



# Bury My Umbrella At Wounded Knee

By Joel Crosby

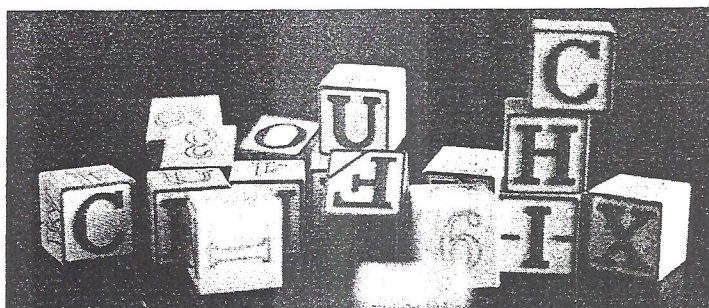
The Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts is an amazing phenomenon. It seems to run almost totally against the grain of our current culture. In an age of multi-media, strobe lights and fast-moving entertainment, Basic Youth Conflicts is thirty-five hours of straight lecture. Charisma, excitement and the spectacular dominate our society while Bill Gothard, alone with his overhead projector as he lectures, is mild-mannered, almost monotone, and so Puritan that the WCTU and the Boy Scouts seem X-rated by comparison. Madison Avenue has taught our country that mass advertising is essential to the marketing of any product, idea, or politician, but Basic Youth Conflicts refuses to advertise except by word of mouth and gets crowds that pack out major auditoriums and coliseums in big cities across the country. Since the Vietnam war, most leaders and institutions, including the church, have been forced to question their basic principles and methods. Tradition has become antiquated, rules are relative, and we seem to be an unresolved people. As an answer to this situation, Basic Youth Conflicts is a system of ethics laying out definite rules and principles which Bill Gothard claims will lead to success in relating to God, family, and society.

Because of these contradictions to our culture, it seems that we must look at Basic Youth Conflicts either as a diehard fragment of our past or as an omen of a new mood emerging in the church and in society. Personally, I opt for the latter position and thus take Bill Gothard seriously. The liberal wing of the church seems to be in a state of decline while evangelism is experiencing a new appreciation. Liberal seminaries like Yale, Chicago, and Union in New York are in disarray, while evangelical schools like Fuller, Gordon, and Dallas are expanding and gaining confidence. Dr. James I. McCord, president of Princeton

Seminary and a founder of the COCU movement, stated at a recent gathering of west coast alumni that he believes Dean Kelly's book, Why Conservative Churches are Growing, is the book for this decade in the church because in it a liberal leader of NCC is bringing our theological establishment to examine the contention that the church must make demands and offer definite meaning to life in order to win the allegiance of people and make an impact upon their lives and society. The tremendous response to Basic Youth Conflicts certainly bears this out and seems to indicate a mass groping on the part of a large segment of white middle class America for answers and handles they can grasp to keep their balance in the midst of the turmoil of these changing times.

Wherever there is a great demand, supply usually follows. Therefore, we will probably see a number of men and organizations attempt with new vigor to offer teaching and answers using modifications of Gothard's successful example on scales that range from small youth groups to great crowds. Those of us in youth work and the clergy may be called upon as we rarely have been before to help our people sort the truth out of the various theologies and opinions vying for our allegiance. Sincerity, conviction, and Bible quotations do not necessarily yield the truth. Church history is filled with people and even nations who have been led into bondage and agony by men with deep convictions preaching false doctrine for a variety of motives and reasons, not all of which were bad or evil. Perhaps a great service we can perform in our ministries is to keep ourselves and our people from absolutizing the teachings or methods of any one man or organization. Bill Gothard and Basic Youth Conflicts should certainly be no exception to a careful evaluation by ourselves and our constituents. One such teaching of Gothard's that needs examination is the





Chain of Command concept.

On the second night of his institute and in the second section of his manual, Bill Gothard explains that one of the principles for a successful relationship to God and men is a proper understanding of and obedience to a chain of command which begins with God and extends to a teenager through the Bible, the government, his father and his mother in a descending order. Gothard claims that God has put a protective umbrella over us and that whenever we get outside of this umbrella through rebellion or disobedience we expose ourselves to the realm of Satan as though we were entering into witchcraft. This is a universal principle applying to everyone, Christian or non-Christian. He quotes I Samuel 15:23 claiming that special troubles haunt the disobedient, giving the example of people he had met in communal living situations where not even prayer could help them because they were not fitting into the chain of command. He also cites Proverbs 21:1, "The heart of the king is the hand of the Lord," and places the government in God's hands, explaining that disobedience to law or parents is disobedience to God. Because David did not lift a hand against Saul, Bill Gothard asserts that even when those in authority are possessed by the devil, we should obey them as we would righteous leaders because the goodness of the leader makes no difference in the chain of command.

