

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 enraged by disease or retardation or social injustice or pollution and the like that have brought correctives? 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.

Also, in retrospect, aspects of Gothard's teachings about successful living seem a shade ascetic. His "living in" Scripture via memorization and meditation, along with his life of separation and dedication and investment in service and godly sensitivity, carry the seeds of frustration, despair and failure for those minimally endowed with fortitude. For the overly scrupulous who are plagued by the guilt that they haven't quite made it, will greater efforts appease or aggravate their sense of failure? And how many of us, in this necessarily busy world, can gear ourselves to the almost contemplative existence suggested by Gothard's orientation?

These things aside, the Basic Youth Conflicts' seminars with their full measure of biblical imperative and principles is an important critique of the do-your-own thing syndrome that is coming home to roost in a civilization of confusion and despair. □

Basic Youth Conflicts: A Closer Look

According to Frederick Wagner and William A. Dyrness, the message that comes through the Seminar sometimes neglects or distorts basic assumptions that are vital for a balanced Christian faith and witness.

GOD HAS USED the Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts to bring healing to countless lives. There's no doubt about that.

Evangelicals need Bill Gothard's major thrusts. His insights on self-acceptance, forgiveness and one's relationship to parents are solid and forceful. What Gothard says about dying to ourselves—relinquishing our rights and finding them transformed by God's grace into privileges—is thoroughly biblical and much-needed in this materialistic and individualistic day. And Gothard's emphasis on openness and confession should warm up some of our cold churches.

Furthermore, his stress on putting our complete trust in the living God who acts in our lives and works out His will is absolutely necessary if faith is to be a live option in our secular world. In all this we have much to learn and Mr. Gothard has much to teach.

But just as Billy Graham is not above inspection, and Campus Crusade's Four Spiritual Laws are not above biblical scrutiny, and Francis Schaeffer's books are not above critical reviewing, so Bill Gothard's Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts merits evaluation. What follows is a tentative attempt to open discussion on several important matters.

Although Gothard understands much about the dynamics of human relationships, we believe theological imbalance creeps in at several points and leads him astray.

Dr. Wagner is Pacific-Northwest area director of Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship and received his Ph.D. from Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, Calif. Dr. Dyrness is minister to students at Hinson Memorial Baptist Church, Portland, Ore., and studied under H. R. Rookmaker for his Ph.D. at the Free University of Amsterdam.

First, we are sorry to see him leave the impression that Christian young people should avoid the social sciences and humanities. This reflects his experience in the graduate program of psychology at Northwestern University, where he made the discovery that either he had to drop out or seriously jeopardize his faith.

Too defensive?

But is such advice a valid outgrowth of biblical guidelines? Gothard's position seems to slight the fact that all truth is God's truth and that we can be in the world without being of it.

Does Gothard fully appreciate the biblical teaching on natural revelation or "common grace"? It is true, of course, that man cannot find God by his unaided efforts. Nevertheless, he is made in the image of God and retains the ability to pursue a serious study of God's world and of man's relationship to it. We believe that when Christians disdain the insights of secular learning they do so only to their loss.

In addition, if we ignore what the world feels and thinks, we will soon find it difficult to communicate the Gospel in ways our fellowmen can understand. Many Christians already hold a negative view of secular education. We are afraid that Gothard may reinforce this attitude and contribute to the already deplorable tendency for Christians to neglect their responsibility to the arts and sciences. Instead of fleeing we need to be encouraged to evaluate everything by the Word of God and bring our Christian influence to bear on all fields of human knowledge and achievement.

In the second place, Gothard seems to present a sub-Christian view of vocation. He offers these two tests for determining what sort of employment to seek: "1. Will the job give me the greatest freedom to develop my life message? 2. What job

will give me the greatest freedom to share a message?" In the same vein, he adds, "Your employment is only the means of your support."

Apparently, for Gothard, work has no intrinsic value except as it contributes to "developing a life message." This undercuts the New Testament view of vocational calling which teaches that we are to do all that we do with all our might to the glory of God. More than that, it slights the creation mandate with its focus on such work as agriculture, industry, medicine, etc. Gen. 1:28 gives meaning and purpose to man's work that is quite apart from any specifically spiritual or pietistic by-products.

The other side of this coin is the ascetic view of the Christian life the Seminar seems to encourage. Using the tripartite model of the nature of man (body, soul and spirit), Gothard almost seems to suggest that physical instincts are inherently evil and therefore must be checked by developing strong spiritual drives. (Statements such as, "Adam and Eve did not see each other naked before the Fall because they were clothed with special light," contribute to this impression.)

A severe view?

In any case, the Bible encourages a holistic view of man rather than a body-evil, spirit-good dichotomy. Gothard knows this; of course, but by describing the spiritual man in terms of dominant spiritual drives, and by warning against stirring up physical drives, he may foster a severe rather than balanced approach to life.

Another tendency that concerns us is the neglect of the concept of the body of Christ. Apart from his strong emphasis on family and interpersonal relationships, everything seems focused on getting Christians to follow the biblical rules and principles of life *as individuals*. Virtually nothing stands out about the place of the

church in the "chain of command," and the vital role of worshiping, praising and serving the Lord *together* with fellow believers seems equally neglected. Even a verse so clearly communal in thrust as Eph. 5:19 is illustrated by Gothard with an account of his going out into the woods alone and singing to God.

And too individualistic?

