique combination of deterministic theology (Chapter I) which emphasizes cause and effect relationships, and a hermeneutic that observes the principles of divine causality.

This leads many critics to question the exegesis and to charge Gothard with flagrant proof texting (Bockleman, 1974; Wagner & Dyrness, 1973; Coots, 1973; Marty, 1974). Gothard is aware of the charges
lveled against him and explains his rationale. Citing Paul and Jesus, he uses I Corinthians 9:9 for an example. Paul elucidates from "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing" (Deuteronomy 24:4) to support the position that one deserves to make a living from the preaching of the Gospel. The specific Old Testament teaching -- food for the oxen -- was dropped in favor of Paul's application of the larger principle that a man deserves pay for the work he does. Gothard maintains that sometimes the New Testament writers quoted the Old Testament out of context. This was done because they understood the principles involved. Gothard believes that the "proof texting" done in the seminar follows the same style as the New Testament writers and therefore is a valid method. He believes that the exegetical style of the New Testament writers is being reproduced and claims the same authority for himself. The key to proper use of proof texts is a full understanding of the principles that underlie the text.

The previously cited example of Gothard's style (Chapter I, this work) is representative of the relationship between theology, principles, and exegesis. Following is exactly as it appears in the manual:
'From the very beginning God decided that those who come to him ... should become like His Son.' Romans 8:29 (Living Letters) This process involves the development of basic inward qualities. For this objective 'All things work together for good.' Rom. 8:28 [Manual, Rights, Transforming Irritations, p. 7].

The text becomes a support verse for the theology that states that God is primarily at work producing inward qualities. In so doing the verse order is reversed, the original context is deleted, emphasis is placed on the process of character development (which does not come from the text), and meaning is brought from the outside to give the impression that the meaning comes from the Bible.

Another example of Gothard's use of Scripture to illustrate a principle is reported by Coote (1973):

In another lecture Gothard offers a particularly novel interpretation of Job's life situation, based in implications he sees in chapters 1, 2, 29, 30 and 31 of Job. Against the clear Biblical statement that Job was a righteous man and that he suffered because of no sin of his own, Gothard claims: 1) Job was overcommitted to Christian work and good deeds; 2) this led to his neglecting the family; 3) therefore his sons became embittered against God and cursed Him at their parties; 4) this was the reason Job wasn't invited to join them (he interceded for them at home instead); 5) Job had a wrong attitude toward the man-in-the-street. Instead of desiring to have a spiritual ministry in the lives of other
men, he evaluated them only in terms of their usefulness to his 'Organization,' working with his herds (Job 30:1). [p. 38]

In this same article, Coote concludes by saying "it's not a bad idea, but it doesn't come from Job."

Illustrations of this type are numerous throughout the seminar. The pattern is that principles are discovered either through observations of life or study of Scripture, then the Bible is searched for additional places where that principle is illustrated. The hermeneutical system has a two-directional approach. There is the search both for new principles, and for Biblical insight that supports his established principles. There is a constant interchange between cultural situations and biblical principles, each giving support and clarity to the other.

Thus, the first need of hermeneutics for Gothard is solved because he sees the Bible as a book of principles. God's character as a loving and gracious Lord.

The second need of a hermeneutical system is to span the cultural, linguistic, geographical and historical gaps that separate our minds from those of the biblical writers. Spanning this gap is not a difficult
matter for Gothard. The Bible is God's book, given to us to show us how to live. It is the inerrant, inspired, dependable Word of God. To acquire insight into a problem of living, one must humble himself through memorization and meditation of Scripture. Then God will give the insight that is necessary to solve the problem. According to an associate of Gothard's, whom the author interviewed, God, through this process, seemingly bypasses the intellect. The emphasis in this system is away from studying cultural, anthropological, and historical contingencies, or linguistic and literary styles. Gothard maintains in his lectures that the Holy Spirit is the author of the Bible, so the final interpretation belongs to Him. The Bible therefore is a living book, that is, a book through which the Holy Spirit speaks to our present need. In fact, much of the seminar material came during Gothard's prayer, fasting, and meditation.

