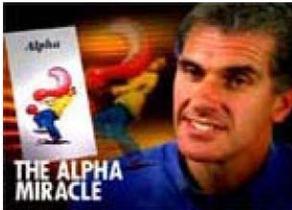




The Burning Bush—Online article archive

Free Presbyterian Church protests against ecumenical conference and its sponsoring of the *Alpha Course*



A typical Alpha Course blurb

Rev. David Priestley, minister of WP Nicholson Memorial Free Presbyterian Church in Bangor, Co. Down, recently wrote a letter of protest upon learning of an ecumenical conference having taken place in Bangor, organised by the Church of Ireland and sponsoring the Alpha Course. Here is the text of his letter to the local newspaper, *The County Down Spectator*.

"As reported in last week's issue, the special ecumenical conference sponsored by the Church of Ireland and held in the Bangor Elim Centre promoted the Alpha Course. Alpha claims to be a tremendous success, an efficient evangelistic tool. The course gives a prominent place to the Holy Spirit. In John 16:8 we see something of what the work of the Holy Spirit is, And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness and of judgment. The Spirit of God convicts of sin, lays open the wound before the healing balm of the Gospel is applied. Does the Alpha Course confront men and women with the exceeding sinfulness of sin? Does it show them that they are lost, children of wrath with hearts deceitful above all things and desperately wicked? Nicky Gumbel in his book, Questions of Life Page 18, writes, ' In every human being the image of God has been to a greater or lesser extent tarnished and in some cases almost eradicated by sin. Good and bad, strength and weakness coexist in all human beings.' The Scriptures teach that man has entirely lost the image of God, that he is totally depraved. Romans 3:12, They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Romans 5:6, For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. See also Ephesians 2:12.

This failure by the Alpha Course to show man his ruin by the fall will not wring from the heart the cry of the publican, 'God be merciful to me a sinner,' Luke 18:13. Without conviction of sin there will be no true repentance. Alpha promotes a casual, easy believism, a fact borne out by its own literature. Here is the testimony of Alex Livingstone in Alpha News July/October 1997 Page 9. 'I still needed some physical evidence of the existence of God. Part of the course was the Holy Spirit Weekend at a camp, which I wasn't looking forward to. I went and maintained a stone wall approach until the second day - suddenly a feeling of joy came over me and I began to laugh uncontrollably. At that point I knew that I had become a Christian.'

Where in the Scriptures do we read of souls laughing their way to the Saviour? This is foreign to the true Gospel of Christ. When we also consider that the Alpha Course is strongly ecumenical and charismatic in its nature, clearly it is part of the end time delusion and is not Scripturally sound. The words of Paul in Ephesians 5:11 are timely to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.

Finally, are we to conclude since this conference was held in the Bangor Elim Centre that it now gives its approval to ecumenism and endorses the Alpha Course?



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Rev. David Priestley.

A recent article in the *Daily Telegraph*, written to extol the man at the heart of the Alpha Course, Nicky Gumbel, gives a further insight into its errors and unscriptural character. The article, written in that gushy form of parlance that the giddy-minded consider very modern and 'with-it', treats Gumbel as a sort of pop celebrity and his ministry as the latest popular craze. "Alpha is now in 130 countries and has been completed by one million in Britain and two million abroad. Somehow he has rebranded Christianity and made it a label people - and particularly young people - want to wear." In speaking of the Alpha Course as a "label people - and particularly young people - want to wear", the writer tells us much about the real nature of this trendy religious movement. The Word of God tells Christians: Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you, 1 John 3:13. Nicky Gumbel, it is claimed, has managed that which the apostles could not nor expected to do — make Christianity popular!

The article continues: "It has been acknowledged by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr George Carey, the Bishop of London and the late Cardinal Hume as a powerful tool at work in the Christian Church." Does not such an endorsement by the champions of ecumenical apostasy identify the deceitfulness of this course with its mixture of biblical terms and the theology of error?

It is further claimed that Gumbel and his Alpha Course "has helped Jonathan Aitken, the disgraced Tory minister, Samantha Fox, the former Page Three girl, and Geri Halliwell, the pop singer, to faith." Such a claim, were it not so blasphemous, would be riotously funny. The two females mentioned are widely reported in the media as cavorting, half-naked, around the world in a fashion that indicates anything but conversion to Christ. The standards of the truly converted are set down in the Bible. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life, Romans 6:22. *Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord*, Hebrews 12:14. Listen to the blasphemy of Nicky Gumbel as pride obviously takes control of his heart. "I say the prayer 'Come Holy Spirit' and stand back. Then people have a profound and life-changing experience. All I do is say three words. I can't take the credit and I can't take the blame." I challenge any to show me any apostle of Christ uttering such an inverted boast!

That the Elim Church in Bangor is involved with this is very sad. I have no doubt that there are believers in the Elim movement who will be most unhappy to find themselves linked with this deception. I will let Nick Gumbel tell them just what it is they are now associated with. "Young people like the fact that the same course runs in a Catholic, Baptist or Pentecostal church." Does more need to be said?