

The Alpha Course by Chris Hand – Is Alpha Leading People Astray?

The Alpha Course

by Chris Hand

From Website : intotruth.org

Is the popular Alpha Course leading people astray? Many people have been greatly impressed by the Alpha course. Designed to be an introduction to the Christian faith through talks, video presentations, small-group discussions and a special weekend-away, lots of churches are now employing it as part of their outreach. In the eyes of many it has been a run-away-success and its fame has spread far beyond the UK, and Holy Trinity Brompton, the London church where it originated. It is no exaggeration to say it has spread right across the world and is now finding friends in several continents. It has been adapted so as to be accessible to young people and has also proved versatile enough to be used in prisons, schools and places of work. Churches in inner cities and rural areas have found it sufficiently flexible for their needs. Future plans for expansion suggest that Alpha is very much here to stay. What is more, many people claim to have been helped through going on the Alpha course and believe it has ought them an understanding of God and how to respond to Him. Testimonies and accounts of wonderful things that have happened to individuals abound; In the light of all this, surely there cannot be anything wrong with it? With so many in today's society gripped by materialism and atheism, can Alpha be anything other than a good thing? As young people become hopelessly enmeshed in a godless culture, should we not applaud the efforts of Alpha and help make it a success? We wished that the answers to these questions could be an emphatic Yes. But closer examination of Alpha prevents such a clean bill of health being given to it. Why this concern? There are six vital reasons we would like to bring to your attention.

1. The God of Alpha is not the God of the Bible. Alpha quotes from the Bible a lot. It cannot be faulted on that. But for all this it does not present us with the God who has revealed Himself in the Bible. There is much we could say about the God of the Scriptures. He is the Creator of the universe and the one who upholds it and maintains it. He is a great King and Sovereign over all He has made. We are challenged to ponder: "To whom then will you liken me. Or to whom shall I be equal? says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these things, Who brings out their host by number; He calls them all by name, By the greatness of his might and the strength of his power; Not one is missing." (Isaiah 40:25-26) He is high and holy.

He dwells in heaven and is all-glorious. Nothing impure can live in His presence. For those that fall short of His glory and perfection, there is judgement that follows (Romans 6:23) Now of course much more could be said. But you will have to search hard and long in Alpha to find a God that resembles the One just described. Nothing about Him as Creator, nothing about Him as a great King. He is assumed rather than described. The Bible tells us "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31). But we would not be any wiser of this from going on the Alpha Course. It simply fails to tell us anything we need to know about God.

2. The plight of man in Alpha is not as serious as in the Bible. Man's state until he is reconciled to God is not a happy one. Psalm 7:11 tells us God is a just judge, And – "God is angry with the wicked every day". The gospel of John makes this abundantly plain: He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him. (John 3:36) Man without God is subject to the wrath of God. We are not slightly displeasing to Him. It is not that we have occasional faults and foibles that surface. It is what we are by nature. The apostle Paul explains that we are "by nature children of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3). This is very strong language and leaves us in no doubt. We have offended against God and broken His holy law. We are sinners in His sight and deserve condemnation. It is as straightforward as that.

By contrast, Alpha does not use strong terms and leaves us rather unclear about where we stand. As one follows its argument, sin is more to be seen in the way we have messed up our lives (Gumbel 1994: 44,47). It is an inward-looking description of man's state that majors on his feelings of fearfulness (Gumbel 1994:22). It is a picture of man predominated by his feelings of sadness and unhappiness (Gumbel 1994:12-22). sup1/sup. Now of course these things are all true. This is what life is like for sinners. It is a miserable life for them. Yet this is to major on the consequences of sin rather than sin itself. These are the miseries that follow inevitably because we are sinners. The problem, however, is more serious than simply sin's consequences.

Alpha fails to tell us that ultimately we have offended God and courted His displeasure. We have sinned against God and are justly under His judgement. We are people "...having no hope and without God in the world" (Ephesians 2:12). For all the gravity of sin, Alpha never allows us to feel too bad about ourselves. It never permits us to see ourselves in God's sight. That is a big omission.

3. The Jesus Christ of Alpha is not the Jesus Christ of the Bible. This may surprise us. Alpha appears to have quite a lot to say about the Lord Jesus. It tells us what He did, what He said, the claims He made about Himself and establishes beyond doubt that the resurrection actually took place. But despite having part of the course entitled 'Why did Jesus die?', it is unable in the final analysis to answer this question. This is a core issue. Christ died because God's holy justice required it. Our lives were forfeit. We had sinned and were helpless. Christ had to die in the place of sinners who truly deserved to bear the penalty for their sin. Christ's death propitiated or appeased the wrath of God (Romans 3:25, 1 John 2:2).

