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What is behind the Alpha Course?

DIALECTIC, PRAXIS and the ALPHA COURSE.

by Wendy Howard Editor of Despatch Magazine.

THE ALPHA COURSE.

The Alpha course is set up in exactly the way a Diaprax session is convened. At the Alpha training seminar I attended in Brisbane [described in depth in my book, "Alpha, Friend or Foe?"] the instructions were almost identical.

In Alpha :

1. Non-believers are invited to an Alpha dinner by the church people. Christianity is virtually set aside for the night, no meaningful prayers, no hymns or songs which really spell-out Christianity. The unbelievers are given an "open-ended" opportunity to give their own views and beliefs, the churchgoers are introduced to a new experience of unfettered interaction with people [or a person] who are not believers or followers of Christ Jesus. This is done, Alpha claims to justify such strange tactics, so that the non-Christians can feel loved, appreciated and listened to. NO ONE is allowed to "confront" the unbelievers in any way.

2. Alpha is "non-directive" in that very, very little Biblical instruction is given in the dinners and the weekends-away meetings. The laying on of hands, experience with the "holy spirit", making friends and having fun are encouraged. But there is a "non-directive" system going on throughout the Alpha Course.

3. There are really no closed philosophical viewpoints allowed! Alpha is supposed to be Christian, but the mouths of the preachers of the Gospel, and the witnesses to the Gospel message are effectively gagged, in reality. The Bible is almost a closed book in Alpha. GOD's Word is gagged as well!

4. Alpha is a social group, it is not a meeting or a church service, it is a social gathering. It is not a Bible study or a prayer meeting, it is a social dinner.

5. It uses a social issue where there are differences of opinion. The non-Christians believe and "feel" differently to the churchgoers, yet they are all mixed.

6. Alpha leads shrewdly into a consensus, because the church people are "not allowed" to preach or teach effectively most of the time, and the unbelievers can hold forth with their "feelings" and "thoughts" almost unhindered. The unbeliever may well want to participate in the "holy spirit" experiences which cannot bring him/her to salvation, but may bring ALL into a shared experience in the "spirit" [a counterfeit of the Divine].

PROCEDURAL CONSENSUS

Dean Gotcher explains about procedural consensus in this fashion [we will compare the Alpha course afterwards] :

"What I call 'First Cause' [God, parents, established rules and standards, norms, sovereignty, etc], must temporarily be set aside if the process of diaprax is to successfully develop [abdication to the procedure].... process of diaprax facilitates the establishment of a 'non-hostile' or 'risk-free' environment. This gives each individual the feeling of security and acceptance needed so they might feel free enough to 'take the risk' of confessing their personal feelings toward their own beliefs and values within the group setting." [p.26].

ALPHA COURSE In the training program for potential Alpha leaders, we were taught that a non-hostile or risk-free environment was essential for a Alpha dinner meeting or weekend. No

“confrontation” of the unbelievers is allowed, they must have full freedom to express their own beliefs, feelings and values about God, the Bible, and Jesus Christ. The only trouble is that in Alpha the ‘first cause’ is then set aside, in this case GOD is the “first cause” and so too is the preaching of the Biblical Word! The whole church group thus abdicates to the procedure. Both the church members and the unbelievers are then in a procedure which can lead successfully to consensus. The preaching of the Word of God does not really exist in Alpha, and the mild teaching of the Word which is superimposed on the “spirit” and “experience” orientated meetings is hardly worth counting in the scheme of things.

DIAPRAX BY GOTCHER “In other words, the fear of reprisal one might normally expect when expressing what one really thinks and how one really feels concerning the beliefs and values set by a higher authority must be alleviated. Therefore, any higher authority that has previously set standards that hinder participation in group-think must either be absent from the environment or have succumbed – abdicated – to the process and become willing to participate in it themselves, taking part in consensus building.”

ALPHA AND DIAPRAX In Alpha group-think the “higher authority,” or God and the Word of God, has succumbed to the process thus allowing the group-think to go ahead unhindered. Who is “participating in it themselves?” The CHURCH PEOPLE, who sit and listen intently to non-church people holding forth. This cannot help but to build consensus between the opposing groups! Remember as well that many Alpha groups are run by the lay church members, most of them are not competent in such things as doctrine, apologetics, and contending for the faith. Their hands also are tied in that they are “not allowed” by Alpha to contend or confront, or to preach or teach sound Scripture. Who is being processed in this ? Both the unbelievers and the church folk. The deliberations of the unsaved can be very convincing and intelligent, many of the church members will be unable to stand firm under the pressure.

