AN EVALUATION OF THE THEOLOGICAL, HERMENEUTICAL
AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS OF
THE INSTITUTE IN BASIC
YOUTH CONFLICTS

by

David R. Bryen, B.S.
Southern Oregon College, 1970

A THESIS
Submitted to the Faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
with a Major in
Pastoral Psychology and Counseling
at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

Deerfield, Illinois
June, 1975
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ABSTRACT

This thesis considers the theological, hermeneutical, and psychological assumptions of the Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts Seminar taught by Bill Gothard. Chapter one describes and evaluates the theological assumptions upon which the seminar is based, especially the theology of God's decrees and the theology of God's providence. Chapter two surfaces and evaluates the assumptions of Bill Gothard's hermeneutic. Chapter three is a discussion of the psychological assumptions and the resulting implications of such assumptions.

The methodology employed in this discussion includes attendance at the Chicago Fall Seminar, 1973; Chicago Spring Seminar, 1974; and personal interview with Bill Gothard, March 28, 1974. This study concluded that the assumptions made by Bill Gothard are inadequate, leading to a biblically incomplete view of God; to an improper use of the Bible; to a somewhat unbalanced understanding of human emotions.
DEDICATION

To Gloria, my best friend, my most able critic, and my strongest support.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION ................................................. 1

Chapter

I. THEOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS AND EVALUATION .......................... 7
   Assumptions
   Criticism and Evaluation
   Conclusion

II. HERMENEUTICAL ASSUMPTIONS AND EVALUATIONS ................. 49
   Assumptions
   Evaluation
   Conclusion

III. PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS AND EVALUATION .................... 76
   Assumptions
   Evaluation
   Conclusion

IV. GENERAL SUMMARY ........................................... 120

REFERENCES ...................................................... 125
INTRODUCTION

The Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts is an intensive 32 hour seminar lasting over a period of one week, three hours Monday through Thursday, and all day Friday and Saturday. Bill Gothard, the seminar leader, lectures, using only an overhead projector, breaking down every principle or idea into numbered steps or parts, many given with the aid of charts, diagrams, drawings and outlines. Along with the lectures the student is given a loose leaf notebook, approximately one hundred eighty (180) pages in length, in which is kept printed material that is given out as the seminar progresses.

The seminars are held in major metropolitan centers in America, more than twenty in 1973, lecturing to more than 250,000 students. The lectures are strikingly similar at each location, the only difference being choice of illustration, minor changes due to growth, expansion or revision of previous material. The teaching, however, remains the same, and the format follows a fairly specific pattern.
The seminar's loose leaf manual is divided into ten categories. These categories and their subdivisions are: 1. Self-Image (acceptance of self); 2. Family (chain of command); 3. Conscience (gaining a clear conscience); 4. Rights (removing bitterness; yielding personal rights; transforming irritations; forgiveness); 5. Freedom (moral freedom); 6. Success (successful living); 7. Purpose (sensitivity to God); 8. Friends (principles of friendship); 9. Dating; and 10. Commitment (salvation).

Bill Gothard has been ordained by an independent Bible Church in LaGrange, Illinois, after receiving bachelor's and master's degrees from Wheaton College. He was very successful in youth work in Chicago area churches. In his youth work, certain insights and concepts emerged in his thinking and in 1964 he began to present these insights regularly to other youth workers in the area. The following summer he taught his first basic youth conflicts seminar at Wheaton College to 45 people. Since that time his organization has grown to a staff of 75 headquartered on a two hundred acre site owned in Oak Brook, Illinois.

Gothard's seminar ministry has now expanded
to the extent of the teaching by use of closed circuit TV so that many cities can have simultaneous viewing. The organization is highly committed to Christian education and has begun moving in that direction. The goals are to expose as many as possible to the teaching and insights offered in the seminar. Projections by the institute staff indicate that by 1981, the seminar will have been presented to the equivalent of the population of the United States, provided the growth rate continues.

To date, every publication reporting on the seminar has only offered descriptive discussion of the seminar. They have been critical of issues that raise lingering doubts in the minds of theologians and psychologists but also have given much credit to Gothard for his insight and ability to sense the needs of the American public.

This thesis is an analysis of the system of the assumptions that form the central components of the Institute. The focus is on the framework on which the particular teachings of the seminar rest. One emphasis of the seminar is to begin to see life from a
new perspective. Inherent in the seminar is the idea that the adoption of this new perspective is the crucial ingredient that will enable the student to live successfully. This thesis then is designed to facilitate the surfacing and evaluation of that new perspective.

There are four reasons warranting the study of the assumptions of the Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts. First, although the supporters of the seminar indicate that the content is strictly scriptural interpretation and application, in reality it is much more than that, and much less. Subsequent chapters will explore this in detail, but here it will suffice to say that scriptural exegesis is not always the primary source of the life principles. The study of Gothard's interpretation of human experience reveals an intricate system of relationships between the way God reveals Himself to man and the way man is to respond to life's situations. Analysis of this system indicates that his pre-suppositions are the most influential factors, prescribing both the interpretation of Scripture and of human experience.
Secondly, the seminar stresses the importance of adopting a specific all comprehensive world view. The emphasis in the teaching of the seminar is on bringing the students under the conviction of the correctness of that specific world view. Applications in attitude and behavior are demanded in line with the logical extensions of that world view. The desired response grows directly from assumptions that are not sufficiently validated.

