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The Alpha Course -- Satan's latest device to deceive believers



The Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster opposes this evil thing as a counterfeit and a fraud that will only undermine the true gospel of Christ and work havoc amongst those who submit to its instruction. On this page we give some information on The Alpha Course. We call on true believers to resist its inroads and, where it is welcomed, to withdraw from such a church in obedience to Christ's call to separate from that which is of the devil. *And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them*, Ephesians 5:11. *Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them*, Romans 16:17. *If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed*, 2 John 1:10.

The Editor.

The Alpha Course contains nothing new. However, that does not make it orthodox. It simply contains no new lie or new presentation of error. It is, at best, a rehash of the old charismatic fables and fancies mixed in with new ageism and plain old-fashioned baloney!

The Alpha Course must have made a fortune for its chief proponents, as well as making them household names in some quarters. It is promoted in a slick, professional manner which deceives many into thinking that such is the method of God. If there was one thing about the Saviour, He was not slick. He was not of that mould of evangelists that the world has come to think of as typical of a Christian -- the perpetually grinning popstar-like being, genial, casually youthful with the well rehearsed joke and glib patter. That is The Alpha Course man. But it bears no resemblance to the character and person of Christ and His disciples. They were far removed from the modern preacher, bursting with self-confidence and oily charm. These modern "apostles" are welcome guests on the television chat shows and readily given a column in the newspapers, while Christ and His apostles were reviled . . . persecuted . . . defamed . . . the offscouring of all things, 1 Corinthians 4:12-13.

The source of The Alpha Course renders it suspect indeed. It has its origins in a Church of England congregation in London. "Twenty years ago," we are told, "Charles Marnham, a clergyman at Holy Trinity Brompton, London, began looking for a means of presenting the basic principles of the Christian faith to new Christians in a relaxed and informal setting. He devised the Alpha Course." Can any good thing come out of the most apostate denomination in the United Kingdom? The Church of England has tolerated sodomy as a legitimate lifestyle and has acknowledged sodomite and lesbians amongst its clerics. Its principal theologians reject the Bible and mock the person of Christ, His deity, His incarnation, His death and resurrection, His coming again in glory and power to judge men. Who ever heard of revival emanating out of Sodom or Gomorrah? The doctrines taught and the methods employed by The Alpha Course are not of the Bible. The "testimonies" that The



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Alpha Course pushes, as examples of the wonderful work of the Holy Spirit in their midst, bear no resemblance whatever to Biblical conversions. Rather, they testify to the evil sham that The Alpha Course is. These experiences are merely mental delusions induced by high pressure salemanship! One can only guess at the havoc such experiences will work in the lives of the duped.

ROME'S APPROVAL

The growing use of The Alpha Course by the Roman Catholic Church must only confirm to the true Christian the erroneous nature of this system of instruction. Anything that Rome claims is helping to renew her cannot be of God. Here is part of the statement that may be found on the official Alpha website. "Demand for Alpha among Roman Catholics in Britain has proved so strong that hundreds of priests and lay people have been booked to attend three Roman Catholic Alpha conferences scheduled for 1997, including two at London's Westminster Cathedral Hall. At the first of these conferences, in April, Cardinal Basil Hume, Archbishop of Westminster and leader of the church in England, sent a message of support and Bishop Ambrose Griffiths, of Hexham and Newcastle, opened the event. Bishop Griffiths said, 'The course is simple, direct, illustrated by wonderful stories... It doesn't contain anything that is contrary to Catholic doctrine. What's more, it provides in wonderful form the basis of Christian belief which many Catholics have never cottoned on to...' The Rt. Rev'd David Konstant, Bishop of Leeds, said, 'The Alpha course is a valuable contribution to our commitment to evangelisation as we move towards the new millennium.' On the other side of the world, Cardinal Thomas Williams, Archbishop of Wellington, New Zealand, was due to open the Waikanae Alpha Conference in July."

What the Roman Catholic Church says about "The Alpha Course"

The following quotations are taken from the booklet: "Alpha for Catholics -- Questions & Answers".

Within the Catholic Church, the priority for evangelisation is very clear. Pope Paul VI stated: "Evangelising is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelise". Evangelii Nuntiandi (para. 14) Pope John-Paul II has continued to stress the importance of the Church's mission: "I sense the moment has come to commit all of the Church's energies to a new evangelisation and mission to the nations. No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples." Redemptoris Missio (para. 3)

What has been unclear to many of us, as Catholics, is how to implement this priority for evangelisation. For some, the very word "evangelisation", seems foreign and Protestant, and so it has been difficult to know how to respond to the Church's call to reach out to others. We believe that Alpha, a practical introduction to the Christian faith, can be used as an effective tool for evangelisation. For several years the Alpha course has been used in the main stream churches. Since 1996, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of Catholic parishes using Alpha. This has led to a demand to examine closely a course originating from a non-Catholic tradition.