Alpha has not described God to us and therefore has no meaningful place for God's wrath. Christ's death ends up having to satisfy some abstract principle of justice that has somehow become detached from God Himself. Alpha's own illustrations and attempts to explain get us no closer to the heart of the matter (Gumbel 1994:19-20;47-48). Christ's death upon the cross becomes an act of love but without any real connection with the reality of judgement and God's wrath. All we are left with is the impression that Christ has sacrificed Himself to rescue us from the consequences of sin because that was required by some impersonal and rather arbitrary justice system. It is all rather mysterious. This is not the Christ of Scripture.

4. The love of God in Alpha is not the love of the God of the Bible. The Bible is clear that 'God is love' (1 John 4:8). Alpha tells us this too. There is a difference, however. In Alpha God is love and little else. There is not much else that He can be as the course has missed all the aspects of His great character that refer to His holiness and glory. We are left with love. The God of the Bible is love but it is love that is seen in His willingness to save sinners. We are told, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

Why did the Lord come? To save sinners. What moved God to do this? His love. This is what makes His love so special and wonderful. It is that such a holy and glorious God should save sinners. This is clear from Romans 5:8 as well, But God demonstrates his own love towards us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. God's love is evident in that He acted to save sinners. Here we see the glory of Christ's love. But without the context of God's holiness and absolute perfection, the meaning of that love is lost to us. Instead God merely becomes an emotional being of unconditional love divorced from any true understanding of His true nature and being. Alpha's God will give us an emotional high and make us feel special. The God of the Bible will give us eternal life. There is a big difference between the two.

5. The Holy Spirit of Alpha is not the Holy Spirit of the Bible. There is more space in Alpha devoted to the Holy Spirit than to the Lord Jesus. This is surprising given what Scripture says about the Holy Spirit (John 16:13-14). Why does Alpha do this? It is because Alpha's 'Holy Spirit' is the agent for giving to people an 'experience' that is going to make God real to them. The main focus for this is the 'Holy Spirit Weekend-Away'. People doing Alpha are told to expect all manner of things might

happen to them. We 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. (Gumbel 1994:136). It is not restricted to this, however. 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 experienced 'liquid heat'. Still another described 'burning in my arms when I was not hot'. (Gumbel 1994:136) This is all very interesting but it has nothing to do with the Holy Spirit as known through the pages of Scripture. Nowhere are any phenomena such as these attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit. Alpha's 'Spirit' appears to work in ways that lie outside the confines of Scripture. Whoever it is that people are 'introduced' to at the Alpha Weekend, it is not the Holy Spirit. But whoever the mysterious guest is, he is equally at home among the ecstatic gatherings of New Age enthusiasts and non-Christian religions alike.

6. Conversions in Alpha are not like conversions in the Bible. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter's hearers were '...cut to the heart...' (Acts 2:37). The Philippian jailer asked urgently 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' (Acts 16:30). They understood that they were sinners. They realised that they needed mercy. It was clear to them as it was to the believers in Thessalonica that the gospel was '...in truth, the word of God...' (1 Thessalonians 2:13). Conversions in Alpha come differently from this. More often than not it is an emotional experience about the love of God but without any understanding of holiness or the need to be saved from our sins. There is no recognition of the need to repent and to turn to God as a matter of life and death. People feel forgiven but do not seem to have realised the depth of their sinfulness or repented of their sin.

People feel cleansed without having consciously put their faith in Christ. Often this happens when people are in some ecstatic state. Alpha may regard this as conversion but it is not what we find in the Bible. For all its efforts, Alpha does not help us to know God. It does not describe the true and living God for us. It does not diagnose man's condition accurately enough. It is unable to adequately account for Christ's death and substitutes an unbiblical view of God's love and God's Holy Spirit in its place. To cap it all, the whole issue of conversion is grievously misunderstood. By sparing us the 'bad news' about ourselves, it is unable to supply us with the 'good news'. The needs of our souls for biblical and life-saving truth are far too precious and important to be ought down to this level. It needs the unvarnished truth of the Scriptures.

We may merely succeed in adding people to our churches who have never been converted. That will be no help to them and no help to our churches either. To leave someone believing they are converted when they are not is an awful prospect. Yet that is what we are risking using defective tools such as Alpha, 'having a form of godliness but denying its power' (2 Timothy 3:5). We must do better. Failure is too high a price to pay. Visit the Christian Research Network website: The Christian Research Network Nicky Gumbel quotes in this article taken from "Questions of Life", Kingsway, Eastbourne, 1994 © 2003 Banner Ministries. All rights reserved. Cross+Word Website: <http://www.banner.org.uk/> This document is the property of its author and is not to be displayed on other websites, redistributed, sold, reprinted, or reproduced in printed in any other format without permission. Websites may link to this article, if they provide proper title and author information. One copy may be downloaded, stored and/or printed for personal research. All spelling and phraseology is UK English. Link to this article: <http://www.intotruth.org/misc/alpha.html> (now broken)