Thirdly, although his comprehensive world view, his insights and his principles have been intricately woven together and presented as a complete package, they should be separated. Care must be taken so that unfounded presuppositions regarding God’s action in the world do not invalidate the numerous insights and practical applications found in the seminar material. Equal care must also be taken to avoid the uncritical acceptance of the seminar’s principles simply because they are presented with conviction and sincerity or because the student either shares the world view or has not developed a view of life that is sufficient to stand up during the intensity of the seminar week.
Fourthly, the aggressive and authoritative stance taken in the seminar has created some awesome momentum that has far-reaching results. The rate of growth has caught many church leaders by surprise. As it is with many popular movements in the church, they grow so fast that the impact has been made before a proper balance can be given. This thesis attempts to give that balance.
CHAPTER I

THEOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS AND EVALUATION

ASSUMPTIONS

Analysis of the theological assumptions of the Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts (IBYC) reveals its dependence upon some basic tenets of Reformation theology. One such doctrine is the Reformed teaching on the decrees of God. In the Westminster Shorter Catechism, questions seven and eleven, it says:

What are the decrees of God? The decrees of God are his eternal purpose according to the counsel of his will, whereby for his own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.

What are God's works of providence? God's works of providence are his most holy, wise and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures and all their actions.

The dependence of the seminar on this doctrine is strongly evident in the three basic principles of the seminar: self image, family and rights.

In the area of self image, the doctrine is applied through the teaching:
We are each one God's design, no matter how puny, deformed, average, stunningly handsome or gross we may be or feel. Our creator, the very Lord of the universe made no mistakes. He has a specific plan in mind for the utilization of each one of us, and He is not finished with us yet [Keating, 1973, p. 32].

The application by Gothard of this doctrinal assumption surfaces in the discussion of a teenage girl's physical appearance.

It was a surprise to her to learn that God had described exactly how she was to look, even before she was born .... She saw that His 'prescription' of her appearance was logical if He has a specific achievement He wanted her to accomplish [Manual, Self Image, p. 7].

The seminar further indicates that "The circumstances and endowments of your life are ordered by God's pre-design, and meant for your spiritual good [Keating, 1973, p. 32]." Gothard emphasizes God's responsibility in what comes to pass when he says in his lecture that "God assumes more responsibility for our physical deformity than we thought." His statement in the lecture that "God has reasons for the way He made you ... become excited about the way He made you" reveals the centrality of God's decrees in understanding physical endowments and in changing destructive attitudes about oneself. This doctrine is presented by the analogy of
the person as a canvas on which God is painting a picture. The inward qualities are represented by the picture, the frame is the physical appearance of the person. The frame is to "emphasize and enhance the inward qualities which God wants to develop [Manual, Self Image, p. 7]."

The doctrine of the decrees of God is also foundational to the seminar teaching regarding the family. The central component in this teaching is the chain of command. The chain of command is descriptive of how God works through the parents to accomplish God's purpose in the child. This is presented in a diagram as a hammer, representing the father, striking a chisel, representing the mother, chipping the rough edges of a diamond, representing the child. (Figure 1)

The seminar teaching assumes "God's purpose ... is to use parents as His tools, guided by His hands, in chipping away the rough edges of each life so that the true reflections of Christ can be seen from every angle [Manual, Family, Chain of Command, p. 3]." God's purpose as seen throughout the seminar is for Christ-like character to be reproduced. Those God places over
Figure 1

[Manual, Family, Chain of Command, p. 3]
each life are the tools through which the character building takes place. The actions of the parent are part of God's providential care for absolutely every child.

In the seminar Gothard teaches that God's purposes are worked out through the chain of command even if the spiritual or emotional condition of the parents is in question. God's purposes are achieved even if the demands of the parents are unreasonable or unhealthy. Gothard implies that God places children into families with specific deficiencies in order to perfect those children's specific deficiencies.

God not only expects that those he places in authority will have personality deficiencies but He states that He is able to work through these deficiencies. 'Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee' Psalm 76:10 [Manual, Family, Chain of Command, p. 4].

Further, the manual states that "It is more important for the teen-ager to understand God working through his parents than that his parents understand him [Manual, Family, Chain of Command, p. 4]." These quotes demonstrate that the primary dynamic in the IBYC system is to convince the student of the importance of a specific theological perspective.
The four subpoints in the manual division
rights: removing bitterness, yielding rights, transforming irritations and forgiveness, are also tied
closely to the doctrine of God's decrees. The seminar
points out that most anger can be traced back to per-
sonal rights which have been violated. In the same
fashion as the diamond illustration (Figure 1), Goth-
ard uses another theological analogy. This time,
God's tool is the abrasive file, representing the
source of irritation, used for the development of
inner qualities. (Figure 2)

The unavoidable irritations which come from other
people or from our environment or from our own
selves are extremely significant. These irrita-
tions are God's way of increasing our sensitivity
to the needs of other people, or expanding our
world of opportunity or developing the inward
qualities which are so essential to successful
living. [Manual, Rights, Transforming irri-
tations, p. 2].