Gothard's stand on inspiration is never systematically presented. He does indicate, however, that in a major way the Bible was written by the Holy Spirit. On one hand the Bible contains the instruction of human
authors, reports of historical events, and the prophetic visions from the Lord. On the other hand, Gothard emphasizes the divine authorship, especially the principles the Spirit weaves into the text. The divine author has woven into, above, and around the human perspective timeless, inviolate principles.

Every principle given in seed form in the Old Testament is found again expanded in the specific teachings of the New Testament. The interpreter then goes to the Old Testament to find historical examples of the particular principle in operation. The Old Testament contains examples regarding the implementation of the principles. In effect Gothard says that the New Testament writers understood the principles of the Old Testament and under direction of the Holy Spirit expanded the implications into direct teaching. With that understanding in the mind of the interpreter, the timeless principles become the construct through which biblical understanding take place.

Gothard points out that there is only one interpretation but many applications. His hermeneutical system enlarges this to include that there are many
Implications as well. Often in the seminar a principle is validated, verified, and supported by the implications, not the interpretation, of the text. The previously quoted example of Gothard's interpretation of Job shows how the implications seen in the text become the teaching of the text and are used to verify the principle. Thus it is common to have the teaching or interpretation of the passage recede and the implications become the most significant. According to this system, valid discovery of a principle then makes it permissible to emphasize the implication as much or more than the actual meaning. In a very real sense the principles determine whether the meaning of the text or its implications will be presented in the seminar.

"The Bible was written for our instruction [lecture]." The tendency for Gothard in this system is to take every example in the Bible and extract a principle that can be applied for our benefit. In many cases the examples become a normative binding principle for any situation that approximates one's personal experience. Gothard's understanding of Paul's thorn in the flesh (II Cor. 12:7-10), for example, has become
a normative binding response for all Christians beset with any physical handicap. Gothard's understanding is that God brought the irritation to Paul and that our response is to be confident that irritations have a permanent benefit in our development and ministry. This instance in Paul's life is used to demand the same response today. From this is given the exhortation to: 1) see God's hand in every irritation, and 2) respond to every irritation as Paul did.

One aspect of the hermeneutical system worthy of note is the heavy reliance on paraphrased editions of the Bible. The Phillips paraphrase and the Living Bible are used most frequently. Some crucial principles are established on the basis of the "feeling" expressed in the paraphrase.

The right thing for you to do is to obey your parents as those whom the Lord has set over you (Ephesians 6:1, Phillips). Honor (revere and respect as God's picked representatives over you) your father and mother; ... (Ephesians 6:2,3) [Manual, Family, Chain of Command, p. 2].

This example shows how the purpose of these verses is to establish the principle that God's chain of command is directly controlled. Various paraphrases are used if the sense of the verses in those paraphrases cor-
responds with the principle in focus.

EVALUATION

The reviews of the IBYC in periodic literature of the last two years have been characterized by severe criticism of Gothard's use of Scripture. Bockelman (1974) says: "As I sat through the seminar, I came to the conclusion that Gothard has a false doctrine of Scripture [p. 879]."

Gothard also seems to go beyond the credal maxim that the Scriptures are the rule of faith and practice when he uses the Bible as though it were equally a textbook of psychology, sociology, philosophy, and even nutrition. [Wagner & Dyrness, 1973, p. 34].

The most disconcerting element in this writer's opinion is the recurring impression that Gothard manipulates his biblical texts and oversimplifies the ambiguity of human experience. [Coote, 1973, p. 38].

He uses the Bible. From what I have seen, however, he does "use" it, eliminating its ambiguities and paradoxes and complexities and lining up one side of what it says - and always the most authoritarian side - in support of psycho-social positions he has come to a priori. One could find an opposite text in support of almost every critical point he makes [Marty, 1974, p. 4].