Dangerous Deceptions of Dr Nicky Gumbel & Dangers of Alpha Course About Dr Nicky Gumbel

Nicky Gumbel (born 1955) is an Anglican minister, currently at Holy Trinity in Brompton, London. He is well known as the developer of the Alpha course, a basic introduction to Christianity. He is the author of a number of books related to the Alpha course, including Questions of Life, which has been published in 48 languages. Statement and written by: Christian Witness Ministries

My purpose is that you may see what Nicky Gumbel stands for (in my view one of the four most influential figures on the British religious scene, the others being George Carey [CoE], Basil Hume [Catholic] and Clive Calver [EA]), and that you may welcome his Biblical ideas, and question those which could be of human origin. In no way do I seek to assassinate his character – I urge you to join me in praying for him as we are commanded, in love and humility: “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

Two injunctions by Mr Gumbel himself may well be appropriate in beginning: There is a double standard in having “a rosy view of ourselves and a jaundiced view of others” (Stott), for we point the accusing finger at others, but never turn it on ourselves. It makes us feel better to gloat over the sins and errors of others – hence our love of scandals. We lap up all the sordid details and every speck we collect helps us ignore the log-jam in our own eye. This applies not only to the moral faults of others, but also to doctrinal ones as well.

Some doctrinal critics may agree with 99% of their opponent’s view. We may agree on the Trinity, the person and work of Jesus Christ, the nature of the atonement, the authority of Scripture and issues of morality, but we find what is objectively a minor area of disagreement and latch onto it. We feel we are not ‘sound’ unless we are constantly denouncing and condemning. So we write with poisoned pens. Could it be that we are blinded by the log in our own eye? Often we are defensive, rigid, judgmental, intolerant and even nasty and petty. Unless we first remove the plank of hypercriticism and censoriousness from our own eyes, we will not see clearly to remove the splinter from the eyes of others.

Handling Criticism from Challenging Lifestyle Although we are to be wise and discerning, we are not to be suspicious of everyone, and neither are we to become heresy hunters, for false prophets will reveal themselves by their fruit. We need not worry.

How To Discern False Prophets From Challenging Lifestyle

As we look at Mr Gumbel’s teachings, let us avoid hypercriticism and intolerance, but – in contrast to his latter point – some concerned enquiry may not go amiss :

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears” (Acts 20:28-31).

Nicky Gumbel- the man ·

Practised as a barrister and is now ordained on the staff of Holy Trinity Brompton · Author of best-selling: Why Jesus?- a 24-page tract looking at Christ and our need of Him, · Why Christmas?- the Christmas edition of Why Jesus, · Questions of Life- forms the basis for the Alpha course material, including ‘who is Jesus’, ‘how can I be filled with the Spirit?’, ‘why and how should I read the Bible?’ ·

Searching Issues- examines 7 common objections to Christianity such as suffering, other religions, sex before marriage, the New Age, homosexuality, and science and Christianity ·

A Life Worth Living- a study of Philipians, forms the basis for the Alpha 2 follow-up course; looks at continuing new life in Christ, · Telling Others- a ‘feedback’ book of testimonies and practical tips for running effective Alpha courses, · Challenging Lifestyle- a study of the Sermon on the Mount explaining how to live under God’s blessing, how to have an influence on society, how to deal with anger, sexual sin, giving, praying, fasting, money, divorce, integrity, loving your enemies, criticism, life... · Developer and director of Alpha, a 10-week introduction to Christianity with the principles- Anyone can come, Learning and laughter, Pasta, Helping one another, Ask anything :

Year Director Development Courses People
 1977 Charles Marnham 4-week course for new Christians 1 (HTB)
 1981 John Irvine 10 weeks, Holy Spirit weekend 1 <35 1985 Nicky Lee expansion... 1 100+
 1991 Nicky Gumbel . 4 600
 1992 . . 5 1,000
 1993 . Questions of Life published 200 4,500
 1994 . (May – Toronto Blessing breaks in HTB rest of UK) 750 30,000
 1995 . Goes international 2,500 100,000
 1996 . 1,200 outside of UK, all continents except South America 4,500 (Oct) 250,000+

This table demonstrates just how influential Nicky is, with over a quarter of a million people directly reached by his exposition of the Gospel alone: all the Alpha resources are by him, and the July issue of Alpha News draws attention to a copyright statement relating to the course which requires that any alteration to the course by way of shortening or lengthening is “subject to the proviso that such alterations do not change the essential nature of the course”. Furthermore, “teaching on the various topics contained in Questions of Life should neither be departed from nor qualitatively altered in an Alpha course”.