To transform these irritations it is taught
that one must "thank God for the irritation" and
"determine ultimate objectives" by asking "what quali-
ties does God want to develop in me?" [Manual, Rights,
Transforming irritations, p. 4] The following repro-
duction from the same section demonstrates how the
GOD

SOURCE OF IRRITATION

REFLECTION OF QUALITIES

DEVELOPMENT OF INNER PERSONALITY

FIGURE 2

[Manual, Rights, Transforming irritations, p. 2]
seminar integrates the irritations and the qualities God wants to develop.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Irritation</th>
<th>Quality to be Produced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From one hard to love</td>
<td>Genuine love based on mature insight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From circumstance of sorrow</td>
<td>Continuous joy even in the midst of pain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From conditions of confusion</td>
<td>Inward peace and steady confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From irritating inconveniences</td>
<td>Sympathetic flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From obvious needs of others</td>
<td>Wise generosity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From unwelcome responsibilities</td>
<td>Consistent trustworthiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From people who intrude upon personal rights</td>
<td>Surrender of personal rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From temptation of wrong desires</td>
<td>Self control</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[p. 7]

The above quotes demonstrate that in the three basic principles: self image, family and rights, the primary dynamic is for the student to learn and to apply the proper theological perspective. What appears explicitly in these three concepts reappears implicitly throughout the seminar. Although the primary assumptions are grounded in Reformed theology, the seminar
extends the doctrine into the applications of real life situations. It is fair to say that to a large degree, the IBYC provides extensive training in the application of Reformed theology regarding the decrees of God.

The application of this doctrine demands the establishment of other assumptions which make up the next series of assumptions. As Hodge states it, "Nothing can occur that was not foreseen and if foreseen, it must have been intended [Vol. 1, p. 542]" Gothard implies this and adds to it the idea that if it was intended for a purpose, then that specific purpose is knowable. The ultimate purpose for every Christian according to the seminar is to reflect the character of Christ (Figure 1 and Figure 2), or to develop essential qualities necessary for successful living. Every event experienced by a person can therefore be understood as God’s wise method of creating good, holy, Christ-like qualities.

The unique contribution Gothard makes to the doctrine of God’s decrees is the identification and description of how God works. The manual cover claims
that the seminar (is) "Giving the world A New approach to Life!" A brochure publicizing the seminar claims that the "seminar is a 32 hour exposure to seeing life from a new perspective." Seeing life from this new, bigger perspective enables one to know what God is doing and how He is accomplishing His objectives. Evidence of this is readily available in the entire seminar. Contained in the lecture are repeated phrases such as: "This is how God works," "This is God's way of producing Christ-like qualities," "Conflicts are the reproofs of God," "God has worked it out this way," "This is actually what God plans for me," "God talks to women first in the marriage," and "God always carries out His ultimate will through the husband, even if the decision is wrong." Examples of the seminar emphasis on how God works are evident in the manual also. Assumed in Self Image material is the development of inward qualities by God's prescription. Gothaard's stated emphasis is to "Learn to see how God uses His chain of command to develop mature attitudes" [Manual, Family, Chain of Command, p. 5]."

Along with presenting how God works, the seminar also teaches that one can know the reasons lying
behind God's perceived activity. God's activity in this sense is either His giving permission for evil to take place or His direct intervention to prevent it. In either type's experience, Gothard teaches, the reasons grow out of divine wisdom and for the good of each person. The strongest example of this teaching is an extreme one, but it reveals the seminar mindset in every other area. The following example is a classic seminar perspective. In the lecture Gothard states that "God will not let anything come into your life beyond your control unless He wants to vaccinate you." This point was made at the end of a discussion concerning a young lady who had been sexually assaulted when she was eight years old. Counseling her later in life because of a deep fear of men and an inability to respond to them, Gothard discovered the deep emotional scars of the assault and asked her if she had ever been tempted sexually. She said that she had, so he pointed out to her that "this was God's way of morally vaccinating her." His apparent implication is that God knew that she would face severe sexual temptation so He allowed the molestation to keep her from sexual sin.
Another example of the seminar perspective regarding knowing the reasons for God's activity is demonstrated in the discussion of children whose parents are removed from the home. After citing the examples of Joseph, Samuel and Esther as the Biblical "successes" who grew up without their parents, Gothard says "If God worked things out beyond your control that father and mother are taken away from the home, then you can be sure God has a special calling for you [lecture]."

The names of some outstanding Christian leaders who also grew up without parents are given to further validate the principle.

To further apply the doctrine of God's decrees, various agents are posited as His tools. In the seminar, offenses, temptations, governments, physical deformities, families, catastrophies, irritations, friends and enemies are interpreted as tools in God's hand to accomplish the purpose of developing Christ-like character. The seminar's stance is to encourage the student to view all events in this way. For example, one notable emphasis of the seminar in this regard is the way negative experiences fit into God's overall plan.
Truly the uniqueness can be found in Gothard's stress on seeing the good that can come out of every bad experience.