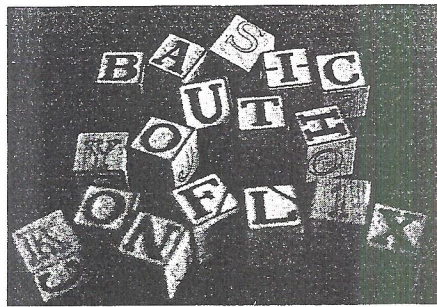
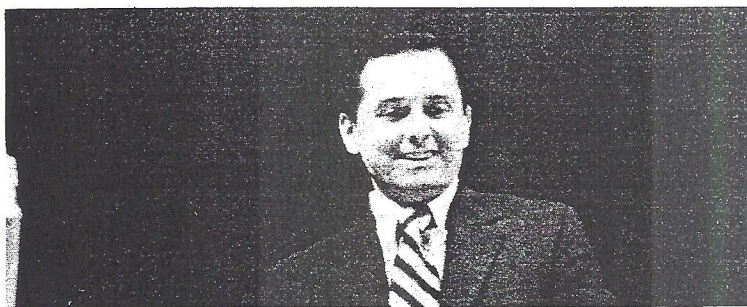
However, within this structure we are to discern the basic intentions of those in authority, and if they violate scripture or moral convictions we are not to obey, but should seek creative alternatives, following Daniel's example in Babylon and Peter's example in Acts. The example of Pharoah is used to illustrate that God is able to change the hearts of those in authority as their subjects submit to them. He relates this to youth by citing examples of teen-

agers who have submitted to difficult parents with the result that the parents became wholehearted adherents to the desires of their children. According to Gothard, obedience to those in authority is the Christian way which will lead to success and happiness.

In my opinion this is a definite perspective which is true to the gospel. However, my contention with Bill Gothard is that, by itself, this perspective is incomplete. Over against this guideline for living is also the prophetic perspective which is in tension with that of the kings and priests. The omission of the prophetic thrust in the gospel seems to me to leave the Christian a passive observer to the events of history and the destiny of his family. Elijah did not politely seek a creative alternative with King Ahab, but called him a sinner as he forthrightly confronted the evil in Ahab and Israel. Elisha anointed Jehu the king of Israel and precipitated a bloody revolution in which the reigning king Jehoram was killed, his mother Jezebel assassinated, and his entire family slaughtered. Amos cried out against the government of Israel and would probably be considered a radical today. Isaiah confronted king Ahaz and told him that his foreign policy would lead him to the ruin of himself and his people. It is out of this confrontation that the famous prophecy of our Lord's virgin birth in Isaiah 7. Jeremiah spoke out so loudly against the decisions and foreign policy of Judah that he urged soldiers not to fight against the Babylonian enemy. For this creative alternative Jeremiah was called a traitor and thrown into prison. This perspective was, in my opinion, honored by Jesus when he drove the money changers and merchants from the temple and spoke out against the scribes and pharisees.

To build a life style on either of these perspectives seems to me to be out





of balance. To those in prosperity and in authority, the perspective of obedience is particularly appealing. This is the argument given to justify the divine right of kings. To the poor, the oppressed and the powerless, the prophetic perspective is most favorable. Yet both are part of the gospel, but neither is the whole. In my understanding, living life as a Christian is a dynamic relationship with our Lord which calls us to reconcile the tensions of the gospel to a changing and complex world. It is simple, but not simplistic. It is tempting to domesticate the gospel within a system which we can easily understand and control. However, unintentionally we come to worship the God of our finite system rather than the God of the universe.

Perhaps the following historical event, as recorded in Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee by Dee Brown, will serve to illustrate the incompleteness of the obedience perspective alone. On November 5, 1864, Major Scott J. Anthony assured Black Kettle and a party of approximately 600 Cheyenne Indians that if they returned to their camp they would be safe and under the protection of nearby Fort Lyon. Black Kettle had been to Washington, D.C., met president Lincoln, and been given a large American flag which he flew over his tent with the promise from Col. Greenwood that no soldiers would fire on him as long as he flew this flag. Black Kettle and his tribe went peacefully to Sand Creek, obediently remaining under the umbrella of the authority of the United States government.

On November 26, 1864, Major Anthony and the Fort Lyon troops, along with Col. Chivington and 600 reinforcements, attacked Black Kettle and his people at sunrise. As the soldiers opened fire on the sleeping Indians, women and children rushed to huddle around Black Kettle's tent which flew the American flag. The soldiers paid no attention to flags or

cries for peace, but proceeded to massacre the Indians in a most brutal manner, killing 105 women and children and 28 men. (All but 35 of the men were gone on a hunting party, leaving the camp unprotected.)

Black Kettle was under the umbrella of authority which Bill Gothard describes. The Indians who didn't believe Major Anthony and refused to camp "under the umbrella" were unmolested. Black Kettle was not an advocate of war, but a voice for peace among his people. Col. Chivington was a former Methodist preacher who had devoted much of his time to organizing Sunday schools in mining camps. He was a righteous man who had come to kill Indians and believed "it is right and honorable to use any means under God's heaven to kill Indians." The soldiers under Anthony and Chivington were obeying orders.

It would be interesting to hear Black Kettle and Col. Chivington discuss Bill Gothard's concept of God's chain of command with regard to the special tragedies beyond even prayer for those outside it's protective umbrella. It would be interesting to hear a discussion between the soldiers at Sand Creek and the ones at My Lai, South Vietnam. It would be interesting to hear a discussion between the whites which compose almost 100% of Gothard's Bay Area audiences and a group composed of Christian people from racial minorities in this country. It would be interesting to hear the Bible verses which each would quote. Then it would be interesting to hear Jesus comment on the remarks and verses each had chosen. It might be disappointing, but liberating for us all. In my opinion, Jesus would shatter all of our systems leaving us with only himself as an absolute.