



MEDIA SPOTLIGHT

A BIBLICAL ANALYSIS OF RELIGIOUS & SECULAR MEDIA

SPECIAL REPORT

THE ALPHA COURSE

CHAPTER AND VERSE ON ALPHA'S JESUS

By Dusty Peterson and Elizabeth McDonald

INTRODUCTION

By Albert James Dager

Few Christians today have not heard of the Alpha Course, offered to churches as an opportunity to explain the Christian faith to those who do not know Christ or to Christians who want to review their faith. The following introduction to Alpha is found on the course's Web site:

Alpha is a ten-week opportunity to explore the validity and relevance of the Christian faith for our lives today. It is a practical introduction to the basics of Christianity with loads of opportunity for debate and discussion. The style of Alpha is informal, friendly and non-pressured.

Alpha is enjoyed and appreciated as much by those who have never set foot in a church as it is by those who once attended and by the regular churchgoer. No matter what their background, whether investigating Christianity for the first time or revisiting their faith, participants get a lot out of an Alpha Course.

Each week people meet together for a meal, a talk on topics such as "Who is Jesus?", "Why Did Jesus Die?", "How Can I be Sure of My Faith?", and "Does God Still Heal Today?", followed by small group interaction. There is a day or weekend retreat midway through the course, which focuses on the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

There are over 5,000 Alpha courses running in the U.S. and about 1,000,000 people in America and Canada have already participated. Most Americans live within easy access of an Alpha course.

Churches of every different type and background, including Anglican, Baptist, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Methodist, Pentecostal, Salvation Army, Free Church and House Churches are running Alpha.

Because Alpha covers the basics of Christianity all churches provide the same material, making alterations only to suit the local culture. Alpha originated at Holy Trinity Brompton—an Anglican church in London, England over twenty years ago. The syllabus of the course is contained in the Book "Questions of Life" by Revd. Nicky Gumbel. Thousands of Alpha courses are now running in many countries and it has been translated into many different languages.

Holy Trinity Brompton is the birthplace in England of the "holy laughter" movement inherited from Toronto Vineyard, and its subsequent, more bizarre aspects that spread throughout the United States by way of Brownsville Assembly of God. (See our special reports, Holy Laughter, and Pensacola: Revival or Reveling?)

According to Alpha, "Over 1,000,000 people have now attended an Alpha course in North America alone." Following are some endorsements by prominent Christian leaders:

Bill Hybels, Senior Pastor, Willow Creek Community Church:

We stand alongside others who have a similar passion for leading people into vital relationships with Jesus Christ. We applaud the vision and work of Alpha Ministry to connect the unconnected to the life of the local church and to relationship with Jesus Christ.

Bill Bright, President, Campus Crusade for Christ:

Alpha is definitely a powerful tool for reaching the lost for Christ and helping them mature in their faith.

J.I. Packer, Professor of Theology, Regent College, Vancouver, B.C.:

The Alpha course is a most engaging way of passing on the basics of Christianity. It is a tool for evangelism and nurture that I highly recommend.



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Charles W. Colson, Founder, Prison Fellowship Ministries:

I know of many people whose lives have been transformed through the Alpha Course. I rejoice at how God is using it so powerfully to renew many churches both inside and outside prison walls.

The "Rt. Rev." Herbert Thompson, Jr., Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of Southern Ohio:

The Alpha course is a superb vehicle for seeking and evangelizing non-Christians, the unchurched and the nominally churched. Would that every Episcopal Church had an Alpha course for we would be truly embracing the Great Commission of Jesus our Lord.

Luis Palau, Evangelist:

Alpha seems especially blessed in that the Lord is using it to reach all sorts of people in all sorts of spiritual conditions.

Jack W. Hayford, President, King's Seminary:

I see Alpha as a strategic tool, sensitively crafted to address today's

secularized seekers with satisfying answers to their spiritual hunger.

Cardinal William H. Keeler, Catholic Archbishop of Baltimore:

Several parishes in the Archdiocese of Baltimore are currently using the Alpha course and are finding it quite effective at evangelizing people to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and to the [Roman Catholic] Church.

Testimonials abound to the effect Alpha is having upon the faith of many. Its ecumenical nature is largely regarded as a non-issue. Yet, even as the Alpha Course continues to sweep churches in America and worldwide, several ministries have written about aspects of it, voicing legitimate concerns. However, not all such treatments prove their points with adequate numbers of direct quotes and references to primary sources. The following was written by a ministry that has for several years specialized almost exclusively in researching Alpha. It was compiled by researchers who have spent many man-years studying the subject. Christians today need hard facts, and this article supplies them.

I believe the following article will greatly enable true believers in Jesus to assess the Alpha Course and, in the process, hone their abilities to discern truth from error when similar movements rise up in these last days. ajd

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PART 1: THE CHARACTER OF ALPHA'S JESUS

INTRODUCTION

According to renowned pollster George Gallup, the Alpha Course has now been run in over 150 countries.¹ Alpha materials have been translated into scores of languages, and a million people took the course in 2001 alone. It is clearly something about which every believer should be well-versed.

A number of assessments have been published about Alpha since the early nineties when Nicky Gumbel took over responsibility for the Course, and many of these critiques claim that Alpha's teachings about the Lord Jesus are worrisome. Jesus is obviously the very center of the Gospel and we have felt led to investigate these claims carefully from official sources. In this article we will focus on Alpha's treatment of the Lord's character.

Biblically, the "name" of someone is a reference to their character. In fact, Alpha is correct in saying, "the name is used for everything which the name covers."² This includes the commands, deeds, qualities, etc. of the person. So where the Bible refers to "the name of Jesus" or "the name of Christ" (1 Peter 4:14), or "the name of the Lord" (Acts 2:21), it encompasses the Lord's whole character. When Paul writes "[W]e pray...that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you..." (2 Thess. 1:11-12), and when the Lord teaches that our prayers must be in line with His character if they are going to be heard (John 15:16), it becomes evident that we must obtain a good idea of the Lord's character.