Although Gothard claims that he is not a theologian, it must be understood that without the above theology the seminar could not be presented in the same form. Knowing God's reasons, understanding God's tools, comprehending how God works, and assuming God's ultimate purposes are totally essential components of the seminar. The seminar is essentially theologically based. The entire week of the seminar takes the shape of staunch reformed theologian Augustus Strong's (1907) exhortation regarding:

the true method of preaching the doctrine: (a) We should most carefully avoid exaggerations or unnecessarily obnoxious statements. (b) We should emphasize the fact that the decrees are not grounded in arbitrary will but in infinite wisdom. (c) We should make it plain that whatever God does or will do, he must from eternity have purposed to do. (d) We should illustrate the doctrine so far as possible by instances of completeness and far sightedness in human plans of great enterprises. (e) We may then make extended application of the truth to the encouragement of the unbeliever [p. 369].

Whether or not Gothard is conscious of Strong's exhortation, the fact remains that the seminar follows
this outline very closely. While the majority of the seminar is devoted to extended application, the framework upon which it is built are points (a), (b), (c) and (d), quoted above.

One common debate among theologians concerns the relation of a holy sovereign Lord and the evil and sin that is so prevalent in the world. "Reformed theology stands practically alone in its emphasis on the doctrine of the decrees [Berkhof, 1941, p. 100]."

With the emphasis on the decrees is also the problem of finding the consistent middle-ground that does not deny the sovereign control of God and that also does not make God the author of sin. With Gothard's building much of his theological base on a doctrine that demands delicate definitions, it is not surprising that God's relation to sin and evil is ambiguous.

Apparently Gothard has been approached on the problem because in the fall seminar of 1973, and the spring seminar of 1974, attention was drawn to this issue. He reported that frequently he gets asked if God causes or if God allows. In every seminar, Gothard assumes that question to be on the student's mind. His
rebuttal is, that really is not the question that should be asked. Rather, attention should be drawn to qualities that are developed as a result of the experience. The question therefore technically remains unanswered. It is probable that Gothard's answer would be that God allows, not causes. The usage of the word "allow", however, must be defined within the context of the entire seminar system.

Gothard's use of "allow" is best understood when seen in context with a series of words used frequently enough to be labeled a formula. This formula is worded basically as follows: God allows (the specific event in question) for a purpose. There are various renditions of this formula, but the thought is always the same: God's purposes are fulfilled because He allows something. The things allowed by God, and thus everything that comes into the life of that individual, are meant to fulfill His specific purpose.

Speaking in this context the word "allow" can be used in two ways. The first usage is when authentic freedom is exercised, that is: God's "allowing" meaning nature or cause and effect moving towards its
necessary end. The second way to use "allow" is to remove the idea of freedom and assume that to allow presupposes the necessity that God gives actual permission before the event can occur. This second use carries with it the assumption that it is not possible for God to be "not involved" in any event in history even if He would choose not to be involved. Events occur only because God gives His permission. If an event does not occur it is because God prevented it.

The word "allow" as it is used in the seminar carries with it the connotation that God is always involved. It is always used connected with the perceived purpose of God. To a question such as "Can God not be involved?", Gothard's answer would be "no" because God always allows for a purpose. "No matter what happens, there is a purpose [lecture]."

The IBYC characteristically sees the good that can come from any situation; situations are seen as tools in God's hands. In so doing, however, the delicate balance regarding how much God is a causative agent is lost. The following quotes, representative of the manual and lecture, demonstrate the extent to which
Gothard is willing to maintain this formula and demonstrate the extent to which this formula does attribute to God the causative effects of life's catastrophes.

"Scripture teaches that we are intricately designed and that each of our physical characteristics was prescribed by God and developed according to His plan [Manual, supplementary pages].

God doesn't allow any reaction to me that He doesn't will [lecture].

These irresolvable irritations provide the basis for a significant process which God intends (sic) to take place within each one of our lives [Manual, Rights, Transforming irritations, p. 1].

When we yield our rights to God, we can expect that He will allow situations to develop in which these rights will be withheld from us [Manual, Rights, Yielding rights, p. 7].

God will not let anything come into your life beyond your control unless He wants to vaccinate you [lecture].

Nothing comes in that He has not ordained [lecture].

Humans are indestructible until our work is done ... death is in the hand of god ... People have a time to die [lecture].

Gothard's teaching regarding the causative nature of God's activity is abundantly clear when he says: "He brings to your life a problem that will only be solved as you develop these aptitudes i.e., yielding personal rights [lecture]." This mentality is
also clearly specified in his Manual, copyright 1966. The discussion centered around various problems some teenagers were having. The following is what appeared in that Manual:

Why did God allow the Conflict?

1. To learn to be thankful.
2. To learn obedience to the Chain of Command.
3. To learn God's will.
4. To learn self discipline.
5. To yield all rights to the Lord.
6. To teach humility.
7. To evaluate friends.
8. To reveal stubbornness.
9. To prepare us for future problems.
10. To suffer wrongfully.

[Manual, 1966, supplementary pages]

It is worthy of note that the seminar objective is not merely to present what the teenagers learned from the conflict, but to demonstrate that God is a causative agent in experiencing these problems. In the seminar Gothard is understandably reluctant to say that God is a causative agent in regards to pain and suffering. The repetitive use of the above formula, however, betrays an uncomfortable emphasis on treating the perplexity of pain and suffering as God's ultimate responsibility.
CRITICISM AND EVALUATION

The assumptions and applications of the seminar theology have some serious deficiencies. These deficiencies lie at the formative base of much that is taught. Criticism of the seminar theology will be made from within the Reformed tradition, from outside that tradition, from evaluations of scriptural proof texts, from logic, and from the nagging negative implications of the seminar.