Disregard for Interpretative Context

One very obvious consideration in Gothard's hermeneutical system is that the interpretations are gov-
earned more by his personal experiences than he cares to admit. Hermeneutical scholars point out the danger of failing to appreciate the degree to which the outcome of the interpretation is due to prior convictions. Grant (1972) indicates that it is impossible to interpret without including personal ideas. It is Gothard's generic conception of the Bible that determines interpretation. "An interpreter's preliminary generic conception of a text is constitutive of everything that he subsequently understands ... [Hirsch, 1967, p. 74]."

Failure to consider the extent of Gothard's own experience leads him astray at several points.

If Hirsch is correct, and if Gothard fails to consider his own assumptions as factors in the final interpretation, then we would expect to find many cases of misinterpreted data. Such, in fact, is the case.

Ephesians 2:10 "we are his workmanship ..." reinforces the principle of God's design of our physical appearance. The factor that determines this interpretation can be none other than his own assumptions because nowhere in the context of Ephesians 2 is there any indication of physical appearance. Throughout the seminar
unique interpretations such as this are offered based not on the textual teaching, but upon Gothard's vigorous attempt to isolate cause and effect principles. Gothard's perspective as he views the Bible is to surface these principles, but in so doing, the teaching content is reduced to his teaching regarding the principles.

This is clearly evident in the interpretation of the book of Job (quoted by Coote, cited earlier in this chapter). Here, concern for balance in ministry and work responsibilities cause Gothard to make Job say what is needed at the moment rather than extracting the actual meaning from the text. An interpretative context is one's own system of values, traditions, and assumptions, assimilated, from the learning environment, which therefore form the basis for determining meaning. Gothard's hidden interpretative context, demanding cause and effect principles from the Bible, causes him only to see what his interpretative context demands that he see.

This phenomenon has been observed repeatedly throughout the history of biblical interpretation. This
process has not been an intentional attempt to alter
the native meaning of the Bible. It is, however, a
hermeneutical trap that must be avoided. Speaking of
this, Smart identifies the danger:

He the interpreter can be totally unaware of it
so that he identifies what the Bible means to him
in his particular historical and theological con-
text with what the Bible means absolutely. When
this happens, he has robbed the Bible of its free-
dom to say anything that will be out of harmony
with the milieu of his interpretation. The inter-
pretative context with the hermeneutic intrinsic to
it has seized that authority and has set the bound-
daries to what the Scriptures are permitted to
say ... As a result, the message of Scripture is
dangerously silenced [Smart, 1970, p. 59].

Gothard's interpretative context is part of the
bigger picture offered in the seminar. This inter-
pertative context, assumed to be true by the seminar lea-
dership, is neither spelled out nor defended, yet it
appears in teaching and diagram, and emphasis.

We have observed that the interpretative context
once established, recedes into the unconscious
so that we cease to take account of it as a fac-
tor in our knowing. Insofar as it is taken over
ready-made, or better, absorbed from the environ-
ment and tradition in which life has placed us,
we may be unaware that it is a relative histori-
cal product and consider it simply the normal
way of healthy human seeing and hearing. We be-
come dogmatic that what we see and hear is what
everyone should be seeing and hearing. This has
happened with a disconcerting regularity to in-
terpreters of Scripture [Smart, 1970, p. 56].
The interpretative context of the IBYC is a product of mainline Reformed theology. The interpretative context assumes the Bible's generic conception is a source book for problem solving. "Gothard insists that for every problem in life there is a particular Scripture passage that offers the solution [Eckelman, 1974, p. 879]." It is an interpretative context that assumes extensive divine causality. It is a product of American fundamentalism with its emphasis on attitude and faith defined in terms of right belief. For Gothard, this interpretative context has receded and he no longer gives it sufficient evaluation and exegetical support. Unfortunately, the interpretative context is not enough of a factor in Gothard's hermeneutic.

Disregard of Cultural Anthropology

The lessened regard for interpretative context leads to another criticism of the hermeneutical system. Completely missing from the seminar is any appreciation for the cultural conditions to which the Bible was written. Yet, Ramm (1970) indicates:

The most acute theological problem today is to assess to what extent or degree culture determines
the character of Scripture, binding Scripture to its own particular period [p. 157].