Believers should have the "mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16; Philippians 2:5). This is naturally going to be harder if we have an inaccurate idea of His mind! Beyond this, God's Word even says that a correct grasp of the Lord's character is fundamental to salvation (Romans 10:13). The Body of Christ plainly needs to be fastidious in this regard.³

As we check the pros and cons of Alpha's treatment in detail, there will inevitably be moments where we have to be quite exacting, and some individual points may seem not to carry much weight on their own. The question we need to ask is: what is their effect when taken together? If we really love and care about our wonderful Savior then we will want the world to be taught only the truth regarding Him.

WAS HE SINLESS?

The Bible openly states that the Lord Jesus was "without sin" (Hebrews 4:15; cf. Deuteronomy 32:4). This issue is foundational to the Gospel, for if the Lord was not a spotless Lamb (1 Peter 1:19) then His sacrifice on the cross cannot have paid the price for us. Such a belief might lead some people to try to "make up the difference" through "good works." Without a clear, concise statement to the effect that Jesus is the incarnate Word of God who was born and lived without sin, the question of His divinity remains obscured. Observers feel that Alpha could be clearer over this.

In the Alpha video talks⁴ the actual word "sinless" in relation to the Lord Jesus does not occur. And when Nicky quotes Hebrews 4:15 that "Jesus was tempted in every way," the suffix, "yet without sin," is strangely omitted [Talk 11]. What Nicky then says makes this absence particularly unfortunate:

"Jesus was tempted in every way, just as we are. Jesus had evil thoughts."

Earlier in the talks Nicky explains where "evil thoughts" come from: "...from within, out of your hearts, come evil thoughts...they make you unclean" [Talk 3]. It would be reasonable for hearers to assume that the Lord's "evil thoughts" came out of His heart, and that the Lord harbored evil thoughts. Jesus was offered temptations, He was offered evil thoughts by the enemy, but He rejected them all instantly. Sadly Nicky chooses not to mention this point.

Nicky teaches that the Lord's "friends said about him, 'He's without sin'" [Talk 2], but unsaved hearers may feel that friends saying something about you does not necessarily make it true. Having said that, Nicky does refer to 2 Corinthians 5:21... "There St. Paul wrote, 'God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us...'" [Talk 4]. Oddly though, Nicky uses the phrase "knew no sin" even though the Bible

1 *Alpha News* (UK Edition), Jul – Oct 2002, p. 17.

2 *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*, 3686.

3 For yet more reasons to be precise about the Lord's character see Matthew 18:5, 20; Mark 9:41; 16:17; John 14:13-15; 26.

4 In this article, phrases like 'the talks' or 'the video talks' always refer to the official Alpha video transcripts released in the Summer of 2000. Apart from Bible quotes taken from Alpha talks, all Bible quotes (and all statements about the Bible's contents) relate to the King James Version. All emphases in quotes (whether from the Bible or not) are our own unless otherwise stated.

version he uses (NIV) actually says here that Jesus "had no sin."⁵ Some explanation of the Hebraism "knew no sin" would have been a help, we feel, for "knew no sin" could be interpreted to mean "was ignorant of or unaware of His sin" or "was not intimate with His sin."

On another vital occasion, Nicky again neglects to clarify Jesus' sinlessness. He says that Jesus on the cross was "Godforsaken...not because of his own sin but because of our sin" [Talk 3]. Some detractors point out the potential ambiguity here and that it would only have taken a moment for Nicky to confirm that Jesus had no sin. He apparently decides against clearing up any doubt here.

Nicky prefers to say that "Jesus never did anything wrong" [Talks 3 & 4], and to refer to "Jesus Christ, who never did anything wrong" [Talk 4]. On the face of it, this seems to settle the issue, but Nicky elsewhere reminds us that it is not just a matter of what we "do", but also what we say ("...good deeds,' that's everything we do and say" [Talk 12]) and also what we think ("it's not just our actions it's our words and also our thoughts" [Talk 3]). Logically, this leaves the door open again for Jesus to have sinned in thought or word.

Additionally, there is more to being sinless than avoiding sinful behavior. God's Son also needed to be free of the sinful nature that Adam passed down to all his generations (1 Corinthians 15:22). Jesus needed to have been born of a virgin⁶ in order to avoid being tainted by "original sin." Nicky does not mention the virgin birth in the talks and instead likens Jesus to a building that is "totally the work of human beings" [Talk 5]. But if Jesus' conception was "totally the work of human beings" then He inherited man's sinful nature and, thus, was not sinless.

Nicky also says: "There is a big difference between the things that we do

wrong and the mistakes that we make" [Talk 1]. This allows for the Lord to have erred, which brings us to our next question.

WAS HE INFALLIBLE?

The Bible says of Jesus, "the Word was made flesh, ...full of...truth" (John 1:14) and that the Lord "faileth not" (Zepheniah 3:5; cf. Deuteronomy 31:8). But does Alpha leave participants believing for certain that Jesus was infallible? (Again, and just for the record, neither of the actual words "fallible" or "infallible" appears in the talks themselves.)

From John 1:3 we know that "All things were made by" Jesus, yet Alpha sometimes suggests that the Creator did not do a perfect job. For example, Nicky talks about "the created order that had gone wrong" [Talk 11]. To some observers this wording suggests an error on the Creator's part. But nothing "went wrong" with the Lord's perfect handiwork. Satan fell through the sin of pride and thus adversely affected the creation. Subsequently, he caused man to sin and this affected man's environment on the earth. But this is not what Nicky says. Likewise, it was apparently left to the Holy Spirit, in the early days of the Universe, to bring "order out of chaos."⁷ Since "God is not the author of confusion," the word "chaos" here implies unfortunate things about our Lord.

Another concern for some folks is that towards the start of Talk 6, Nicky says "Jesus promises that our prayers will be answered," but later in this talk he teaches that "[S]ome of our prayers may not be answered" and that "[S]ome of our prayers don't get answered." If Jesus wasn't a liar, then the message appears to be that he was definitely mistaken.

