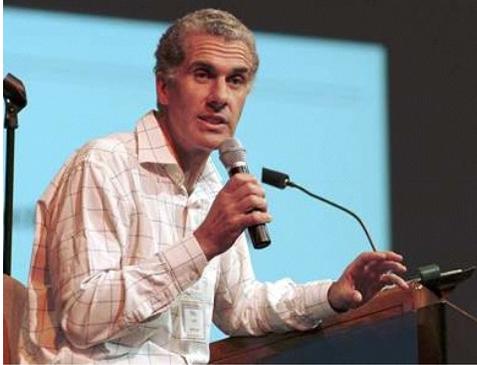




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'Alpha' on course for Rome!



Nicky Gumbel

Amidst vehement denials by those “evangelicals” within ecumenical denominations, which have heralded “The Alpha Course” series of meetings as a revival of gospel truth, it is becoming undeniable that the whole “Alpha” set-up is thoroughly ecumenical and pro-union with Rome.

Long ago Nicky Gumbel hailed the pope as a great Christian leader and the course has been welcomed by Roman Catholic spokesmen as a means of rejuvenating flagging attendances at the Mass! That left little doubt as to the true nature of the “Alpha” programme. Back in our February issue of 1998, we reported:

“Protestant and Roman Catholic churches in North Belfast are jointly offering the charismatic Alpha Course to their congregations in a bid to promote ecumenical unity.

One of the organisers, Rev. Tom Wilson, said, “It is not focused on divisive issues but rather covers important foundational areas that many Christians, whatever their denominational background, share in common. It is not surprising therefore that both Catholics and Protestants are interested in running Alpha.”

Leaders from the Church of the Resurrection (RC), Fortwilliam Park Presbyterian church, Rosemary Presbyterian church, St. Gerard’s (RC) and St. Peter’s Church of Ireland have already begun to meet for prayer and training. “These meetings were characterised by open, warm relationships, by committed application to the task in hand and by a strong spirit of Christian unity,” says Rev. Wilson.”

That trend has continued.

We reprint the text of an article from a Canadian publication, “Christian Week”, on a recent visit by Nicky Gumbel, the leader of the “Alpha Course” organisation, to Canada.

“**QUEBEC CITY** — A popular evangelistic program developed in the Church of England is making inroads with Canada’s Roman Catholic population. Cardinal Marc Ouellet, Canada’s top Roman Catholic cleric, met August 1 in Quebec City with Nicky Gumbel, the inspiration behind the growth of the Alpha movement. Several days later, Gumbel met with Cardinal Aloysius Ambrozic, head of the Archdiocese of Toronto.

Many see Gumbel’s session with Ouellet as particularly significant, as Ouellet is the senior Canadian Catholic leader and widely viewed as a possible future papal successor. Gumbel, who launched the Alpha movement in London’s Holy Trinity Brompton Church nearly two decades ago, met with the two cardinals during a cross-Canada summer tour.



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“It was a privilege to meet with Cardinal Ouellet,” said Gumbel. “We were impressed with his vision for Canada and his emphasis on unity, the Holy Spirit and evangelization — and his concern for young people.”

Later during his Quebec visit, Gumbel spoke to 250 Quebecois, addressing the question: “Can a nation be changed?”

Although about 85 per cent of Quebec’s population is Roman Catholic, only about six per cent currently attend church, according to Jean-Philippe Auger, parish priest at Ste-Anne-de-Beaupre and Alpha advisor in Quebec.

Half of the Quebec audience was French Catholic, coming from several of the 100 parishes that run the Alpha in that province. Auger suggests that the ecumenical nature of Alpha helps to ameliorate some of the tensions, many of which are still recent and real, between French and English, Catholics and Protestants.

An advocate for Alpha in a French Catholic context is newly-appointed Bishop Gilles Lemay. When he was still a parish priest, he introduced Alpha to his church.

In Ontario, Gumbel met with the Archbishop of Toronto, Cardinal Aloysius Ambrozic. The Toronto archdiocese comprises 1.4 million Roman Catholics and 223 parishes, some of which are offering the Alpha Course.

“It was a pleasure to meet with Cardinal Ambrozic,” said Gumbel, “and to share with him some of our experience working with Roman Catholics around the world.”

Gumbel spoke of his Canadian Catholic contacts when he met with a few dozen Christian leaders in the Parliament Buildings, under the sponsorship of Senator Anne Cools, a committed Anglican.

Under Gumbel’s leadership, Alpha, a series of supper meetings incorporating teaching videos on the basics of Christianity and open discussion about Jesus Christ, has rapidly spread both into evangelical denominations and Roman Catholic churches. Gumbel says there are currently 32,000 Alpha groups in 153 countries and 55 languages, involving seven million people.”