Criticism from within the Reformed Tradition

Gothard’s authoritative stance regarding God’s use of every experience as a tool carries along with it extensions of doctrine that most theologians are unwilling to hold. Whereas the doctrinal statements support God’s decrees, the theologians emphatically deny that God has anything to do with the causation of the evil itself. Included in the evil are both moral and physical acts. Gothard, however, teaches a new perspective that repeatedly shows that God is working in everything, especially bad experiences, to produce a Christ-like character. Moreover, the seminar teaches that God predesigns parentage, environment, appearance, and aptitudes, regardless of the possible pain and
suffering that this might include. Gothard goes far beyond the idea that God uses pain and suffering for His good and says that God predesigns it.

This very uncomfortable association of pain and suffering to God's causative action is reflected by most recognized Reformed theologians. Discussing the permissive decrees Berkhof (1941) says that this does not imply that the futurition of these acts is not certain to God, but simply that He permits them to come to pass by the free agency of His rational creatures. God assumes no responsibility for these sinful acts whatsoever [p. 102].

As indicated in the previous section, the word "allow" (permit) takes on a causative connotation. "Moreover, it should be borne in mind that God has not decreed to effectuate by His own direct action whatsoever must come to pass." [Berkhof, 1941, p. 106]

Gothard contributes to his error in that he assumes everything allowed is for the character development of individuals. His simplistic assertion that pain and suffering is God's way to develop character is an error that Berkhof (1941), for example, is careful to avoid; "For good and holy reasons He renders these sinful acts certain, but He doesn't
"decease to work evil desires or choices efficiently in man [p. 108]." These good and holy reasons, the seminar points out, make the disgusting acts not so repugnant. But care must be taken so that God is not made responsible for every incident of pain and suffering. This Gothard fails to do.

If, as Gothard states in the beginning of his seminar, these principles are absolute, inviolate and non-optional, then one can't help but wonder if God is not being brought very close to being the author of pain and suffering. The chain of command principle appears to make God the efficient cause because God places the authority over the individual, knowing completely what wrongs, even atrocities, will be committed against the person. The iron-clad chain of command picture is a type of mechanistic determinism that leaves no room for exceptions, mistakes, or neuroses.

Another way that error has crept into the teaching of the seminar is the apparent lack of understanding of divine providence. Once again the Reformed theologians who share Gothard's perspective
give the criticism. In the seminar all cause and effect relationships are described in terms of God's principles, or God's way of working, or God's method of developing character, etc. Buswell (1962) states that "Within the providence of God there are operations of logical implications and there are operations of mechanical necessity by physical causality [Vol. I, p. 171]." In other words, providence does not exclude cause and effect but includes it. "...Second causes are real, and are not to be regarded simply as the operative power of God [Berkhof, 1941, p. 172]."

Gothard interprets the cause and effect relationships as God's principles, and gives these principles of second cause, or cause and effect the same emphasis as the direct teachings of the Bible. One example of this is the teaching regarding great men of faith and great men of the business world that have come from broken homes. According to the seminar, this is a common way God makes leaders. Instead of interpreting the facts as learning to cope with aggression that catapulted them into responsible positions, the process somehow gets twisted so that it becomes a prin-
 principle of life that is empowered by God. The seminar contains many such illustrations, but each series of facts have other viable explanations. The seminar only offers the interpretation of a God-empowered principle. In so doing, the seminar tends to depersonalize God.

In this view of God, providence is simply identical with the course of nature, and this is nothing but the self-revelation of God, a self-revelation that leaves no room for the independent operations of second causes, in any sense of the word. From this point of view the supernatural is impossible, or rather the natural and the supernatural are identical ... [Berkhof, 1941, p. 168].

Many of the principles are cause and effect relationships, and Gothard, sees, upon conversion, the proper exercise of these principles as the primary way of developing a relationship to God. Thus the tendency is to relate to God primarily by obedience to principles rather than through a relationship to a loving Father.

The Reformed theologians see the providence of God as the sustaining and ruling power that He exercises. Gothard, however, sees that providential care expressed in manipulative tools brought to the individual so that character can be developed.

The final area of criticism from a Reformed
perspective is the simplistic way that Gothard theologically explains the problem of pain and suffering. The seminar's attitude regarding God's relation to pain and suffering is to adopt the stance of Joseph and apply it to our own situations: "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good [Gen. 50:20]."

Thus, in situations where pain and suffering come in, God allows them because they are meant for good. Pain and suffering frequently are seen as God's tool in the character building process. The young girl sexually assaulted for her moral vaccination is only one of many examples.

The seminar claims to give a new perspective. Actually the new perspective is primarily the giving of authoritative suggestions regarding how God works. The system is built on reformation theology, but goes beyond it in explaining God's reasons, His methods, and His perspectives on pain and suffering. One criticism offered is that of Charles Hodge: "We know that He acts, but we do not know how He acts or the relation which his activity bears to time, or things outside Himself [Vol. 1, p. 337]." To build a system around
what we cannot know is a courageous task, but must be regarded with much caution.