Did Jesus have infallible faith? Consider this quote from Nicky Gumbel:

Jesus never said to anybody, 'It was your lack of faith that stopped you being healed.' He sometimes

said to the disciples, 'You lacked faith,' but not to the person who was sick" [Talk 13]. Yet just moments earlier Nicky had said: "even with Jesus, on one occasion, he laid hands on a blind man and he said, after he had laid hands on them [the man's eyes], 'Do you see anything?' and the man said, 'I see people but they look like trees walking around.' So Jesus laid hands on him again."⁸

The unavoidable conclusion from Nicky's combined statements is that it was Jesus' lack of faith that required Him to pray for a second time. (In truth, if there is a "lack of faith" on the part of the person who is sick, it most certainly does get in the way of prayers for healing, as Mark 6:5-6 makes clear.)

In both Talks 1 and 7 Nicky says, "We all make mistakes," but he doesn't exclude Jesus on either occasion. Indeed, Jesus is the last person to be mentioned in both of these discussions on "mistakes." Take Talk 7: "In conclusion...the whole issue of guidance was not easy for Abraham. It wasn't easy for Jesus.... Secondly, we all make mistakes." A Christian may not pick up the wrong message from this, but what about someone who has never heard about Jesus before?

While we are on the subject of unbelievers and how they interpret things, consider this comment: "Jesus...was the most fully human person who's ever lived, the most normal person" [Talk 15]. Without proper clarification, this is sure to be misunderstood by some hearers simply because of the definitions they attach to the highlighted words. Phrases like "we're only human" and "it's only normal" are common secular ways of expressing failings and imperfections. Even so, Nicky still doesn't say the Lord was "fully normal"—just that He was the most normal person to ever live. These two are not the same.

In his defense, Nicky does write the following in one of his books: "Only in Jesus Christ do we find infallible

5 Nicky's Bible version DOES however infer that Jesus may well have lied! In John 7:8 the Lord said He was 'not yet going up' to a particular Feast, but a footnote in the NIV says "Some early manuscripts do not have 'yet.'" Because the NIV constantly extols manuscripts based purely on how 'early' they are, the inference is clear: since Jesus *did* go up, this would have been a lie.

6 As per Isaiah 7:14 & Matthew 1:23.

7 Green *Alpha Manual*, (HTB Publications, 1995), p. 30.

8 Without clarification, these words also suggest that Jesus did not actually know whether His prayer had been completely successful or not. (His question was surely just asked to encourage more faith in the blind man.)

9 We are not supporting the (excessive) 'Word-Faith' line in saying this!

truth."¹⁰ But some of the more demanding detractors point out that this is not saying Christ's behavior was always infallible. Nicky's phraseology could also be read as focusing on us. In other words it is like saying "only in Jesus Christ do we find true happiness."

On the same page, Nicky writes, "God's revelation in Jesus Christ is infallible." But critics understandably ask why he must add the emboldened words. They believe the extra words just serve to make some people wonder if only a part of Jesus contained "God's revelation," and thus only this part is infallible. Why not simply say "Jesus Christ is infallible"?

What indeed could be the problem with stating categorically and repeatedly that Jesus was totally sinless and totally infallible at all times? In fifteen long talks and many associated publications there doesn't seem to be any good reason why not.¹¹

WAS HE 'GENTLE, GRACEFUL, MEEK AND LOWLY'?

Paul described the Lord as "gentle" (2 Corinthians 10:1) and, in Matthew 11:29, the Lord Himself said "I am meek and lowly in heart." His meekness and lowliness was also prophesied before His Incarnation (Zechariah 9:9; Matthew 21:5). John 1:14 calls Him "full of grace."

These references to Jesus' meekness address His humility, evident in His submission to His Father's will. This did not mean He was a spineless Milquetoast, but that He was gentle toward those to whom He ministered.

Jesus is never called "gentle" or "graceful" in the Alpha talks. Neither is He described as "lowly" in the talks, although Nicky uses the term of himself [Talk 1]. The word "meek" (often translated "gentle" in Nicky's Bible) doesn't occur in the talks...¹²

Elsewhere in Alpha, our incarnated Lord is actually portrayed as very ungentle and unmeek. For example, at the top of Nicky's list of emotions that Jesus had is "anger,"¹³ and Nicky sometimes uses militaristic language to describe the Lord's manner, even when it seems quite out of place: "Jesus fought against suffering wherever he came across it."¹⁴ And what led Nicky to say the following?

Everywhere that Jesus went he removed evil [He expelled devils, but Nicky widens the scope dramatically]. He destroyed evil wherever he found it [He exposed it, but that is not the same thing at all]. And that's what we are called to be. That's the exciting thing. [Talk 11].

Is it not "exciting" just to walk with our glorious Bridegroom and Creator and to learn of Him?

Some readers may feel we are being excessively "picky" in these sections, but it should be remembered that Nicky has had more than a decade to get his material correct, and that it is vital to reflect the true character of Jesus consistently and precisely. The words Nicky uses determine exactly what is communicated to hearers, many of whom today know virtually nothing of the Lord.

So while some issues we deal with in this article are inevitably going to be minor on their own, we must look for the resulting tapestry as a whole. Is it a clear and accurate representation of the Savior? As a Cambridge-educated lawyer, Nicky is a master with words and with public speaking so he should be well able to get his statements correct. Yet as we consider further his teachings about Jesus, we find that he consistently convolutes the Lord's humanity as well as His deity. At best, his statements are ambiguous.

WAS HE A "MAN OF SORROWS"?

According to Scripture, the Lord was "rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not" (Isaiah 53:3).

Throughout His ministry the Lord was mocked, accused, cursed and rejected—all without cause. Most of His followers left Him (John 6:66); even His closest friends deserted Him after Gethsemane; ultimately He was tortured and crucified without any justification. But is this the picture of the Lord's life painted by Alpha?

On the contrary, Alpha assumes the popular modern concept of Jesus as a fun-loving guy—someone to whom we can "relate."