One can understand HTB’s move to consolidate copyright rights, but the Gospel must not be according to Gumbel, but from the full counsel of Scripture. In Nicky’s defence, he himself merely stipulates that “it is a good idea to follow it exactly the first time around and then to see next time if there are any ways in which it could be improved” (Practicalities from Telling Others). Nicky Gumbel’s Friends and Supporters.

John Wimber head of Association of Vineyard Churches

“Alpha is ingenious in the way that it brings people into a private setting by invitation [fashionable sociologically, but not necessarily the way Jesus or the Apostles preached]. So you are accommodating the 20th Century culture in a very manageable and functional way and I am thrilled by it [why is Wimber more thrilled by ‘cultural adaptation’ than the plain declaration of the timeless Gospel?]. I am not surprised to hear of its immediate acceptance and use by hundreds of churches all over the world [doesn’t that ‘immediate acceptance’ ring any bells? Perhaps an uncompromising Gospel presentation would put more noses out of joint than heads nodding in agreement. [brackets mine].(Remember that John Wimber does not believe in the sufficiency of Scripture, is known to have said- “We are cataloguing all of our experiences so we can develop a theology” [which explains his results-based mentality], confuses “truth and error reflected in his books when opponents of the Evangelical faith are portrayed as having conversions or being great saints and advocates of signs and wonders. This is particularly so with his ready acceptance of Roman Catholics” [John Wimber - Friend or Foe?, p9,10, Philip Jensen]. Also – Nicky Gumbel refers fondly to John Wimber on many occasions in his books, and recommends Wimber’s equivocal Power Healing and Power Evangelism.)

Charles Whitehead, International Catholic Charismatic Services

“Alpha is an excellent introductory course for those who do not go to church or for whom an inherited Christianity has little meaning.

I have no hesitation in recommending it to any church or group wishing to present the basic Gospel message clearly and effectively”. (Catholic Charismatics- despite their possibly oxymoronic label- are the fastest growing religious group in the world. See Jonathan Fiddy’s article on Rome to see if Catholicism is compatible with the practise of the gifts of the Holy Spirit of God.)

George Carey, Archbishop of Canterbury

“I think it’s superb and it appears to be adapted culturally as well- and all that’s good. I commend it wholeheartedly and I think it’s a very good thing.” (Note that Carey also refuses to repudiate the blatant flouting of Scripture amongst the gay lobby in his church [viz. Bishop of Guildford, Lesbian Gay Christian Movement, 20 year celebration, Southwark Cathedral]; he goes along with the Synod’s dismissal of Biblical hellfire; he seeks full unity with the Catholic church [recent visit to the

Vatican]; he regards Hindus as being on a shared spiritual walk with Christians [recent visit to the Neasden temple]. If homosexuality, annihilationism, Catholicism and Hinduism are condoned by Carey, then of what value is his approval of the Alpha course? Rather, is it not cause for concern that Alpha is not Biblical enough to ruffle his ecumenical tendencies? Instead: "He's on our side," assures Sandy Millar. "He is a friend")

Steve Chalke, the Oasis Trust

"Alpha is the most effective [visible results again] and transferable [read 'amorphously ecumenical?'] introductory course to the Christian faith that I know." (Steve Chalke has also added his backing to Fusion, the divisive and ill-conceived National Student Initiative. On questioning, I found him to know nothing about it.)

Michael Green and Michael Marshall, advisors in evangelism to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York: "Every lively church needs a maternity ward! It needs a setting in which new Christians can be made and Christians can be made new [hinting at it being a man-made manufacture]. The Alpha course has proved itself to be a marvellous vehicle for this purpose, and it can be adapted to a very wide variety of cultures [the marvellous thing about the Gospel is not that it is 'adaptable' but that it is distinct, unique, pointing solely to the Biblical Christ. If 'culture' here means 'doctrinal basis', then we can only fear that Alpha serves to confirm the unscriptured in their ignorance]." Other responses- "non-threatening yet challenging"

(Fiona Castle), "cringe free" (Joel Edwards, EA), "fun and unthreatening – just like our Lord Himself!" (Gerald Coates, Pioneer), "exciting don't miss it!" (Rob Parsons, CARE), "a tool of our time" (Ken Gott), "a new and fresh approach to evangelism" (Clive Calver, EA), "successful" (Terry Virgo, New Frontiers), "effective" (Green & Marshall), "significant" (Bishop David Pytches), "significant" (Canon Robert Warren), "exciting and successful" (Roger Forster, Ichthus), "effective" (Rob Frost, Methodist), "phenomenal growth" (Elaine Storkey, ICC), "engaging (Jim Packer), "effective" (Os Guinness), "significant" (Leighton Ford), "enormous impact" (Eddie Gibbs), "effective" (Mike Bickle, former Kansas City Prophet), "superbly produced relaxed, non-threatening" (Michael Cassidy), "significant" (Bishop John Perry), "enjoyable" (Bishop Graham Dow), "extraordinary success" (Bishop John W Howe), etc.