In America our faith is too often individualistic and private. Gothard may speak to huge crowds and he may encourage listeners to have a spiritual ministry in the lives of others, but somehow the focal point never strays far from the individual and his progress in following God's principles in life.

Finally, we believe that at times Gothard "uses" Scripture, isolating verses to support his system. For instance, he appeals to I Sam. 15:23 and Prov. 21:1 to establish the "chain of command" principle. But he says nothing about the role of prophetic dissent seen throughout Scripture which is the necessary balance to any system of authority if it is to function properly.

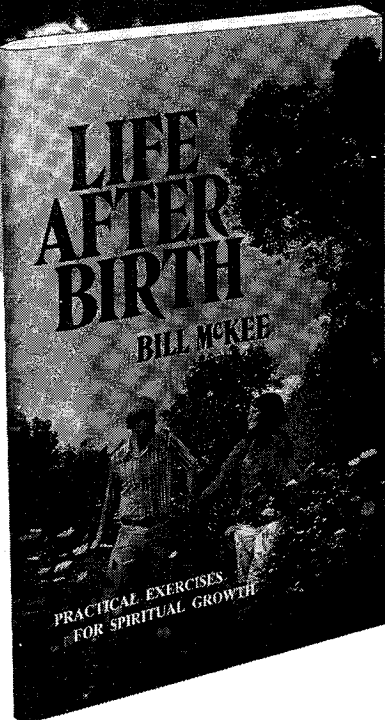
Gothard also seems to go beyond the credal maxim that the Scriptures are the rule of faith and practice when he uses the Bible as though it were equally a textbook of psychology, sociology, philosophy and even nutrition.

Another illustration of Gothard's approach to Scripture is his assertion that "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.

(Continued on page 50)

a
new
life



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Have a 'Record' Christmas

Columnist Richard J. Stanislaw leads you to just the right sources to match the musical tastes of those on your gift list.

Looking for a Christmas gift? Nothing fits better than music.

Nearly every major composer has left enduring music, for this occasion. *Messiah* is the perennial favorite recording, available in at least thirteen versions (I prefer Colin Davis conducting on Phillips). But Handel is not the only choice.

Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*, although available only in German, is close enough to our tradition to be accessible with a little effort. It is actually a collection of cantatas written for the season, but assembled later. The music is varied and joyful, and the dances have typically Baroque vigor. Four different recordings are current, each having a fine array of vocalists. I would pick Karl Richter's new anthology on DGG in an attractive package called *Cantatas for Advent and Christmas*. It contains six records and is a fine collection recorded with quality musicianship and technical finesse.

There is a charming collection of Renaissance and Medieval carols by the Deller Consort, *From Heaven Above* (RCA-Victrola). It includes Carl Orff's settings of seven carols: beautiful treatments of "Silent Night," "Joseph, Dearest," "The Coventry Carol" and others. Some elegant Baroque Christmas instrumental pieces round out a musical offering that is both familiar and distant, quaint and full of depth.

From the nineteenth century, Hector Berlioz' *Childhood of Christ (L'Enfance du Christ)* deserves more attention than it normally receives. There are four good recordings, all in French. The music is flamboyant and descriptive, especially exploring the orchestral spectrum. The chorus plays a minor role but the over-all effect is stunning, a different dimension of Christmas music.

The twentieth-century choices are many. From Great Britain, Ralph Vaughan Williams' *Hodie* (in English) fits all the traditional Christmas molds. Almost entirely choral, it rings bells, sounds brass and explodes unabashed. Vaughan Williams uses boy choir, organ, full orchestra and soloists. Much of the text is Scripture, with prose and poetry of Milton interspersed. The style is neo-romantic, openly lush and emotionally potent.

Mr. Stanislaw is associate professor of music at Bloomsburg (Pa.) State College.

Writing in a more cerebral idiom, Benjamin Britten finds mystical Christmas inspiration in a set of medieval carol texts. He sets *Ceremony of Carols* for treble choir and harp. The recording by the Texas Boys Choir is light and fresh; or, for greater dignity, it is also performed by the Women of the Robert Shaw Chorale.

More international, Honegger's *Christmas Cantata (Cantate de Noel)* blends traditional carols in French, German and Latin. Most are familiar, so the music is easy to follow. The orchestra plays the large role and the poly-language chorus parts act as an added attraction.

The variety is endless, ranging from Fred Waring or Alfred Burt to Daniel Pinkham or Charles Ives. Apparently musicians cannot resist joining a tradition begun by the Angel Band.

A CLOSER LOOK

(Continued from page 34)

Yet the clear teaching of Paul in Galatians 2 is that a Gentile convert does not have to adopt Jewish culture. It is the Koran, not the Bible, which attempts to fix behavior for its adherents for all time.

The danger of Gothard's way of using the Scriptures is that it may encourage Christians to live by conformity to rules and regulations rather than in a dynamic relationship to a living God who reveals Himself within the confines of a particular culture but who stands above culture, ever judging it in terms of His own character.

It is not wrong to systematize Scripture; in fact, it is necessary. And Bill Gothard's system, focusing as it does on practical Christian living, has certainly helped thousands of people. But we would like to beware lest we ignore important biblical material that does not readily fit into the Basic Youth Conflicts system.

Of course, these are complex issues. Gothard himself doesn't claim he has all the answers, and we certainly do not claim to have sorted everything out here. But we know God is honored by the attempts of His people to conform their understanding to the Scriptures, and we trust this discussion will encourage this. □