"[I]magine being with Jesus! What fun it would have been!" says Nicky in Talk 2.¹⁵

The Lord's life in this unworthy world was actually characterized by sacrifice and suffering. It was not a lot of "fun" to watch it if you loved Him. Additionally, it could not have been "fun" for His disciples to receive His insightful criticisms or hear His heart-piercing words that drove people away rather than coddle their religious errors.

In the previous video edition, Nicky insisted that Jesus "laughed," [Talk 2] but the Bible does not say this, and there was certainly not much for Him to laugh about as He saw the dreadful apostasy into which the deceitful shepherds of His people had brought them. Indeed, the Lord cried "Woe unto you that laugh now!" (Luke 6:25) and He blessed those that mourn over this fallen world (Matthew 5:4).

Nicky has replaced these biblical statements with the words, "He was the supreme example of...joy, but never at another's expense" [Talk 2].

10 Nicky Gumbel, *Searching Issues*, (Kingsway, 2001), p. 30. But does not the *Bible* offer infallible truth too?

11 Immature Course participants are far more likely to come away believing that *Rome* is infallible than that Jesus was. (See our book for the reasons why.)

12 Gumbel does say at one point that Jesus "was the supreme example of...humility, [and]...kindness" [Talk 2], but in more than *eleven* hours of talks supposedly centered on Jesus, this is just about all that participants get. Note, too, that, although the Lord certainly humbled Himself by *becoming* a man, there is a subtle (but significant) difference between Him always behaving 'humbly' on earth and being 'meek and lowly.' Since He claimed to be *God*, some hearers may get the wrong idea about what being humble involves!

13 *Green Alpha Manual*, p. 5.

14 *Searching Issues*, p. 23.

15 Nicky encourages Alpha churches to go to great lengths to keep the Course as 'fun' and relaxed as possible, and he always talks in an informal way. Hence our decision to refer to him as 'Nicky' on several occasions in this article.

Considering the context of his remark, unregenerate listeners will not understand that joy in the Spirit does not equate to laughter. The Lord wept over Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37) and over other things (John 11:35), and He did not exude merriment in Matthew 17:17; Matthew 8:20-22, etc.

Another problem with Alpha, which makes it even harder for participants rightly to interpret Nicky's teachings about the Lord, has been identified by a young theology student who notes: "When discussing Jesus' character, Biblical references are conspicuous by their absence."¹⁶

All in all, we must realize that Jesus had God's character, since He is God in the flesh.

WAS HE RIGHTEOUS AND HOLY?

To be "righteous" means to be upright, virtuous, just, and obedient to God's commands. The Bible calls our Savior "Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). Although Alpha does employ the word "righteous" in several places, amazingly it is never categorically applied to the Lord Jesus except to say that he shared the "human" emotion of "righteous anger" [Talk 2]. Strangely, the term "righteousness" is redefined by Alpha as merely meaning "right relationships." So it would not tell hearers much even if Nicky did call the Lord "righteous."

The word "holy" does not just mean righteous; it means sacred, separate, set-apart. It has the connotation of perfection that is characteristic of God Himself. While true righteousness is found only in God, the word is often used in other contexts as well.

The Lord is called the "Holy One of Israel" over 30 times in the Bible (e.g.,

Isaiah 43:14-15; 47:4), and is described as "holy" on very many other occasions too (e.g. Jeremiah 51:5; Revelation 4:8; and throughout Acts). The words "holy" or "holiness" occur a full 586 times in Scripture and can be said to be the primary characteristic of the Lord, and of those who are truly following Him.¹⁷

Amazingly, while the Spirit of God is called "holy" on well over 100 occasions in the Alpha talks, and the church of God is frequently called "holy" there also, Nicky manages to call the Son of God "holy" only twice in the entire video set.¹⁸ And apparently only because the term is part of a Bible verse that Nicky is quoting for other reasons.¹⁹

The Lord is not called "holy" during either of the two Alpha talks that are devoted to Him. Perhaps as bad, the word "holy" is never explained in Alpha. This is all very incongruous, coming as it does from a church called Holy Trinity Brompton.

WAS HE PERFECT?

Nicky writes that "Jesus himself set us a great example."²⁰ But surely Jesus set us the perfect example. Great examples may be set for us by mere men, but those set by Jesus must be above all others.

As we have seen, Nicky also regularly says that Jesus was "the supreme example,"²¹ but it could be argued that "supreme" still does not mean perfect or pure; it simply means the best available.

There is a fundamental difference between "great" and "perfect," and no less a fundamental difference between "supreme" and "perfect." Note that Nicky does not have a mental block about using the word "perfect" to describe other things. At one point he

tells us of a man called Earl, saying that "Earl was thrilled because the paper in this Bible was very thin and it was perfect for rolling joints!" [Talk 5]. He also says that Christians are "perfectly righteous in God's sight" [Talk 4]. Ironically, Holy Trinity's head man, Sandy Millar, has repeatedly said of Alpha, "I think the course is now about as perfect as it can be."²²

Why could Nicky Gumbel not use the same approbation for the Lord Jesus? Whether an oversight or deliberate, this can have a serious effect upon one's understanding of Jesus' nature.

DID HE FEAR HIS FATHER?

Every recorded prayer that Jesus uttered displayed godly fear towards the Father, and every time He spoke of His Father it was with deep reverence.

This fear is not the same as terror. It is not fear of judgment, but fear based in humility that renders one aware of the awesomeness of the one feared. It is the same fear coupled with love that any worthy child would have of a righteous father. Jesus had this noble fear of His Father for good reason.

Indeed, the Bible says that Jesus' prayers were heard by the Father because Jesus "feared" Him:

As He also says in another place: "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek";

Who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear,

Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. (Hebrews 5:7, NKJ).

16 David R. Coaker, *A Critical Evaluation of the Use and Influence of the Bible in the Alpha Course*, (Draft for Comment, 20 Aug 2002), unpublished BTH paper 9T15, Mansfield College, Oxford University, p. 19. This statement was specifically in reference to Nicky Gumbel's book of the talks, *Questions of Life*, (Kingsway, 2001), p. 34. This book is tighter in some ways than the video talks themselves, but is not appreciably better overall. For example, Jesus is *still* called 'the Lord of **laughter**' there (p. 34). Besides, the videos are the primary tools used by many churches.