What is Catholic Alpha?

Catholic Alpha refers to the promotion of the Alpha course within the Catholic Church, through the work of the Catholic Alpha Office. Catholic Alpha involves the situating of the



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Alpha course within a Catholic parish or organisation. Catholic Alpha uses the Alpha course as it stands, but recognises that for Catholics, and those wishing to become Catholics, much more teaching is needed after Alpha.

Is Alpha compatible with Catholic teaching?

The basic thrust of Alpha is to communicate the essentials of the Christian faith, with its understanding of God, of Jesus Christ - his incarnation, death and resurrection - and of the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is the historic faith expressed in the ancient creeds. It is, therefore, compatible with Catholic teaching.

Can Alpha work well for Catholics?

Jenny Baker from The Sacred Heart Parish, Berkhamsted writes: Yes. From our experience of running numerous Alpha courses since 1996, we have found that Alpha brings a sound understanding and deepening of the Christian faith. Specifically Catholic areas, such as teaching on the sacraments, can be added as further development after the course. In fact for some of us Alpha created a hunger to gain more knowledge and several people from our parish went on to do the CCRS course and others the pastoral ministry course.

What are the benefits for the parish? Alpha benefits the parish in a number of ways: Alpha provides an effective tool for evangelisation Alpha helps to reach the unchurched and the lapsed Alpha feeds RCIA and other programmes (see next paragraph for meaning of RCIA) Alpha supports the on-going process of adult formation Alpha helps to build community Alpha often encourages people to become more involved in the liturgical life of the parish Alpha provides an ecumenical witness

How does Alpha link with RCIA?

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults was formally promulgated by the Catholic Church in 1971, as the way of becoming a Catholic. It was one of the elements of renewal following the Second Vatican Council. The concrete question that arises over RCIA and Alpha is rarely one of having to recommend one against the other. This question often concerns somebody who has already followed the Alpha course and wants to become a Catholic. The answer is simply: the RCIA is the next step. The Alpha course is essentially about finding and responding to the call of Jesus Christ, with the understanding that the next step is to join, or rejoin an actual Christian community. The RCIA is the way to join the Catholic Church. Neither can be a substitute for the other.

What happens after Alpha?

. Many Catholics who go on an Alpha course come out renewed and refreshed in their faith. Their next step is to sustain others and to find sustenance themselves to live their baptism in their Catholic community to the full. A comment from one who has participated in Alpha courses in a Catholic parish "Regular church-going Catholics experience a deepening of faith; the uncommitted or lapsed come to realise what they have been missing and return to Mass. Unbelievers meet the person of Jesus Christ; some have moved onto RCIA. Some go to follow-up groups or come back to help on the next course." Pauline Sheridan, St Joseph's, Upminster.

These quotations, some of which we have underlined for the sake of emphasis, show that The Alpha Course is helping to build the Roman Catholic Church. That,



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above all other considerations, indicates that this course does not present the gospel.

God is calling people out of Rome but the Alpha Course is bringing people back to her evil embrace.

ALPHA-PROMOTING MINISTERS CHALLENGED TO DEBATE THE ISSUES

On Lord's Day evening, 1st October, Rev. Ivan Foster preached on the subject, "The Alpha Course --a fraudulent gospel." At the end of the message he issued a challenge to those ministers in the area who promoted The Alpha Course.

Here is the letter he wrote to the local newspaper, The Impartial Reporter, the reply that was published from the local Presbyterian minister and his response to that reply.

The Editor, The Impartial Reporter, East Bridge Street, Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh. Tue, Oct 3, 2000.

Dear Editor,

As advertised in your newspaper, last Lord's Day evening in our church, I preached upon the subject: "The Alpha Course --a fraudulent gospel." During the course of the sermon, I challenged those local ministers who promoted The Alpha Course amongst their congregations to defend their actions in the light of the Bible and the doctrinal standards of historic Protestantism.

I wish through the columns of your newspaper to repeat that challenge. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland, the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland all have doctrinal creeds and statements which their ministers are bound to uphold. I would contend that The Alpha Course promotes a view of God and His saving purpose in Christ that is contrary to historic Protestantism as represented by the aforementioned creeds. To promote this course is therefore to promote that which is contrary to the ordination vows of the ministers of these denominations.

Added to this, are the implications of the growing use of The Alpha Course by the Roman Catholic Church. It has become a powerful means of reviving the teachings of Roman Catholicism according to her spokesmen on this subject. To true believers that must be the ultimate proof that The Alpha Course is a fraudulent gospel.

I therefore repeat my challenge to the local Protestant ministers who promote The Alpha Course. What you are promoting is contrary to the teachings of the Bible and the creeds of historic Protestantism and you are therefore in breach of your ordination vows.