FACILITATION IN DIAPRAX “For the diaprax process to become a part of the individual’s and the group’s life, it is equally important that the leader of the discussion facilitate instead of teach. The environment must be dialogue or dialectic in structure if everyone is to freely experience group life [communism] and group think [socialism]. Facilitating in a diaprax setting requires the questioning of preset standards established by a higher authority, preferably with that authority figure participating in the questioning process themselves.” [p.26].

ALPHA FACILITATES In the Alpha Course no actual teaching goes on, it is rather that the leaders give way to experiencing the group-think and group life. The unbelievers are free to question preset standards [the Bible and God’s instructions and commands] and the “authority figure” or the CHRISTIAN CHURCH is participating in the questioning process themselves. There are no ABSOLUTES being soundly preached, no “thus saith the Lord” being presented with a sound “no dialogue” platform. The environment is didactic in nature in Alpha groups. No instructions or revelations which are set in concrete by a Divine Person, and are thus beyond human control, are tolerated in this New World of change agents for a One Mind.

ALL POSITIONS ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE? Look at this following description of Diaprax [Gotcher’s own term]: “Diaprax survives today because of its ability to stay hidden behind the activities of the moment. The facilitator’s ability to control group feelings gives him the ability to shape the definition each person in the group gives for his or her position. What is lost in the whole scheme of things is that someone is always influencing the definitions we give for our position and that apart from God and His Word, all positions are subject to change. There is only a [redefining] of positions, shaped by our desire to gain or retain relationship with others.” [p.27].

ALPHA’S CHANGING WORLD Alpha insists that the world is changing, that we are all in the Age of Aquarius, and that this new era is the age of the “spirit.” The Age of Pisces is over, says Alpha, and the cognitive age of reason has been overtaken by the age of the “spirit.” No longer the WORD of GOD but the SPIRIT is paramount now [Alpha insists]. The Christian Church’s definitions that make up their position have been altered! Diaprax lies hidden in the “activities of the moment” in

Alpha, these activities are seemingly “evangelism”, whilst the real reasons for the group is actually group-life, group-think, consensus and change. To successfully create a “relationship” with unbelievers Alpha compromises and dialogues!

DIE-A-LOG? Writes Gotcher : “In dialogue all one can do is deviate from an original position. This is why Jesus did not dialogue with Satan when tempted by him in the wilderness. Instead He held to His position by quoting ‘First Cause, ‘the scriptures [position sub-phrase], with ‘It is written...’ and did not respond with ‘I think...’ or ‘I feel...’ [definition sub-phrase], Matthew 4:1-11. Therefore, if we believe that God’s Word is true, all we can do is give His definition. We thereby give Him control over our life. If we deviate from it, we give the process of compromise [diaprax - Satan’s scheme] control over us. I speak in regard to values, beliefs, and morals, which is what this process concerns itself with.” [p.27].

ALPHA WANTS THE CHURCHES TO LISTEN TO OTHERS! In our training program for forming Alpha groups we were taught that there should be no prayers that were more than a mere sentence prayer, that the only songs should be simple ones that expressed that God was the Creator, not many Bible verses or explanations to be given – but there should be listening to the unbelievers! Lots of this! They should be allowed to express themselves on “what do you feel about God? What do you think about life? and so on.” Why would Christians be expected to opt out in this way? With-holding proper teaching and preaching, prayer and hymns from the unsaved in their midst? The reasons given by the advisers of the Alpha team [trained people who have been programmed from Brompton UK] were pathetically inept! They said this strange way of acting was to give the unsaved a listening ear for once, because they never had anyone to listen to them respectfully, out there in the world. But the real reason I would suggest is a hidden one, the reason is to teach Christians the “art” of dialogue, to teach them to respect other people’s views, to make them shift their own positions, to lead them into “tolerance” with other’s belief systems, to bring the churches into a less “absolute” way of presenting their “religious” beliefs.

LAWS IN THE FUTURE? On p.28 of Gotcher’s book we read: “It is evident that Christians with positions of influence in education, business, and politics are having a hard time deciding whose definitions to use. Diaprax is making it easier for them to use definitions most conducive to human relationship building and most likely, they believe, to help them gain or retain respect in the eyes of the community. They believe this will put them in a better position to influence laws in the future. If they have any doubts about where the Word of God stands on the issue, they should read Matthew 10:32-3. “He does not approve of this type of reasoning.” [p.28].