17 Alpha claims that the Lord is all about *love*, but the Bible puts the emphasis squarely on His *holiness*. Only 22 verses in the whole Bible speak of "God" alongside His "love" for us.

18 See Talks 8 & 12.

19 Interestingly, *both* of these verses (Luke 1:35 in Talk 8, and Acts 4:30 in Talk 12) relate to Bible *corruptions*.

20 Nicky Gumbel, *30 Days*, (Alpha Publications, 2001), p. 8.

21 Talk 2; see also *Green Alpha Manual*, p. 25.

22 Introduction to video Talk 1. Sandy Millar said these words about the Alpha talks three full years before the release of the problematic transcripts used in the article you are currently reading. Nicky *does* quote a famous name who said: 'I believe there is no one ... **more perfect** than Jesus' (*Why Jesus?*, [HTB Publications, 1997], p. 7), but critics counter that this still does not mean Jesus was perfect, just that no one has bettered Him.

Alpha does not say this at all.²³ Instead it ignores this aspect of Jesus' relation to the Father and stresses only one more "palatable" aspect. Says Nicky Gumbel: "Abba is an Aramaic word which means, well, the nearest translation is 'Daddy'" [Talk 6]; "It was distinctive of Jesus. Jesus had this intimacy with the Father ... and he made it possible for us to address God as Abba ... Prince Charles is the Heir Apparent to the Throne ... But to William and Harry, he's 'Daddy.'"²⁴

While it is true that Jesus opened the way for us to have an intimate relationship with our heavenly Father as adopted sons of God, we believe that Alpha dangerously misrepresents the correct attitude towards God the Father that Jesus exemplified. Even though our earthly fathers may love us and we may approach them as "Daddy," it does not mean we are not to fear them for the power they have over us as children. Love and fear work hand-in-hand to produce the proper loving relationship founded upon the obedience of children toward their fathers. It is no less so in our relationship with our heavenly Father. Our fear must be based upon love for Him. Fear without love is nothing short of terror.

But doesn't Scripture say, "Perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18)?

Yes, it does. But the fear spoken of here is fear of condemnation, not the fear of a loving person toward their loving authority.

Does this mean that if we are disobedient the Father will cease loving us? No. His love for us has provided a way for us to regain our relationship through repentance and obedience (1 John 2:1). But what loving father will continue to indulge his children while they remain disobedient? Disobedience should cause fear of chastisement from one's father. This is where fear plays an important part in driv-

ing us toward the Father in our desire to be obedient children. To ignore fear in our relationship invites even more disobedience.

WHAT DOES HIS "NAME" MEAN?

Is there something magical about the word "Jesus"? In truth the word "Jesus" itself is just that—a word. It is an anglicization of the Greek pronunciation of the Lord's name.²⁵ The Hebrew is Y'shua, or in English, Joshua. There have been many people named Joshua or Jesus, so the word itself is not what carries the power. It is the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God that has power. It is the utterance of His name under the anointing of the Holy Spirit (sent to glorify Jesus Christ and no one else) which has any power.

Of importance is the Lord's character and person. This is what Scripture alludes to in the manifold references to "the name of Jesus."

Unfortunately, this is not what is communicated by Alpha. Consider, for example, Nicky's discussion of the "Lord's Prayer":

"Hallowed be your name." That literally means "May your name be honored"...People don't respect the name of Jesus. So often it is used as a swear word or it's just a laughing matter [Talk 6].²⁶

The Lord's name is merely equated to the word "Jesus" here.

Nicky also teaches that "at the end of our prayers, we say, 'In Jesus name' ... It's an acknowledgment..." [Talk 6]. Yes, it is an acknowledgment, but it is through emulating Jesus' character that we can abide in Him and can thus approach the Father in prayer. But if Alpha is not describing the Lord's character correctly, how can hearers properly emulate Him?

So while what Nicky says is technically true, it is Alpha's overall misuse

of Scripture that nullifies the truths he speaks.

In light of the fact that the "name" of the Lord is never explained in the talks, one can easily guess the unfortunate (i.e. superstitious) interpretation that many hearers will place on statements like the following:

"Jesus is the only name that can save";²⁷ "Origen in the third century, [wrote] that 'the name of Jesus can take away diseases'" [Talk 13]; "[T]here is such power in the name of Jesus. That's why the apostles used to expel evil [again, not just devils] in the name of Jesus" [Talk 11]; "...Satan and his demons are so frightened of the name of Jesus".²⁸

The heart-stopping peril of thinking you are serving God just because you use the actual word "Jesus" is made horrifyingly plain in Matthew 7:22-23:

Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity.

Our heavenly Father insists upon total adherence to His truth. Those who pick and choose or misrepresent His Word are not honoring His name.

CONCLUSION TO PART 1

Confused about Alpha's position regarding the Lord's character? So, also, are participants being muddled!

The collective effect of these points is that hearers are coming away from Alpha with an inaccurate impression of the Lord's character. And since the Bible places such huge emphasis on the "name"—the character—of Jesus, Alpha's failure to describe His character rightly is of real concern and obliges us to ask what other problems may be present.

23 The Bible says God is "greatly to be feared" (Psalms 89:7) but Alpha does not portray a God that is remotely to be feared. Nicky even insinuates that fear of the Lord is of *Satanic* origin: Adam was "'afraid' [of God]. That was **the** aim of the **devil** ... And that's **not** how it is meant to be" [Talk 11], despite many dozens of verses saying the opposite (e.g., Psalms 111:10; 147:11; Luke 12:5; Isaiah 8:13; Acts 9:31). See our book for more.

24 Talk 9. (Underlined emphasis in original HTB transcript.)

25 The Lord's earthly name was *Y'shua*—Hebrew for 'salvation'.

26 Nicky must mean the name 'Jesus' is *treated* as a laughing matter. (While we are on the subject of the 'name' of the Lord, for some reason Nicky gives Jesus the New Age's preferred title, 'the Teacher,' *three* times in Talk 12.)