An example of Gothard's disregard for the cultural variants is seen when Wagner & Dyrness quote Gothard:

"God came to the Jews and gave them the ideal culture. To the degree that a culture copies this revelation it will be blessed and prosperous." Thus the ancient Jewish family structure is recommended as a model for contemporary society.

What is lacking here is a clear distinction between the timeless spiritual and moral values of the Scriptures and the various ways different cultures might express those values [p. 34].

**disregard for Context**

The lecture and the manual contain many examples of a general disregard for the context of the verses offered in support of the principles. It is this practice that has led many to believe that Gothard manipulates the biblical text to accommodate his system (Coote, 1973; Bockelman, 1974; Wagner & Dyrness, 1973; Marty, 1974). It is a common occurrence to see a verse pulled from the cultural and biblical context and "used" as an example to validate the teaching. Coote demonstrates this:

On the first evening (the principle of design) we are told that some of Christ's disciples were
short men and therefore felt inferior. Their feeling of inferiority shows that they hadn't accepted God's design for their lives. To compensate, they placed an overemphasis on clothing ('Why are you anxious about clothing?' Jesus asked).

All of this Gothard derives from Matt. 6:25ff, interpreted in light of extensive experience with young people who give excessive attention to clothing in the effort to escape feelings of inferiority.

In the process Gothard bypasses the uncertainty over the best way of rendering verse 25. It is 'which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life?' (RSV) or 'to his stature?' (margin) Even if one accepts 'stature,' there is no basis in the context to establish that the disciples felt inferior or that Christ was making an oblique attack on those feelings [Coote, 1973, p. 38].

Another example of Gothard's disregard for context is found in the use of Romans 9:20. The context of chapters 9-11 deals directly with God's corporate election as it relates to the salvation of mankind. Romans 9-11 is not a deterministic teaching on the destiny of individual man (Shank, 1970). Gothard, however, uses 9:20, "On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder 'Why did you make me like this' will it?" to demand that the seminar student accept without question the wisdom in God's design of phy-
Biblical appearance. The context of Romans 9:20 says nothing about physical deformity.

Through this disregard for the context Bockelman (1974) voices a very strong criticism as to how the Bible is used:

Gothard insists that for every problem in life there is a particular Scripture passage that offers the solution. For him the Bible is essentially an answer book - a verse here to answer this problem, a verse there to answer that. So the more Scripture passages you learn, the more problems you can answer. A favorite approach of Gothard's is to state a problem, then ask, "You know what the answer is?" and then quote a Bible passage to dispose of the matter. Such use of Scripture, it seems to me, reduces it to a kind of book of magic.... The Bible doesn't deal in magic...

[p. 879].

In this hermeneutical system, Gothard's insistence on principilizing contributes to his failure to understand the relative difference between statements in the Bible. Included in the Bible are theological statements that say "God is ..."; ethical statements that say "Do this ..."; and practical statements derived from historical precedent which say "This happened ..." By isolating a principle from an historical passage, Gothard makes the descriptive statement ethically normative and binding (Ps. 139_13-16;
Gothard's use of the epistles tends to move toward the idea that Paul, for example, wrote directly to us, forgetting that the epistles were letters written to a specific church, for specific reasons in a specific historical time period. The occasional nature of the documents does not mean that they do not apply to the 20th century, but that the true message of any particular book can only be understood if the cultural situation and specific problems addressed are part of the interpreter's consideration. Recognition of context is a very weak part of the IBYC interpretative system because the timelessness of the principles and the interpretation of the Holy Spirit diminish the significance of the context.

Elimination of Biblical Perspectives

The outcome of the IBYC hermeneutical system selectively emphasizes or neglects the various perspectives found in the Bible. Gothard's perspective is incomplete because his own interpretive context blinds him to any perspectives that do not line up with his a priori theological assumptions. Gothard
places a system of belief over his study and medita-
tion so that only truth compatible with his presup-
positions comes into focus. With the proof texts and
examples from life to validate his presuppositions,
the faith in his assumptions becomes stronger and
stronger.