**Criticism from Outside the Reformed Tradition**

Criticism from the Armenian perspective questions the validity of the entire doctrine of God's decrees. "A doctrine which means, not only that God decrees evil volitions, but causally determines them, cannot be true [Miley, 1894, Vol. II, p. 256]." Armenian theology would therefore conclude that the seminar's teaching of God's causative action is a false doctrine.

Armenian theologians take issue with the doctrine of decrees basically because the decrees logically lead to thinking that God is in some sense a causative agent in sinful acts. Permissive decrees (Reformed theology) or, God allowing for a purpose (IBYC), are phrases used to avoid the problem of God permitting evil while having no part in cause. Miley (1894) believes that:

The mere permission of events through human agency lets in the contingency of free agency, which yet can have no place in the system. If the decrees of God are efficacious in any proper sense of the term, they must be causal to
the things or events decreed, and to the sins of man as really as to anything else. [p. 255].

Gotthard's repetitive use of the formula suggests that the purpose of all experiences is for the completion of character qualities. The diagrams (Figure 1 and Figure 2) further suggest that these experiences are extensions of God's hands. Pinnock (1973) states the conclusions that one would be forced to come to if these assumptions were carried through.

God is not sovereignly active in the causative sense so far as sin is concerned, because if he were the entire biblical theodicy based on the misuse of man's freedom would fall and God himself would be the Author of sin [Vol 2, #1, p. 6f].

The writer sensed a very strong feeling in the seminar that if God is not controlling every experience in the world, then He is somehow not the sovereign Lord of the universe and His power is limited. The alternative to seeing God somehow less than sovereign is to picture Him as a cosmic manipulator -- always working for good and holy means. Pinnock's (1973) understanding of God's power does not demand total manipulation:

God's power is marvelously greater than the power to manipulate dolls. It is the power that can create free agents who act with a certain autonomy while God at the same time is able to govern
his universe despite the fact that some of them disobey Him and work against His will. Omnipotence does not mean having all the power there is. That would be to deny that there is a created order at all. It means that although He has delegated certain powers to his creatures, He remains competent to deal with circumstances that may arise [Vol. 2, #1, p. 7].

The issue is not whether or not God is sovereign, but how sovereignty is carried out in the world.

Providence of God is very fully revealed as a fact. The Scriptures are replete with expressions of His government. These expressions are given in such terms of universality, and with such detail, that nothing is omitted.

There is still the difficulty, and perhaps the most perplexing of all, arising from the magnitude of evil, physical and moral. Only a complete theodicy could fully adjust such evil to the doctrine of providence. There is no present attainment of such a theodicy [Miley, 1894, Vol. I, p. 309, 311].

Gothard's system attempts to stand in the gap of that perplexing adjustment. His diffusion of the moral question of the presence of pain and suffering and its place for developmental purposes is a conclusion that many theologians do not agree with. Contrary to the teaching of the seminar, the privilege of knowing how God sovereignly relates to the world is not ours to definitely know.
Criticism from Evaluations of Scriptural Proof Texts

The following chapter discusses the hermeneutical style of the IBYC in detail. Criticism directed here only evaluates the Scripture used in validating the theological stance regarding God's decrees and God's relation to sin. Gothard seldom uses his verses systematically to defend his ideas, but uses them instead as examples to prove his assumptions. When an example of God's working is reported, the assumption is made that this expression is a normative experience. Gothard implies that all similar events throughout history have God working in the same way. Such is the case when he refers to Genesis 50:20. Concluding his life story, Joseph reports that "you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good." The very strong implication of the seminar is that every time someone means evil against you, God probably means it for good.

The normative nature of experiences is also implied when he quotes Prov. 21:1: "The heart of the king is in the hands of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it withersoever he will." The implication of the seminar is that God always controls
or uses the decisions of the person in authority for the benefit of all persons under that authority. The king could represent either a boss, parents, government, pastor or school. This concept of the king in authority is a crucial verse in the chain of command principle. Other verses used to validate the chain of command principle such as I Peter 3:1-6, and Eph. 5:24, show the relational aspects and responsibilities of those under the authority, but doctrinal truth is established on the basis of Prov. 21:1.

Psalm 139:13-16 is also used to fit into the system that speaks of divine causality.

For Thou didst form my inward parts; Thou didst weave me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Thy works, And my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from Thee, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth. Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Thy book they were all written, The days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them [Psalm 139:13-16].

David's descriptive expression becomes for Gothard a source for believing that God specifically designs every person's appearance. David's description of his own experience then becomes a normative way to look at
every birth. This doctrine is applied through an example in the manual: "It was a surprise to her to learn that God had described exactly how she was to look, even before she was born. (Psalm 139:14-16) [Manual, Self Image, p. 7]." One descriptive passage cannot be taught as a universal doctrinal truth. In so doing, additional meaning is brought to the text. The text simply does not say that God designs everyone's looks. Gothard also feels that God is not only the designer of one's appearance but also of "our abilities, our parentage, and our environment [Manual, Self Image, p. 5]."

The final verse to be discussed is the rendition of Romans 8:28-29.

'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.' Romans 8:28 [Manual, Rights, Transforming Irritations, p. 7].

This verse in this form is the theological validation for God using pain and suffering in our lives. Not only is the exegesis of the passage in question, but more problematical is the fact that Gothard changes
the verse order, interjecting his own perspective so that the verse emphasizes the seminar point of view. The perspective in the verse above is not the perspective in Romans 8:28-29. The error comes when his own assumptions are interjected into the textual meaning, causing the thought progression to be foreign to that expressed in the text.