27 *Searching Issues*, p. 26.

28 *Questions of Life*, p. 166.

Part 2: The Nature of Alpha's Jesus

True evangelists love Christ Jesus above all else. They will not compromise Him for any reason. Any such who are planning to run Alpha should read this article.

In a radio interview we were asked what Alpha taught about the nature of the Lord Jesus. (The interviewer had heard that Alpha's view was out of line with Scripture.) We were aware of some problems, but the question prompted us to look in detail at the matter. First, though, we should establish whether or not accuracy on this topic is important.

Many people today believe that, provided "Christ" is preached, it doesn't matter what is preached about Him. This notion is based on an erroneous understanding of Philippians 1:15-18, which talks about two groups of people:

Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from good will:

The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel.

What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice. (NKJ)

Does this mean that God the Father is happy for us to preach whatever we want about His Son, provided we use the words "Jesus" or "Christ" when speaking? Mormons preach a "Christ," as do New Agers and other false religions.

As the references to preaching "insincerely" or "out of love" demonstrate—and as a check of the Greek proves—the phrases "in pretense" and "in

truth" in the above passage relate to the motive behind the preaching, not to the accuracy of it. Both groups were preaching the same things but for different reasons. Paul does elsewhere warn very gravely against listening to anyone who preaches different things about the Lord than those things he himself preached (2 Corinthians 11:3-4 or Galatians 1:6-9), but this Scripture is not one of those places.

Every Scripture needs to be held in tension with all other Scriptures, else we will lose our balance and fall. Since the Lord warned of "false Christs" (Matthew 24:24; Mark 13:22), we need to be careful that we are always preaching the true Christ. Acts 9:20 states that "preaching Christ" must entail preaching "that He is the Son of God." Getting the nature of Jesus Christ correct is foundational to the Gospel and is therefore something about which we have to be precise.

WAS HE PRE-EXISTENT?

The Bible tells us that Messiah Jesus has always existed. Micah 5:2 teaches that His "goings forth" have been from "everlasting."¹ Just like the Father and the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus lives beyond the limits of time. Hence, He said in John 8:58, "before Abraham was, I Am," rather than "before Abraham was, I already existed." He has always existed as the Word of God. Thus time is irrelevant on this matter.

In contrast, some in the New Age movement believe that a messiah (one who will come to save the world system through the preaching of peace and brotherhood, rather than through the appearing of the Messiah of Israel and the judge of the world) is a created being. Plainly this has a bearing on the trustworthiness of Scripture as well as on the true nature of our Lord.

Considering all these truths, how does Alpha fare over this important question?

Nicky Gumbel does not actually call Jesus "pre-existent" or "everlasting" or "eternal" in the Alpha talks. And when he discusses Jesus' love for us he says only that it is now and future, neglecting to state that it existed in the past as well.² Yet, from a spiritual perspective, the Lord sacrificed Himself for us before the foundation of the world (2 Timothy 1:8-10; Revelation 13:8). Regarding the Lord's pre-existence, it would also be valuable if Alpha mentioned at least one of His appearances as recorded in the writings of the prophets (e.g., Daniel 3:25; Joshua 5:13-15) but Nicky currently chooses not to do so.

We have to go to the final chapter of his book, *Searching Issues*, to locate his best comments regarding the pre-existence of the Lord. Here Gumbel usefully says:

God the Son ... [was] there at the very beginning."³

We say he "usefully says" this with the provision that his readers are confident that Jesus is indeed God the Son. In such a case, this statement is very significant. The only fly in the ointment is that Gumbel never explains that God the Son existed before the very beginning. Some New Agers (and Jehovah's Witnesses, among others,) believe that the Son was the first created thing. They would therefore readily agree that He was there "at the very beginning." Gumbel should teach clearly that Jesus Christ was not created at all. It would surely not take much time or effort to do so.

Nicky Gumbel's second best statement about Jesus' pre-existence is this:

The three Persons of the Trinity existed before the creation of the Universe...The Three Persons of the Trinity loved each other...before the Universe was made."⁴

Again, this would not actually preclude the Son having been created before the creation of the Universe.

- 1 Any honest translation of the Masoretic Hebrew, such as the KJV, will say this. Gumbel does refer to 'Micah 5:2' on page 35 of *Questions of Life*, but only in relation to "the **place** of his [i.e. the Lord's] birth." If his readers look up this verse in Gumbel's unfortunate choice of Bible versions (NIV), they will see that it teaches the Lord Jesus had an "**origin**."
- 2 "The love of Christ ... It's so long: all the way through our lives ... **from** the moment we accept Christ to the moment we die, and **then beyond** that into eternity" [Talk 10]. (See the first part in this series for version details [e.g., for Alpha talks and books] and for other administrative points regarding this second part.)
- 3 *Searching Issues*, p. 101.
- 4 *Searching Issues*, p. 110. (Few, if any, people doubt that the Father and the Holy Spirit were not created, so it would have been ideal if Gumbel had unambiguously mentioned the 'Lord Jesus' here. Note also that the relevant paragraph in Gumbel's book never denies the idea that the Father and the Spirit could have been in communion with *each other* before creating Jesus.)

Since New Agers draw a distinction between Jesus and the “second Person of the Trinity,” let us now turn to Alpha’s specific references to “Jesus.”⁵ In one of his books, Gumbel usefully writes that “Jesus is the only man who has ever chosen to be born,”⁶ although of course this is still quite a long way from teaching that He has always existed. (Some of the more demanding observers might also insist that this statement does not necessarily mean Jesus existed as a separate person before His First Coming.⁷)

Unfortunately Alpha materials get progressively more worrisome on this issue, and we need to consider what is the total impression being given to participants. This is especially important in view of the increasing numbers of them today that have been taught little or no truth about Jesus (and probably some error) beforehand. For example, a sentence on page 213 of Questions of Life begins: “Under the Old Covenant (before Jesus)...” Now, if the Lord Jesus has always existed then the concept of “before Jesus” is meaningless. Note that Nicky does not write “before Jesus’ Incarnation” or some other unequivocal phrase.⁸ The inference is that the Lord did not properly exist before Mary gave birth to Him as a man.