Each interpreter has tended to identify what he
has found in Scripture directly with the content
of Scripture itself and to attribute to the inter-
pretation the same authority that he assigns to
the Scriptures. The interpretation then becomes
a veil drawn over the surface of the text pre-
venting the text from saying anything that would
contradict the interpretation [Smart, 1970, p. 56].

By exercising this selective hermeneutic, the

IBYC loses the completeness of Scripture's balance.

This loss of balance is devastating to the Bible's mes-
sage, as is pointed out in the following critic's eval-
uation:

One overall Seminar theme, however, emerges with
nagging implications. This is the total quiescent
acceptance of what is, a nirvana of spirit that
acquiesces unquestioningly to God's will. There
is no suggestion of a Davidic or Abrahamic arguing
with God. Who was it that insistently argued for
the life of Sodom? Which psalmist wondered if God
was going to be embarrassed by what people might
think? Didn't Jesus question whether the cross
was the only way? Should we not question deeply
the tragedy and inequity in our world and social
system? Should we for generations have raised
no question about our attitude toward those of
another race? Hasn't it been those who have been
angered by disease or retardation or social in-
justice or pollution and the like that have brought
incorrectives? We must find a way to live with the
paradox of seeing what is our lot as God's will,
while at the same time struggling to subdue the
forces of evil that plague our world [Keating,
1973, p. 33].

As Crosby (1973) points out, the perspectives
in the seminar are not incorrect, but terribly incom-
plete. He points out that the prophetic thrust of the
gospel is all but eliminated, leaving "the Christian a
passive observer to the events of history and the des-
tiny of his family [p. 22]."

Carter (1974) points out that perspectives in
the seminar de-emphasize interpersonal relationships,
losing fellowship (koinonia), and Brotherly love
(phileo). Further, since the Bible is used as a book
of rules, the spontaneity, joy, freedom and liberty
which exist in Christ are absent. God is presented as
an impersonal deity instead of a loving father. Goth-

A hermeneutical system must account for all
the material in the Bible. Gothard's system is inade-
CONCLUSION

The specific citations of Gothard's inadequate hermeneutical system are not simply isolated examples of interpretative error. If it were a case of exegetical error, then a mere correction of the specific violations would set our minds at ease. Rather, the examples in this chapter point to a faulty system of interpretation. The criticisms come from recurrent disregard for context, disregard for culture, magical manipulation and quotation of the Bible, severely limiting the various perspectives of Scripture, and textual twisting to fit presumed principles.

The system is a faulty system because it undercuts the authenticity of Scripture. Scripture is "used" to fit into the IBYC system, but in so doing it has become subserviant to the principles of the seminar. The Bible no longer has the power to correct the system, but is used as an authoritarian tool to appeal for application of the principles.
The following quote is used by the writer because it captures the respect owed Gothard, but also offers the necessary understanding and balance to an inadequate interpretive system that is affecting thousands.

If we regard all this as conscious hypocrisy, we do not touch the edge of the problem. These are in many instances deeply earnest people who read their Bibles in a context which, to our mind, produces a grossly distorted gospel. There is no mystery about the forces that have shaped their interpretative context for them. They are the products of an aggressive capitalist economy with its individualistic philosophy of life, or of a society that has permitted the lines of racial discrimination to harden into walls. Their way of reading Scripture has been subtly adapted to prevent any collision between what they hear in Scripture and the order of society that they prefer. They simply do not hear the consistent witness of the prophets to God’s interest in the price the poor have to pay for grain and in the quality of justice in the law courts, in the foreign policy of the government, and in all man’s acts of inhumanity toward his fellow man. They do not notice that Jesus stood directly in the tradition of the prophets and brought it to fulfillment in his own mission. They have what they call a spiritual Bible, which is concerned only with spiritual things such as God, the soul, and eternal life. Their interpretative context has silenced the unique and essential voice of Scripture in which the whole of God is concerned with the whole of man in the whole of life [Smart, 1970, pp. 58f].