I would be ready at any convenient time and place to debate this matter publicly with any of those local ministers who advocate and defend The Alpha Course.

I await with interest a response to this challenge.



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Yours faithfully,
Ivan Foster.

Dear Sir

I write reluctantly. Our church is using the Alpha Course at present so I stand among the accused in the letter from Rev Foster. I will not be defending Alpha or myself in this letter or in a public debate because I do not consider myself answerable and accountable to other ministers.

I want to make two points, and I hope to do so in a way which models the gospel both in what I say and how I say it. First I believe that differences between Christians should be dealt with first of all privately and in a spirit of love and mutual respect rather than through the press.

We in the historic Protestant denominations have become accustomed to being addressed for the last 40 years by our critics by protest, placard, picket, denunciation in pulpit, pamphlet and press, on occasion even anonymous letters and phone calls. The gospel demands a different way; a personal relationship within which real listening and understanding can happen, and where the truth can be spoken in love as God commands. Your brother is your brother, even if you differ; he is not your enemy.

Of course, if you are Elijah confronting the prophets of Baal and the apostate nation, you will think this doesn't apply. But it will only be when I am recognised as a Christian, and my ministry and church regarded as genuine, I will feel able to give respect to those who want to correct me. Until then I cannot.

Second, I and my ministry will be judged by God on the Great Day and I work constantly with that in mind. My convictions are expressed perfectly by the words of Paul in 1st Corinthians. "If any man builds on this foundation (Jesus Christ) using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames. I care very little if I am judged by you or any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself.

My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God." (chs 3:12-15, 4:3-5)

THE REV. DAVID CUPPLES,
Enniskillen Presbyterian Church.



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Mon, Oct 16, 2000.

Dear Sir,

I would have thought that Rev. David Cupples, minister of Enniskillen Presbyterian Church, might have considered himself obligated to respond to a charge of teaching doctrine which is in violation of his church's standards and his ordination oath. Obviously I misjudged him and he can live with such a charge going unchallenged.

Having stated that he would not respond to my challenge, he then sets out to justify his rather strange response. He says that differences between Christians should be dealt with in private rather than in public through the columns of a newspaper. It was he and his friends who used the newspaper to announce that they were promoting the Alpha Course in their churches and thus made the issue a public one. Furthermore, while issues that relate only to differences between individuals should, when possible, be dealt with in private, that is not the nature of this dispute. The promotion of the errors of the Alpha Course is no private matter and must therefore be conducted before the full scrutiny of those whose lives and souls this false system of teaching will impact upon. It was in this fashion that Christ acted against the errors of those who professed to be followers of Jehovah. Paul, in like manner, confronted Peter when he acted wrongly. Here are Paul's own words on the incident to which I refer. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? (Galatians 2:14). I underline the words that clearly indicate that Paul's rebuking of Peter was a public matter. Does not the most of the New Testament comprise of writings containing public rebukes of the wrong-doings of believers?

His use of 1 Cor 3:12-15 and 4:3-5 to suggest that my challenge was unscriptural and that his reaction is on a parallel to that of the attitude of the apostle Paul to criticism, is a misuse of the Word of God. Paul refused to rush forward to reply to those who spoke derisively of his ministry and achievements, for to react to such criticism would appear too much like boasting for Paul's comfort. He would leave the matter with the Lord and await the judgment of Christ on the matter.

However, when criticism mounted against him threatened to hinder his effectiveness and standing as a minister of the gospel, Paul most certainly did reply to his opponents no matter how his response was construed. A consideration of 2 Cor 11:16 --12:12 will sufficiently demonstrate this truth. But the issue is not my opinion of Rev. David Cupples. The issue is the erroneous nature of the doctrines that he and others are teaching through the Alpha Course. It is right to pass judgment NOW on that matter and not leave it to the day of judgment. Indeed, the Saviour showed that such an ignoring of error was very wrong when He condemned the Pharisees for not judging error and sin, Matthew 23:23. Might I remind Rev. Cupples that he did not always follow the course he now finds convenient to espouse. He engaged in a judging and condemning of the religious views of others the night he made his ordination vow and signed the Westminster Stan-



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dards and thereby declared, amongst other things: There is no other head of the Church, but the Lord Jesus Christ; nor can the Pope of Rome, in any sense, be head thereof; but is that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself, in the Church against Christ and all that is called God. (Chapter 25, paragraph 6).

I can but leave the unwillingness of Rev. Cupples to answer my challenge to the discernment of others and to offer to substantiate my allegations against the Alpha Course in the form of literature to anyone who contacts me requesting such.

Yours faithfully,

Ivan Foster.

Rev. Cupples did not respond to this second letter from Rev. Foster.