Alpha’s books are important, but we should pay particular attention to the Alpha talks because these are what every participant is supposed to be presented with. We can find no hint in the talks that the Lord was pre-existent.

In contrast, Holy Trinity Brompton says:

How can something...[made] by human beings also be 100% inspired by God? It is similar to the way in which we say that Jesus is fully human....Let me use an analogy. Perhaps the greatest English architect of his time was Sir Christopher Wren. He built St. Paul’s Cathedral.... There was only one architect involved. He finished building it in 1711.... He used agents to do it, but he was the one who was behind it all [Talk 5].

God the Father is likened here to an architect, and the Lord Jesus is likened to a building. But every building has an originator, and hence an origin. A building is a created entity. The most reasonable assumption for hearers is that the Lord Jesus Christ was not pre-existent, but was designed and “built.”

IS HE THE WORD MADE FLESH?

Revelation 19:11-15 makes clear that Christ Jesus is the Word of God. This is directly related to His pre-existence, for the famous clause in John 1:1 says, “In the beginning was the Word,” rather than “At the beginning was created the Word.” Likewise, verse 2 says, “the Word was God.” Verse 3 says, “All things were made by Him.” Since He cannot have created Himself He cannot logically be a created being. Verse 14 then tells us “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us,” thus confirming that Jesus is the Word and, therefore, the Creator of “all

things.” Hence He existed prior to creation.

Jesus is never called “the Word” in the Alpha talks. (We possess a copy of the video transcripts in electronic form, as released by Holy Trinity Brompton, which enables us to perform word-pattern checks with great accuracy.) Although the word “reincarnated” is used at one point, there is no mention of “incarnation” regarding Jesus, nor of Him coming “in the flesh,” nor of any of the crucial verses from John 1 cited above. These omissions can make people question that Jesus existed before His birth as a man. On this pivotal issue we find clarification missing time and again in Alpha. Alpha refers to things like:

I “the birth of Jesus Christ”;⁹

I “When Jesus was born”;¹⁰

I “the place of his birth”;¹¹ and

I “hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus.”¹²

Would it be so difficult to add the three little words “in the flesh” or “as a man” onto the end of at least one or two such statements? In Talk 8, Gumbel manages four references to the Lord’s “birth,” yet in none of them is it explained that He pre-existed His birth.¹³ In the plethora of “Alpha Resources,” we can only find one reference to the phrase “the word made flesh,”¹⁴ and even here Alpha:

(a) Doesn’t explain that “the word” is a reference to Jesus’ nature;

(b) Doesn’t capitalize “Word”—which would at least have helped indicate that it signifies a person;

5 Using indirect phrases like “God the Son,” rather than “Jesus,” when referring to doctrines about Him, is fine on occasion, but obviously introduces an extra layer of complication and can lead to misinterpretation if done often.

6 *30 Days*, p. 9.

7 It is interesting, for instance, that Gumbel chooses ‘born’ instead of ‘conceived’ here.

8 The word ‘incarnate’ can be defined as ‘to come in the flesh.’

9 *Alpha News*, #20, p. 9.

10 *Why Christmas?*, (HTB Publications, 1997), p. 3. See also p. 7.

11 Talk 2. See also *30 Days*, p. 16.

12 Talk 3. Likewise, Gumbel refers to “Mary the mother of Jesus” (e.g., in Talks 7 & 8) without mentioning that she was only His mother in terms of His *incarnation*.

13 As a brief digression, it is very odd to consider that *Satan* is almost presented as pre-existent on Alpha! In talking about the Temptation in Eden, Gumbel says “This was a path that led to destruction, that Satan had planned **from the beginning**” [Talk 11]. But Satan was surely not *fallen* at the beginning, even assuming he was created that early. Alpha participants would not know this however. Indeed, Talk 11 in the 1997 videos taught that we “**don’t know**” Satan’s origins. (Gumbel needs to read Ezekiel 28:14-19!) Gumbel’s amazing statement has been replaced with one that is arguably *worse*, viz., “[I]t’s not clear **where** the devil **came** from [as opposed to **how he originated**]”. Although Gumbel, in the same talk, also says “[T]he devil ... is part of the created **order**,” this is not necessarily teaching that Satan himself was *created*. It really only says that he possesses his assigned part/role in the *order* of things. But that could be said of the Lord Jesus too! The Lord has a (saving) part/role in the created *order* of things.

14 *30 Days*, p. 15. (Note that Gumbel is happy to employ the word ‘flesh’ in *other* contexts, e.g., in Talks 13 & 15.)

(c) Doesn't quote Scripture—the phrase appears as part of a quote by William Temple (a man who was happy to endorse churches almost regardless of what they taught about our Savior)¹⁵;

(d) Doesn't provide the relevant Bible reference, or indeed ANY Bible reference that would help explain what "the Word" truly means. Indeed, the context of the quote would lead most unbelievers to suppose that the phrase merely means Jesus "fleshed out" the Father's instructions, or "put flesh on" the Father's ideas.

(Incidentally, although the phrases "the Word of God" or "God's Word" appear fourteen times in the Alpha talks, and are rightly applied to the Bible on some of those occasions, they are never applied to the Person of the Lord Jesus. This is extremely unfortunate. Just as the Bible is God's revelation of His Word in written form, Jesus is God's revelation of His Word in human form. With this profound relationship between the "written Word" and the "Word made flesh" broken, Alpha participants are likely to take a significantly lower view of Scripture than they ought to. People would respect the written Word far more if they understood that it is as perfect as Jesus and represents Him in His entirety. For more on Alpha's treatment of Holy Writ, see our book Alpha – the Unofficial Guide: Overview.¹⁶)

DID HE HAVE THE HOLY SPIRIT BEFORE HIS BAPTISM?