Criticism from Logical Inconsistencies

The rigidity of the doctrines previously discussed prevents the teaching from being logically consistent. The logical consistency lacking in the seminar includes the rather narrow interpretation of life situations.

The teaching of the operative psychological dynamics in the home reveals a somewhat inconsistent and inadequate seminar perspective. Gothard states in the lecture that "the nature of a child is revealed, not created, in the home." The chipping activities of the parents that surface selfishness, temper, resentment, etc., are seen merely as God's way of revealing the child's true nature. With the true nature now exposed the child can respond as God desires, and develop
Christ-like qualities instead of reactionary habits. The only operational dynamic presented is God’s use of family circumstances to reveal sinful characteristics inherent in the child.

Such teaching however misses the psycho-social dynamics of learning. This teaching omits the very real possibility that many character deficiencies are learned in the home. The seminar stresses individual responsibility and individual sin to the point that the child is driven to assume the blame for the onset of deviant behavior patterns.

The seminar does point out that the sins of the fathers are passed on to the third and fourth generations. The passing of personality patterns from generation to generation are identified, and unless this passage is interpreted as a genetic phenomenon, it must be a learned pattern. Gothard warns parents of the devastating effects of their own sins on their children, but tells people that the only causative dynamic in their behavior is personal moral failure. Home conditions, how an individual was shaped by parental values, lifestyles, or emotional responses are de-
emphasized.

One illogical component of the seminar is the rigidity of the uncut jewel illustration applied to people in various cultures. If the teaching is correct that all irritations are from God, then every physical disaster, all suffering and all national calamities, are God's tools to reproduce the character of Christ. The people that need the most chipping will be those farthest from God's inward ideal. The seminar thus implies that underprivileged nations recently and historically ravaged by floods, typhoons, hurricanes, famines, murder and war should benefit the most because God allows all this for their character development. This implication, however, directly opposes the perspective of Jesus in Luke 4:18-19 when he describes His mission of liberation, of healing, of preaching good news to the poor, the captive, the blind, and the downtrodden. Jesus' point of view was not to burden people through providential manipulation, but to effectuate the termination of the horrendous ravages in a sinful world. Jesus did not see oppression as God's tool, He saw it as oppression and came to remove it.
The concept of tools in the hand of God is an insufficient view to hold when 6,000,000 Jews were murdered by Hitler's regime, when thousands of Vietnamese children are orphaned or physically deformed as a result of militaristic power blocks in the world. However, Gothard stated in a personal interview (March 28, 1974) that before he could determine the purposes for which God allowed the war in Viet Nam, a personal interview with each person affected would be required. He was convinced, however, that God had a purpose in mind for each of those affected. Gothard acknowledged that war was a difficult situation to understand, but held to the idea that war, as well as many other calamities, is used by God for the character development of every individual affected.

The example cited earlier regarding God's special purpose revealed by the removal of parents from the life of the child is an example of presuppositions that should not be applied to every situation. The criticism stems from improper use of Scripture and historic example to prove a theological assumption. Before Gothard can fairly say that God is preparing
orphans for a special purpose, some honest research should also be made into the frequency of destroyed lives that are attributable to family disintegration. The seminar shows a serious lack of diligent research both Biblically and culturally to make such implications. Giving examples of a few men and women who have eventually benefitted from bad home situations does not validate the claim that all orphans are called to a special purpose.

Criticism from Implications in the Seminar

As Gothard lays tremendous responsibility on God for either the onset or the use of trauma, some nagging implications arise. These implications are necessary extensions of the seminar logic and need to be evaluated so that if necessary the foundational concepts can be challenged.

One of the most serious implications of the seminar is that the ends God achieves justify His means. This implication finds its expression in the idea that the benefit or blessing makes all the pain and all the manipulation by God worthwhile. Although the benefits that can be derived through tough times are a valid
observation repeatedly made by Gothard, an extremely important moral question is raised. Is God morally responsible for engineering the experience? The moral question involved asks if God is locked into a principle of always having to act in or to use pain and suffering. Is God bound to always use, energize or predesign pain and suffering, or do pain and suffering exist on their own without the manipulative power of God? The very strong implication in the seminar is that God is always active in some sense in pain and suffering. The questions rising from these assertions are always begged by pointing to examples in which pain and suffering have really worked out for good. Obviously many people have experienced pain and suffering on an individual and national scale and have become stronger, better people as a result. However, it is not theologically or logically necessary or correct to imply that the means to this strength are a necessary part of God's sovereign outworking. That makes God the author of all pain and suffering and the Bible is violently opposed to such an idea.

Pain and suffering drop into insignificance
because they are all to be seen as reproofs in the hand of God, necessary for the chipping and polishing of personal piety. This point of view may numb one's mind so that the immediate trauma is easier to live through. However, the long term effects of this viewpoint would be devastating to the whole Christian concept of the call to be healers and reconcilers.