ALPHA AGAIN? The reader might reason that surely the church folk who see Alpha as a pleasant tool to reach the unsaved in the community, surely they do not have any thoughts about “influencing laws in the future.” No, these might not have such thoughts, but Alpha is not just a local endeavour of happy little people who want to run dinners for the unchurched community members. Alpha has heavy connections to the global Anglican Church, which is united very strongly with the political might of the United Nations; and Alpha is heavily involved with the Vatican’s political might as well! Alpha has reinvented the Gospel outreach, and the reasons can easily be seen to be “respect in the eyes of the community” and “a better position to influence laws in the future.” The Anglican and Roman Catholic hierarchy want to be “tolerant” and “understanding” of all religious views, and they want the churches to learn proper respect for other group-views.

A PANDORA’S BOX? Alpha encourages the use of questions asked of the unsaved, expecting from them their own answers. But, the unsaved cannot give reasonable answers at all, not one has any answers which we should be listening to. Here Gotcher shows the hidden agenda in this complex process of Diaprax: “Whoever controls the agenda for deciding the questions that will be asked controls the answers as well. In short ‘whoever controls the questions, controls the answers.’ This is true whether one is participating in education, business, or government. Socrates was said to have shown a slave owner that his slave had the truth of Pethagorem’s theorem already within him, and though a series of questions was able to convince the owner that he did.

What Socrates was really doing was controlling the environment of thought, whereby the slave was able to be guided to the only logical conclusion to a presented question. He simply supplied the correct answers to the skilfully laid-out sequence of questions. The answers were in the questions, not in the slave. This questioning is not dealing with 'science according to facts,' but instead is 'science according to Socrates' [Phil Ring]. This is not 'hard' science but 'soft' science where 'hypothesis equals fact' [Tim Clem]. This is 'so called science' [Apostle Paul]. We cannot apply the same principle to answer the questions 'Who am I?' 'Why am I here?' 'Where did I come from?' or 'Where am I going?' without accepting either God's Word as the source for the questions to be asked – or human-reasoning. God, in His Word, only occasionally asks questions to be answered and often those questions provide their own answers. He instead gives us facts [answers] up front to be obeyed. When we come to God and His Word with questions to be answered, it is up to us to search scriptures, not to question them."

WHAT IS DIALECTIC AND PRAXIS ABOUT? DIALECTIC = Using dialogue as a means to resolve conflicting positions. PRAXIS = To practise the experience of speculation, conjecturing, theorising. The New World Order wants the peoples of the globe to "dialogue", to agree, to merge their beliefs into One, Unity in Diversity. The concept of there being absolutes, as revealed by the Lord in the Biblical Scriptures, is a malediction to these internationalists. Therefore the aim has become for the Brave New World to bring about harmony and accord by breaking down the absolutes which they see as standing in the way of One Mind – to do this, they believe, will bring peace in the coming New Age Millennium. Dialectic and Praxis are psychological methods used to achieve this aim. The environment of what Dean Gotcher calls "Diaprax" [a co-joining of the two words] is described on p. 25 of his book :

1. The group environment must be 'open-ended', where established norms or preset standards are set aside by the person of group so all participating can more easily explore and discover new experiences together.
2. It must be 'non-directive,' where rules and preset standards are not presented by the leader or encouraged by the group that might stand in the way of the person or group exploring and discovering new experiences together.
3. It must be 'adverse to any closed philosophical viewpoints,' where rules and pre-set standards are not respected by all participating when they prevent the person or group environment exploring and discovering new experiences together.
4. The group environment must be social in nature. 5. It must use a social issue that the group has differing opinions or viewpoints about. 6. It must use a social issue that all participants can come to consensus, or group-feeling about regarding a possible solution." Link: <http://www.firstplumbline.net/html/drnickygumbalwhatisbehindthealphacour...>

Who is behind the Alpha Course?

Here is a list of Alpha course promoters and supporters, organisations and denominations and Churches

Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA)
Holy Trinity Brompton
The Roman Catholic Church
Brownsville Assembly of God in Pensacola, Florida
Andrew's/St. Paul's United Church
Wall Street United Church
St Paul's Cathedral, London
Norwich Cathedral
Coventry Cathedral
York Minster
Brentwood Roman Catholic Cathedral
Wakefield Cathedral

St Albans Abbey
Winchester Cathedral
World Council of Churches (Ecumenical Movement)

Names of People who promote and are involved in the Alpha Course From : <http://www.alphausa.org/basics>

“Alpha seems especially blessed in that the Lord is using it to reach all sorts of people in all sorts of spiritual conditions”

Luis Palau Evangelist, head of Mission America “We stand alongside others who have a similar passion for leading people into vital relationships with Jesus Christ. We applaud the vision and work of Alpha Ministry to connect the unconnected to the life of the local church and to relationship with Jesus Christ.”

