

The Alpha Course

The *Alpha* course is a British program begun by the Holy Trinity Brompton Church in London, a Charismatic Anglican church well known for its promotion of the 'Toronto Blessing' phenomena. The *Alpha* program is designed to reach unbelievers and is run by most denominations and strongly supported by Roman Catholic churches. The pastor, Nicky Gumbel, is a skilful communicator. In 1997 over 500,000 people completed the course and numbers have grown yearly.

Alpha involves 15 talks over ten weeks usually with the use of videos and often preceded by supper. Non Christians may also be employed as helpers in this programme. (1)

Churches are accepting this programme because many believe it is 'relevant' and non 'threatening': 'The course is fun and unthreatening - just like our Lord Himself!' (2)... 'Stripping the Gospel down to its bare essentials, it makes Christianity accessible to men and women of today's culture.' (3) But we ask - what has the Gospel been 'stripped' of? What is missing that makes it 'unthreatening'?

The first few lessons are basic presentations of who Jesus is and why He died. The deity of Christ and the resurrection are well presented and illustrated. Week 5 skilfully defends the inspiration of the Bible but adds: 'God also speaks to people directly by His Spirit: through prophecy, dreams, visions, and through other people.' (4) Gumbel adds that God also guides us through 'dreams' and 'prophecy'. (5)

Alpha presents sin as something that 'messes up our lives'. (6) The focus is on 'we'. 'We' are losing and 'we' have our lives in a sinful mess. One author, referring to the *Alpha* course, writes: 'Christ dies to rescue us from the consequences of our sin and to save us from our lost, confused and dark world. Christ comes to remedy our fears...' (7) The *Alpha* Gospel is arguably man-centred, not God centred. God is presented as a God of Love and not a God of wrath also, (Jn. 3:36); the depth of Sin is under-played...we feel sorry for ourselves instead of ashamed of ourselves.

In lessons 8-11 participants are encouraged to go on a 'weekend away' where teaching on the Holy Spirit is given. Subjects are encouraged to be filled with the Spirit as a subsequent experience to salvation and are told: 'Sometimes, when people are filled, they shake like a leaf in the wind. Others find themselves breathing deeply as if almost physically breathing in the Spirit...Physical heat sometimes accompanies the filling of the Spirit and people experience it in their hands or some other part of their bodies. One person described a feeling of 'glowing all over'. Another said she experiences 'liquid heat'. Still another described 'burning in my arms when I was not hot' (8) One person says of this experience, '...I couldn't control what was happening to me. I didn't want to control it...' (9) ...But the Bible says the Jews were 'cut to the heart' (Acts 2:37), not 'tingling all over'!

Speaking in unknown tongues is also taught: 'Ask God to fill you with the Spirit and to give you the gift of tongues. Go on seeking Him until you find. Go on knocking until the door opens. Seek God with all your heart. Open your mouth and start to praise God in any language but English or any other language known to you. Believe that what you receive is from God. Don't let anyone tell you that you made it up...' (10) But the participants of the *Alpha* Course should be asked: what were the 'tongues' of Acts 2:8-11 - unknown or known languages?

Gumbel has related bizarre experiences with phenomena seen in the 'Toronto Blessing' and claims it to be of the Holy

Spirit. (11) He once said: 'I believe it is no coincidence that the present movement of the Holy Spirit ['Toronto Blessing'] has come at the same time as the explosion of the *Alpha* courses...the two go together.' (12) Thus, in section 4, Gumbel promotes uncontrollable laughter and spiritual drunkenness. He says: 'that's what we're seeing today...people getting drunk - not with wine...come to the party where you can get drunk on God...I was at a party like that last night...it was a party thrown by the Holy Spirit...the church is meant to be a party.' Compare this with Scriptures on *spiritual drunkenness*, where God speaks of *spiritual drunkenness* as judgement on His people!: '...they are drunken, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with strong drink. For the Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes...' (Is.29:9,10); '...and I will make them drunken...I will bring them down...' (Jer.51:37-40). The Bible always speaks against spiritual or alcoholic drunkenness! The theology of the Holy Spirit in the *Alpha* course is *heresy*.

Alpha is openly ecumenical and promotes unity between the Roman Catholic and Protestant faiths: 'The *Alpha* course is...adaptable across tradition and denominations...I know of its uses in Catholic...churches'. (13) In talk No.8 Gumbel teaches that the differences between Protestants and Catholics are 'totally insignificant compared to the things that unite us...we need to unite around the death of Jesus, the resurrection of Jesus...' But Gumbel has whitewashed important differences! Catholicism does not believe the sacrifice of Jesus was finished but that it is a continuing sacrifice of the 'Mass', (in defiance of Hebrews 9:25,26; 10:10-18; Jn.19:30)! The death and resurrection have different benefits to Roman Catholics and Protestants. Catholicism curses anyone who teaches we are justified by faith alone without works, (Eph.2:8,9; Rom.3:5). Yet Roman Catholic Cardinals and Bishops support *Alpha*: '...it [*Alpha*] doesn't contain anything that is contrary to Catholic doctrine'. (14) Testimonies presented in the *Alpha* publications have the recipients remaining in the Roman Catholic system.

The *Alpha* teachings (and shown by the testimonies), lack mention of repentance, the cross, and conviction of sin. After week three the *Alpha* course assumes people are already Christians. (16) One person stated: '...I prayed a prayer of commitment...it was like a bench mark...I asked Jesus to forgive me and to come in and to take over my life. I didn't feel anything. It was no big deal and I went back to work'. (15)

Alpha is easy believism and 'another gospel' and it will add many false conversions to those already well documented in today's ecumenical movement. *Alpha* is ecumenical and blurs the lines between Roman Catholicism and Biblical Christianity. *Alpha* starts off by preaching the Gospel but as the course progresses the sessions detail heretical and even dangerous controversial and extra-biblical Charismatic experiences. The above mixtures can only dilute the Gospel.

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(1) Gumbel, 1997a, P.0 (2) *Alpha News*, Feb/97, P.29 (3) *Alpha News*, April/95 P.2 (4) Gumbel, 1997b, P.75 (5) Gumbel, 1997b, P.112-113 (6) Gumbel, 1997b, P.45 (7) 'Falling Short - the *Alpha* Course Examined' by Chris Hand (8) Gumbel, 1997b, P.156... (9) *Alpha News* April/94, P.9. (10) Gumbel, 1997b, P.167 (11) Video 3, Talk No.9 (12) 'The Spirit and Evangelism', *Renewal*, May/95, P.15 (13) *Alpha Training Manual*; P.63-68, Video 5, Talk 14 (14) *Alpha News*, July/97, P.1 (15) 'Falling Short-the *Alpha* Course Examined' by Chris Hand., P.71 (16) Eg. 'How can I be sure of my faith?'