Alpha is also dubbed "exciting, effective, successful, significant" by Bishop of Singapore, Bishop of Wakefield, Bishop of Maidstone, Assistant Bishop of Birmingham, Gordon D. Fee, Wayne Grudem, Lynn Green (YWAM), and a host of other ecclesiastical luminaries My one concern is that a good marketing campaign or management training course could be described in exactly these terms. Where in the Bible are these concepts used as gauges of faithful evangelism? "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD" (Isaiah 55:8).

Nicky Gumbel- his teachings vis a vis the Word of God Mr Gumbel is an exceptional writer. He adopts important themes, follows clear lines argument with witty and poignant illustrations and challenging applications I have read all his books and they are always informative and very convicting in places. I am grateful for all that I have learned from him. The chapters Who is Jesus and Why did Jesus die? in Questions of Life are the best systematic defence of the claims of Christ, the authenticity of Scripture and the power of the Cross. Nicky is exceedingly keen on C S Lewis (far and above his most cited author – at least 25 times in all his work) and uses his 'Lord, liar or lunatic' dilemma to maximum effect in this book,

Why Jesus and Why Christmas? He is not shy- unlike other modern evangelicals – of words like 'sin' and 'judgement'. His legal analogy of God being Judge, Advocate and Substitute is classic in talking about dealing with what he openly confesses to be "man's greatest need" – the penalty, power, pollution and partition of sin. He stops short of declaring eternal death in hell as the final penalty, and does not mention heaven as the reward of faith in Christ. An impassioned and direct description by John Wimber of his own conversion is included, and the 'sinner's prayer' at the end of the second chapter recognises repentance, forgiveness, Christ crucified, a commitment to Him as Lord, thanks, reception of the Holy Spirit.

Watching the first few Alpha videos gave me the strong impression that Mr Gumbel was a man devoted to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I was encouraged by his emphatic belief in the deity of Christ, the sin of mankind and the authority of Scriptures. Unfortunately, I feel that he is in danger of preaching Christianity PLUS. David Jackman argues that all heresies stem from adding or subtracting from the deposit of Biblical truth. He feels that earlier this century we were endangered by liberals denying Christ, His life, miracles, death, resurrection, ascension, virgin birth; the Scriptures and their infallibility; man and his sinful nature.

Now the pendulum has swung to the extent that people like Rodney Howard-Browne (probably the most lethal man in Christendom) can have an impeccable doctrinal statement that means very little, as there is so much in his practise that goes beyond it. Oh yes, we believe in the inerrancy of Scripture, but we leave it on the shelf and rely on anecdote and experience and 'ministry' (as Rodney himself unashamedly laughs: "the less I preached, the more people got saved"). Oh yes, we believe in salvation in Christ alone, but we don't preach Him alone – we preach a doctrine of subsequential, ecstatic Holy Spirit infillings. "For many the decisive moment is the Saturday evening of the weekend" (Telling Others, p120) when Nicky asks the Spirit to come.

Not when Christ is preached and there is a response of repentance and faith. The decisive moment is 'when the spirit comes'. If it is not a spirit which convicts of sin, righteousness and judgement (John 16:8) or who points to Christ as Saviour from that sin and judgement, and glorifies Him as the means of our righteousness (John 16:14, 2 Corinthians 5:21), then what sort of spirit is it? One that brings happy or peaceful feelings? The uniqueness of the Spirit of God is not that he papers over our cracks with psycho religious ritual, but that He brings us contrite to the only Way in which those cracks can be filled- the Lord Jesus Christ. As long as Gumbel's Gospel is distinctly Biblical and Christocentric, it is superb (at least 90% of his writing). When his writing wanders into defective pneumatology, reckless ecumenism and feelgood religion, it is disturbing. As Alan Morrison says of Kenneth Copeland and the Word of Faith crew, "It's not what you read on pages 1 to 10 that is the problem. It's what is lurking on page 11 that undermines everything."

It is those 'page 11s' that we will be examining now. Praise the Lord that they are mercifully few, but those that are in evidence merit serious attention as their ultimate corollary is the destruction of all the good teaching that Nicky has taken such pains to articulate. "My brethren, be not many [of you] masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation" James 3:1. My prayer is absolutely not that Nicky will be condemned – rather that he should examine these areas diligently and renew his stalwart efforts in evangelism, preaching a more full, more Biblical Gospel. As must we all!

Nicky Gumbel and the Gospel.

There are big problems with the Gospel according to Gumbel. For simplicity's sake, they can be roughly divided into two areas- defective pneumatology (symbolised by the city of Toronto) and a tendency to ecumenism, even syncretism (symbolised by the city of Rome)

Rome

It is manifest in all of Mr Gumbel's work that he regards the Catholic faith to be simply a rather traditional denomination of the true Christian Church.