Bill Hybels(Senior Pastor) Willow Creek Community Church “Alpha is definitely a powerful tool for reaching the lost for Christ and helping them mature in their faith”

Bill Bright President Campus Crusade for Christ “The Alpha course is a most engaging way of passing on the basics of Christianity. It is a tool for evangelism and nurture that I highly recommend.”

J.I. Packer Professor of Theology Regent College, Vancouver, B.C. “I know of many people whose lives have been transformed through the Alpha Course. I rejoice at how God is using it so powerfully to renew many churches both inside and outside prison walls.”

Charles W. Colson Founder, Prison Fellowship Ministries “The Alpha course is a superb vehicle for seeking and evangelising non-Christians, the unchurched and the nominally churched. Would that every Episcopal Church had an Alpha course for we would be truly embracing the Great Commission of Jesus our Lord.”

The Rt. Rev. Herbert Thompson, Jr Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of Southern Ohio “I see Alpha as a strategic tool, sensitively crafted to address today’s secularised seekers with satisfying answers to their spiritual hunger.”

Jack W. Hayford President King’s Seminary “It’s great to see how Alpha has been used to reach people with the good news of Jesus Christ, who wouldn’t normally come to church. This resource is very complementary to helping seekers connect with The Purpose Driven Life.”

Dr. Rick Warren Sr. Pastor, Saddleback Church “I rejoice and give our Lord thanks for the wonderful way He is using the Alpha ministry throughout the United States and around the world, inviting friends, family or work colleagues to an Alpha course is an outstanding way to share the love and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ in a non-threatening environment.”

Paul Cedar, head of Mission America “Through Alpha, Jesus Christ is capturing the hearts and minds of an ever-growing number of persons. The course meets the vital test of being both open and faithful — welcoming of all, while presenting the gospel message with clarity and power.

George Gallup, Jr Chairman, The George H. Gallup International Institute “Alpha’s great success lies in its ability to take evangelism out of the church into the home and to bridge the gulf between church and community.”

Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey In Britain, Cardinal Basil Hume, Archbishop of Westminster, wrote a warm message of welcome to hundreds of delegates attending three Catholic Alpha conferences held in Westminster Cathedral Hall. And during an official visit to the Convent of Jesus and Mary Language College in Willesden, north London, in 1997, he spoke with schoolchildren attending a Youth Alpha course there.

Cardinal Basil Hume, the highest Catholic official in England As part of the initiative, more than 1,500 billboard sites throughout the UK carried the poster featuring the face of Holy Trinity Brompton Children's Worker Greta Greenwood alongside the slogan, 'The Alpha Course — An Opportunity to Explore the Meaning of Life.' Greta Greenwood 'I sense the moment has come to commit all of the Church's energies to a new evangelisation and mission to all nations. No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples.'

Pope John Paul II "The Alpha Course is a wonderful and proven tool for evangelism in the local church... I enthusiastically support and recommend Alpha."

C.Peter Wagner Global Harvest Ministries "I believe the Alpha course has been one of the greatest initiatives in recent times to introduce people to Christianity in an easy-to-understand, down-to-earth and informal way, I know God changes lives and anything that can help as many lives to be changed as possible has got to be good. I believe the Alpha course should be available to everyone."

Rosemary Conley, Fitness Club Pioneer "If it hadn't been for Christian friends who were sufficiently enthusiastic about their faith to share it with me and answer my obstinate questions, I'd never have discovered Christ for myself that was over 30 years ago. Today, everywhere I go, I hear how Alpha courses are communicating the Christian faith in relevant and non-threatening situations do go along if you get the chance. Christianity promises 'life in all its fulness'. Just suppose that's true — what a tragedy to miss out!"

Sir Cliff Richard "Alpha is a safe place to thrash out the meaning of life; to discuss what Christianity really is all about. I'd highly recommend this course for anyone who wants good food and good conversation."

Melanie Clark Pullen, Actress <http://uk.alphacourse.org> Link to this posting/article: <http://www.firstplumbline.net/html/drnickygumbalwhoisbehindthealphacours...>