



## The Burning Bush—Online article archive

### Alpha Course leader extols the pope



Nicky Gumbel meets the Pope

**Prominent Alpha Course speaker, Nicky Gumbel, recently visited and paid homage to the Pope. It is another clear indication of the endorsement the Roman Catholic church gives to the contents of the Alpha Course which is so popular with ecumenists. It is also a clear indication of the erroneous character of the doctrines it promotes. That which has the imprimatur of the Pope cannot be accepted or trusted by the Christian.**

From the first emergence of the “Alpha Course,” those who value orthodoxy have voiced their concerns. Many mocked them for doing so and claimed that they were jealous of its popularity. Who can now say that such criticisms were not well-founded? Mr Gumbel – along with his wife Pippa and son Jonny, was presented to the Pope by “Father” Raniero Cantalamessa, Preacher to the Papal Household, at the end of a General Audience in the Paul VI Audience Hall in the Vatican. “Father” Raniero has been a friend since the two men met at a conference in Frankfurt in 1999. Also introduced was Kitty Arbuthnott, head of Alpha for Catholics, who presented the Pope with a painting of the Prodigal Son by artist Charlie Mackesy, whose drawings illustrate the Alpha manuals.

Nicky Gumbel is well in with the Roman Catholic hierarchy as is seen in the welcome given him at Rome. During his five-day visit to Rome he met representatives of the Congregation on the Doctrine of the Faith, the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the Sant’Egidio Community, the Focolare Movement and the Rome School of Evangelisation run by the Emmanuel Community. He also met Cardinal Stafford, who was until recently President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, and the Rev. Nicholas Hudson, Rector of the Venerable English College.

#### **Rome’s interest**

An increasing number of cardinals and senior Roman Catholic clergy are encouraging the course’s growth as they seek to fulfil the Pope’s call for a “new evangelisation”. Cardinal Philippe Barbarin, Archbishop of Lyon, France, has taken a close interest in the growth of Alpha in the country. Alpha is clearly seen as a means of advancing Romanism. It cannot be an instrument for promoting the gospel as well!

#### **France**

Speaking on the new Alpha introductory video, Cardinal Philippe Barbarin, said, “For the French church, Alpha is a great opportunity for our time. It is a wonderful gift that we have received from England.” In January, around 600 Catholic lay leaders and priests attended an Alpha conference in Paris, where a fifth of all Catholic churches now run the Alpha course. The conference was run by the French Alpha office.

#### **Scotland**

The Roman Catholic church in Scotland is being encouraged to use Alpha by Cardinal Keith O’Brien, Archbishop of St Andrews and Edinburgh. Writing in the brochure for the Glasgow



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Alpha conference, he said, "A priority for me on my appointment as Cardinal was the 're-Christianisation of Scotland'. I see the Alpha course as an initial and very important tool for this programme – bringing together those who are seeking the way ahead through the following of the Christian faith."

### USA

In America, the course is having an impact on hundreds of Catholic parishes – and it is spreading fast. In April 1999, more than 500 Catholic clergy and lay leaders attended a conference in Baltimore introduced on video by Cardinal William H. Keeler, Archbishop of Baltimore. Roman Catholic parishes using Alpha all over the world are experiencing "a new dynamism and sense of mission in their local congregations." One Roman Catholic lay leader, Mrs Mary Hagar, of Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA, runs Alpha in two parishes near her home. She said, "I have been doing evangelisation programmes in the Catholic church for 30 years. We have been trying to evangelise people with minimal to poor to dismal success. I went to an Alpha training programme on the east coast and I came out saying, 'This is what I've looked for my whole life. This is the programme that is going to change lives.' The first course far exceeded our expectations in numbers of people signing up and after the Holy Spirit weekend, the testimonies verbally and in writing were astounding. For those of us who are Catholic, Alpha is the tool that is bringing into reality in our lifetime the church we have always dreamed of."

On his return from Rome, Gumbel said: "It was a great honour to be presented to Pope John Paul II, who has done so much to promote evangelisation around the world. We have been enormously enriched by our interaction with Catholics in many countries. It is a great privilege to meet inspiring leaders from different parts of the church – Catholic, Baptist, Salvation Army, Pentecostal, Lutheran, Methodist, and so many more – and discover that what unites us is infinitely greater than what divides us."

### The truth

Just what is the Alpha course achieving? I have no doubt that it is preparing the way for a universal religion which bears some resemblance to Christianity but most definitely is not the religion of Jesus Christ. It is that religion spoken of by Paul in 2 Timothy 3:5. "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." It will bear some likeness to the gospel but will have no power to save souls and alter lives. Alpha is paving the way of Antichristianity. Nicky Gumbel's embracing of Romanism and its pope shows this to be so.

No true Christian can have anything to do with it. As Paul says: "from such turn away."