He :

- alleges that Jesus "has approaching two billion followers" (Questions of life, p9), "amounting to 32.9% of the world population" (Searching Issues, p28). This means that 1 in 3 people in the world are Christians. Apart from being blatantly untrue, this kind of figure can only be reached if you count the Roman Catholic religion. Is that Christianity?
- quotes Catholics as if theirs is authentic Biblically Christian testimony. Mother Teresa (along with Jackie Pullinger) is one of his heroes.

In *How to find life in Challenging Lifestyle*, he records an interview with her. When Pope John Paul II visited her in Calcutta, it was “the happiest day of her life”. This is because he was pleased to give her a shelter in Rome to look after prostitutes.

He also quotes Catholic convert Malcolm Muggeridge on joy – “The most characteristic and uplifting of the manifestations of conversion is rapture – an inexpressible joy which suffuses our whole being, making our fears dissolve into nothing, and our expectations move heavenwards” (*Questions of life*, 126).

He admiringly cites the Pope, Father Maximilian Kobe, Father Tom Forrest (originator of the Pope’s phrase, ‘Decade of Evangelism’), etc. Are these Catholics Christians, and is their testimony reliable?

- Martin Luther and John Wesley are the third most quoted pair in Nicky’s work (10+ times each, after John Stott and C S Lewis). He also refers to other Reformed believers, such as Calvin (16th century), Whitefield (17th) and Spurgeon (19th). Highly bizarre is the way in which he quotes Luther and Vatican II in the same paragraph, with equal weight! Remember that Luther was excommunicated for heresy by the Catholic religion :

- Papal authorities ordered Luther to retract and submit to church authority, but he became more intransigent, appealing for reform, attacking the sacramental system, and urging that religion rest on individual faith based on the guidance contained in the Bible. Threatened with excommunication by the Pope, Luther publicly burned the bull, or papal decree, of excommunication and with it a volume of canon law. This act of defiance symbolised a definitive break with the entire system of the Western church” (*Encarta Encyclopedia*).

- Although “the Roman Catholic official view is that the Scriptures were ‘written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit have God as their author without error’” (*QoL*, p74), the Luther whom Gumbel so prevalently quotes obviously thought the Catholic church did not observe their own theory at all in practise. The Catholic church demanded that he recant, and they have never pardoned Luther. It is madness and contradiction to quote the Catholics and the Reformers in the same breath. They represent two different religions, both of which claim to be founded on Scripture. Who is correct? ·

“The same Spirit indwells Christians in Russia, China, Africa, America, the UK or wherever. In one sense it is not so important what denomination we are- Roman Catholic or Protestant; Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist, Pentecostal, Anglican or House Church. What is more important is whether or not we have the Spirit of God. If people have the Spirit of God living within them, they are Christians, and our brothers and sisters” (*What does the Holy Spirit do?* from *Questions of Life*). Gumbel makes the classic misinterpretation of Galatians 3:28 (“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus) and Colossians 3:11 (“Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all). He jumps the quantum leap from nationality to doctrinal belief. Paul is making an inclusive statement – it doesn’t matter what nationality or sex or class you come from, we’re all one. But he is also making an exclusive statement – it DOES matter what you believe, we’re all one only in Christ.

- The Alpha course is installed in many local Catholic churches. If there is anything unbiblical about Catholicism, Alpha is not the thing to expose it. Rather it smooths everything over and makes people cosy in their error: “Newcomers began to read the Scriptures, pray and attend Mass for the first time The Alpha method can be a wonderful and very effective [that word again!] tool for communicating the basics of orthodox Catholic faith” (Father Brian Hackney, who “added three extra sessions to suit the needs of his Anglo-Catholic congregation”). The Reformers died defending the Lord’s Supper as a remembrance, not a Real Presence. Here, people are encouraged to celebrate the eating of the literal flesh of Christ, all under the happy umbrella of Alpha. Alpha seems to be very effective indeed in “communicating the basics of the orthodox Catholic faith”, but that is no recommendation. When did the Catholic church ever save anybody’s soul? When did celebrating Mass get man right with God? It is JESUS WHO MUST BE

PROCLAIMED, NOT THE CATHOLIC CHURCH. If Alpha merely encourages Catholicism, then it is worse than a failure. If a man has cancer, you do not pat him on the back and give him a lollipop.

From the 8 Catholic testimonies I've read, here are some interesting statistics which demonstrate what kind of message Alpha is communicating to them :

· 'Alpha' mentioned 13 times · 'Catholic' mentioned 7 times ·
'Spirit' mentioned 6 times · '
Church' mentioned 6 times ·
'Christian(s)' mentioned 3 times ·
'Jesus' mentioned twice.