By making pain and suffering seem as tools in God's hands, Godward loses one important perspective of Scripture -- pain and suffering frequently exist contrary to the will of God. "We do recognize the Biblical viewpoint that Satan is exercising very real influence in the world. So long as this state of things continues, God's will is not done by man on earth [Ladd, 1950, p. 82]." Satan is pictured as a roaring lion seeking destruction (I Peter 5:8). The life of the Christian is pictured as a struggle "against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness ... (Eph. 6:12)." "We know that we are of God and the whole world lives in the power of the evil one (I John 5:19)." Paul prayed for deliverance from the evil age
(Gal. 1:3-4). Any attempt to minimize the wrongness of pain and suffering and the intensity of our struggle against it contradicts the teaching of the Bible.

Gothard's own example from his life reveals yet another uncomfortable implication. Physical appearance -- the frame around inward qualities -- is prescribed in every case by God to enhance the person's life message. The teaching regarding correcting the deformity is to correct it if possible, but if not, accept the deformity as God's brand of ownership. Gothard's misaligned teeth, offensive to a dentist friend, were given free dental corrective care. Rectifying this deformity enhanced his life's message and his ability to communicate was greatly increased. So, for those who have access to help, deformities should be changed, because they can afford it, but those who don't have access to help are to see the same deformity as a brand of ownership. The determining factor in many such deformities seems to be more of an economic actuality rather than God's intervention. The implication that the rich have superior medical privileges because it is God's will, directly violates the teach-
ing of Christ regarding the priority of healing and ministry to the poor and oppressed. It is inconsis-
tent with the Bible to imply that poor medical facil-
ities in deprived areas of the world exist to keep God's brand of ownership on deprived people. Jesus' attitude revealed in His teaching and His healing mir-
acles regarded disease and oppression as part of the kingdom of evil and with all His power he struck out against it and encouraged His disciples to do the same.

Gothard's notion of the ultimate benefits of disasters and evil have the same implications as the mindset of the world at Jesus' time. Jesus addressed the notion that disasters are a punishment for sin directly in Luke 13:1-5 by using the example of the murdered Galileans and the people killed when the tower in Siloam fell to:

correct the popular false theory about suffering: victims of disasters, such as capricious deeds of violence or the collapse of the tower of Siloam, were not to be regarded as having received divine retribution for some concealed heinous sinfulness [Richardson, 1973, p. 107].

Gothard does not state that death is a divine retri-
bution, but does stress that these catastrophies are sometimes used by God to reveal sinful responses to
Through these words the Savior teaches that physical disasters like physical advantages are no indication that those who experience them are either worse or better than their fellowmen ... The fate of these people is a reminder not of their sins ... but of the urgency of the gospel.

At that time it was a generally accepted notion that whenever calamities visited people this was a proof that they were exceptionally sinful and that for this reason God allowed them to be overtaken by such disasters. Here, as elsewhere, Jesus rejects this false idea ... [Geldenhuys, 1951, p. 370,371].

Commenting on the same passage, Lange says:

Jesus by no means denies the intimate connection between natural and moral evil, but he disputes the infallible certainty of the assumption that every individual visitation is a retribution for individual transgressions ... [p. 211].

The Savior declares Himself against the narrowness of those who consider individual misfortune and individual punishment as words of one and the same significance [p. 213].

Lange's comments can be directed to Gothard who sees misfortunes as God's tools used to correct the character faults of the person upon whom the misfortunes fall.

CONCLUSION

The theology of Bill Gothard as expressed in the Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts has some appa-
ant shortcomings. Built upon some basic tenets of Reformation theology, the seminar applies the doctrine of God's decrees far beyond that allowed by many systematic theologians. In so doing, Gothard has changed the focus of Christianity when he states "The key to practical faith is the ability to see the hand of God in the attitudes, actions and direction of those whom God places over our lives [Manual, Introduction to Family]." "Without the knowledge of authority (chain of command) we will have no faith [Lecture]." "Faith is equal to the degree that we see that God will work through authority [Lecture]." In the final analysis, faith is, to a large extent, the degree to which the student agrees with Gothard's formulae, or with his principles that are expressed in the seminar.

Fortunately for the Christian religion there are other viable interpretations that are not beset with such difficult implications. One such view in total opposition to Gothard's is that of Helmut Thielicke expressed in Between God and Satan. Thielicke brilliantly explains the concept of putting God into a box and dictating what God must do to be God: "it
“is ourselves who set the conditions that God must satisfy in order that we may proclaim him God [p. 4].”

Putting God in such a conditioned set of parameters causes our belief to become merely a ‘belief in a purpose (e.g., in the purpose behind suffering)” [p. 9].”

Gottard’s theology can possibly be a great source of comfort to those who are experiencing disease, trauma, loss of loved ones, loneliness, facing death, etc. This comfort can sustain people for a short, or even a long, time. However, for many, the time could eventually come when the senselessness that their present suffering has fallen upon them because God is developing their character becomes a basis for rejecting God.

As time goes on, suffering appears more and more senseless and senselessness is the strongest argument against God ... In time we cease to see any sense in his actions, let alone any higher purpose behind them. Therefore: Curse God and die! ... In this the tempter does nothing else but what we say in Job: he leads man with the aid of time -- i.e., with the aid of long continued suffering -- to a point at which man can no longer see any sense in his suffering, and certainly cannot understand how they can give him maturity and help him on his way. This is the point at which, with diabolic inevitability, his belief in God appears absurd, and he abjures God [p. 7].