They seem most excited not about the message of Christ and His salvation, but at how you don't have to change the Alpha course at all, and it's perfectly compatible with Catholicism – "LEAVE IT AS IT IS. IT WORKS!" beams the chairman of Anglo-Catholic renewal, delighted that his ecumenicism is unhampered by Alpha, where it might be by the Bible. There will be two Roman Catholic Alpha conferences in 1997, backed by Cardinal Hume, but "we're planning to work quite extensively with post-Alpha material to link it in to Catholic doctrine" (David Payne).

If Alpha was a full gospel course, that would be impossible. Alpholatry is apparent by the fact that in the July and September issues of Alpha News, 'Alpha' is referred to in nearly all headlines :

"Archbishop of Canterbury speaks of his 'wholehearted' support for Alpha",
"Alpha spreads over USA and Canada",
"Alpha was the turning point of my life",
"Alpha praised for boosts in C of E church attendance",
"Premier to repeat Alpha broadcast",
"90 Polish leaders hear about Alpha",
"Alpha for old and young",
"Three generations of Alpha",
"How Alpha is working",
"Nothing has had as much impact on our church as Alpha",
"NY consultant is set to spread Alpha across North America", "Why so many need Alpha".

If only it looked like this :

"Archbishop of Canterbury speaks of his 'wholehearted' support for Jesus", "Jesus spreads over USA and Canada", "Jesus was the turning point of my life", "Jesus praised for boosts in C of E church attendance", "Premier to repeat Jesus broadcast", "90 Polish leaders hear about Jesus", "Jesus for old and young", "Three generations of Jesus", "How Jesus is working", "Nothing has had as much impact on our church as Jesus", "NY consultant is set to spread Jesus across North America", "Why so many need Jesus".

But no. This is the Gospel of Alpha, and Catholics for one are cock-a-hoop. Let us not forget that the Roman Catholic Church regards itself as not only the final authority on God, but the only conduit of salvation; that Mary is co-redeemer with Christ, who is crucified daily at Masses all around the world; that Purgatory exists; that priests can dispense forgiveness (even the Pharisees knew that only God can forgive sins); that saints should be prayed to and revered to the point of idolatry; that the Pope is given power to speak infallibly; and many other horrific twistings and outright denials of the Bible.

Although Gumbel stands by justification by grace through faith alone ("Paul expounds why no one can be justified by their own works, but only by grace through faith in Christ"), he supports Roman Catholicism, which utterly denies it, in fact, the Council of Trent in 1566 declared this doctrine to be ACCURSED, ANATHEMA.

We conclude this section with three quotes, one from J. C. Ryle (who is often quoted by Nicky Gumbel), one from Nicky, and the last from James McCarthy [my brackets]: "We owe an enormous debt to the Protestant Reformation it delivered England from gross religious ignorance and spiritual

darkness from the most grovelling, childish and superstitious practices in religion from the degrading tyranny and swindling impostures of the Romish priesthood from the plague of unholiness and immorality among the clergy.

We owe to the Reformation an English Bible, and liberty for every man, woman, and child in the land to read it an open road to the throne of grace and the great fountain of peace with God a true idea of Christian worship a true notion of the office of a Christian minister a right standard of Christian holiness For ever let us thank God for the Reformation. It lighted a candle which ought never to be extinguished or allowed to grow dim. And for ever let us remember that the Reformation was won for us by the blood of the martyrs, quite as much as by their preaching and praying, and writing and legislation. It was forged in the fires of Oxford, and Smithfield. It cost the lives of one Archbishop, four Bishops, and 280 other men and women. Shall we in this century talk lightly of the great work which they did? Shall we hold cheaply the privileges which they won? Shall we entertain for a moment the idea of forsaking Reformation principles and going back to Rome? Once more I say, God forbid! The man who counsels such base apostasy and suicidal folly must be judicially blind. The iron collar has been broken; let us not put it on again. The prison has been thrown open; let us not resume the yoke and return to our chains. [George Carey is that man today.

May Nicky Gumbel either repudiate his boss' folly and preach Christ to unconverted Catholics; or STOP QUOTING MARTIN LUTHER, JOHN CALVIN, JOHN WESLEY AND J C RYLE with whom he cannot agree if he regards Catholicism as 'just another denomination'] J C Ryle, What we owe to the Reformation, (late 19th century). We need to follow the words of Jesus and cut out our petty squabbles and our judgementalism. We need to stop criticising other denominations [including Catholicism] and other traditions within our own denominations. We need to forget the past [the unrepented-of blood of martyrs, the excommunications, the increasingly heretical doctrines], drop the labels and unite around the person of Jesus Christ. We need to get on with the task that he has given us until he comes again. Then he will do the judging and his judgement will be perfect.

Nicky Gumbel, How to handle criticism (Challenging Lifestyle). Vatican II (1962-65) stated that the goal of the Church's ecumenical strategy was the unity of all Christian churches through common communion with the Roman Catholic Church [820-822, 855] : "The results will be that, little by little, as the obstacles to perfect ecclesiastical communion are overcome, all Christians will be gathered, in a common celebration of the Eucharist, into the unity of the one and only Church, which Christ bestowed on his church from the beginning.

This unity, we believe, subsists in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose, and we hope that it will continue to increase until the end of time". Though Rome has yet to achieve its ultimate purpose, it has succeeded in undermining the commitment of many Christians to the evangelisation of Catholics [PRAY THAT NICKY & ALPHA WILL NOT BE AMONG THEM]. Consider, for example, the 1994 signing in the US of an accord titled Evangelicals & Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium.

In it leading evangelicals and Roman Catholics stated that "evangelicals and Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ". They labelled the evangelisation of active members of each other's flocks as illegitimate theology and "sheep stealing", and resolved "to explore patterns of working and witnessing together in order to advance the one mission of Christ".

Such ecumenical compromise must be opposed. There is no room in Biblical Christianity for unity or cooperation with Rome and its false gospel, its continuing sacrifice, and its idolatrous devotion to Mary. As long as the Roman Catholic Church continues "to regard the Scriptures, taken together with sacred Tradition, as the supreme rule of her faith," there is not even a common basis for dialogue. James G. McCarthy, The Gospel According to Rome. Conclusion Just after writing this, I got a chance to interview Mr. Gumbel. He is resolute that the Catholic religion is just another denomination of the Christian faith, and is happy with anything that calls itself Trinitarian. He has read Vatican 2 and can find nothing wrong with it. All his Catholic friends are very happy with Alpha

too We must reject the ethos and teaching of Nicky Gumbel and Holy Trinity Brompton; 1 – They accept Catholic heresy and encourage others to. 2 – They endorse Vatican 2, the Catechism and the Counsels which enthrone Mary as co-redeemer with Christ, which declare justification by faith alone to be accursed, and which have never retracted the atrocities of the centuries committed against the true Christian church. 3 – They preach ecumenical churchianity, and not Christ and Him crucified alone; they desire the complete fusion of all professing Christians (false and true) into one millennial super faith – with the Bible and the uniqueness of our Saviour discarded (see Jan. 1996 HTB In Focus newspaper for plans for the ecumenical millennium village). Let us also with love and supplication beseech the Lord to have mercy on those bent upon the perversion of His truth and those affected by them. Link to this posting: <http://www.firstplumbline.net/html/aboutdrnickygumbal.html>

What is Alpha?

Alpha The following information comes from Deception in the Church web site

The Alpha Course is a course that has been used by many as a way to attempt to introduce the false doctrines and practices of the Third Wave into mainstream denominations. I was dumbfounded when I found out some of the people who endorse this course. Among them were the Salvation Army and, most notably, Luis Palau. Here is his endorsement that is featured on the Alpha Course web page: “Alpha seems especially blessed in that the Lord is using it to reach all sorts of people in all sorts of spiritual condition.” The Alpha Course, though teaching some truth, also lays truth alongside error. The wooing of people using the gospel message, only to later enslave them in ritualism, works salvation, and occult manifestations is one of the great deceptions of our time. One of the cleverest ploys of the enemy in our day is to allow “unprincipled” men to use the salvation message as an enticement to unsuspecting and untrained people, while they secretly introduce false doctrine, thereby giving “the devil a foothold” for fleshly manifestations and temptations in their lives.

The men who designed this course are laying error alongside truth, introducing error secretly (“pareisaxousinin” in Greek) the result of which will ruin the faith of the believer in the end. The Bible says of this process: “But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them— bringing swift destruction on themselves.” (2 Pet. 2:1) Beware of the Alpha Course! Perhaps the preachers and evangelists who have endorsed this course need to take a longer look at their Bibles. Jesus NEVER laid hands on his disciples, the result of which were “manifestations” of uncontrollable laughter, mayhem, shaking, animal noises, vomiting, or any of the other demonic disorder of the Toronto and Brownsville “things”.

Luis Palau, of all people, had better wake up to this deception that is sweeping the churches of Europe and is now being used around the world. For a good critique on the dangers of this course, visit this web site : “The Alpha Course” by Chris Hand

Also, ready this analysis : “Alpha Course Goes Nationwide In Britain” by Tricia Tillin Following are two e-mails, then an article detailing the dangers of the Alpha Course. The first e-mail confirms that Luis Palau has indeed endorsed this dangerous course. The second alerts Christians to the fact the the Church of Rome is now using the course for its own purposes.

The article following is a critique of the Alpha Course. We hope you will find this information useful when some member of your church attempts to introduce this course into your church! Dr. Nicky Gumbel