Jesus (in His Incarnation) was conceived by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:18-20) and, as a "child...[He] waxed strong in spirit..." (Luke 2:40).¹⁷ This is another important doctrine about the Lord Jesus, as we shall see shortly. So where does Alpha stand?

Gumbel's first reference to Christ Jesus having the Spirit of God is in Talk 8, but not in relation to the Lord's conception. There Gumbel says, "John the Baptist is the first person who

makes the link between the Spirit and Jesus." Surely Simeon and Anna both recognized, or made "the link," between the Holy Spirit and Jesus (Luke 2:25-38). Surely the angel that spoke to Mary before she conceived made "the link," too (Luke 1:35). Surely John the Baptist's father, Zacharias, made "the link" while his son was still a baby (Luke 1:67-79). Surely Isaiah made "the link" between "the Spirit and Jesus" hundreds of years previously (Isaiah 61:1-3). Unless of course Gumbel means something else by the word "link."

Gumbel uses this term again when



Theologian Dr. J.I. Packer (center) with Sandy Millar, Nicky Gumbel, Pippa Gumbel (Alpha News, Nov. 2000 - Feb. 2001 #23, 94)

he writes, "John the Baptist links him [the Holy Spirit] with Jesus."¹⁸ But both of his statements are ambiguous and could easily be taken to mean that John created the "link" between the Lord Jesus and the Spirit. It is important for participants to believe that Jesus was always filled with the Spirit rather than being filled at His baptism, otherwise they will demote Him. (They will also be encouraged to promote the idea that people are indwelt by the Holy Spirit [i.e., saved] through baptism rather than through faith alone.)

Certainly "the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon Him [Jesus], and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art My beloved Son; in Thee I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22), but we have already seen that Jesus was indwelt by the Holy Ghost even as a child. This episode publicly signified the beginning of His full ministry, but the passage nowhere says the Spirit was poured into Him at His baptism (which would have meant He was not full of the Spirit beforehand).

Consider the following text from Gumbel and see whether, taken as a whole, it suggests that Jesus Christ was filled by the Holy Spirit as a result of His baptism.

Jesus was a man completely filled with the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God descended on him in bodily form at his baptism (Luke 3:22). He returned to [sic¹⁹] the Jordan "full of the Holy Spirit" and was "led by the Spirit in the desert" (Luke 4:1). He returned to Galilee "in the power of the Spirit" (v. 14). In a synagogue in Nazareth he read the lesson from Isaiah 61:1, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me..." and said, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (v. 21).²⁰

Note that Gumbel moves very swiftly from the Lord's baptism to the word "Today," giving the distinct impression that His baptism occurred earlier that same day, and therefore implying that the Spirit was on Jesus because He had been baptized. But it was not that same day. The small matter of the forty days the Lord spent in the wilderness in between these two events has been swept under the carpet! Elsewhere we are told by Alpha that "Jesus received power through the anointing of the Holy Spirit at his baptism,"²¹ as if He did not have the power of the Holy Spirit before this (and as if the forty days of prayer and fasting were irrelevant to His ministry). Remember the wedding at Cana where Jesus changed water to wine (John 2).

15 William Temple was, among other things, a founder of the World Council of Churches. He allowed all manner of groups with heretical notions about Jesus to join. See Dr. Cathy Burns, *Billy Graham and his Friends*, (Sharing, 2001), p. 207.

16 U.S. outlets for our book are supplied in the 'Better Than Rubies' section of our Web site (www.bayith.org).

17 Gumbel's preferred Bible version hides this fact in its rendering by deleting the words "in spirit".

18 *Questions of Life*, p. 132. The identical wording is used in the *Green Alpha Manual*, p. 32.

19 Luke 4:1 reads "from the Jordan."

20 *Questions of Life*, pp.123-4. (The ellipsis is Gumbel's.)

21 *Green Alpha Manual*, p. 32.

IS HE “CHRIST, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD”?

Christ is the Greek word for “Messiah.” The Bible makes plain that the Lord Jesus is Israel’s promised Messiah (John 1:41-45; 4:25-26; Daniel 9:25-26). The Bible calls Him “Jesus Christ” on 189 occasions. But is Alpha straight down the line on this issue? (We will come to Jesus’ Sonship in a moment.)

Gumbel certainly refers to “Jesus Christ” a good number of times, although the position of Jesus as Israel’s “Messiah,” (or “Christ”) is not actually explained in the talks. A modest concern for some, however, is the number of times “Jesus” is separated from “Christ” on Alpha.²² These words are separated a total of 571 times in the talks.²³

The phrase “Christ Jesus” makes particularly clear that Jesus is not just someone with “the Christ principle” operating in Him—which is presumably why it appears 58 times in the New Testament. Strangely, this valuable phrase appears only eight times in all the Alpha talks—only about one fifth as often as it should in order to be in balance with Scripture.²⁴

Of greater concern is that Gumbel teaches we are Christ: “[A]ctually, the Church is Christ.”²⁵

The disciples of Jesus belong to Him, so we are His body (the Body of Christ) in the same sense that a husband owns the body of his wife, but we are not Him!

Gumbel also teaches that “The church completes Christ in the same way as a body completes the head.”²⁶ But this is simply wrong. Jesus Christ is already complete; He has His own head AND His own body. He is our “head” in the sense of being our leader, but the Body of Christ is complete, with its own eyes and ears—and hence its own “head” parts, as 1 Corinthians 12:12-21 shows. If we imagine that we “complete Christ” in the way Gumbel says, then we are well on the road to believing that we are also divine, instead of being a group of sinning, “unprofitable servants” who are only saved by God’s grace through faith in His only Son.

On, then, to Jesus’ Sonship. After almost all of His followers had left Him (John 6:66), the Lord asked the remnant if they were going to depart as well: “Then Simon Peter answered Him, Lord, to whom shall we go?...

[W]e believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.” The Lord is indeed “the only begotten Son” of God, i.e. the only natural Son, (John 3:16,18; 1 John 4:9). But is this the way Alpha sees it?

Gumbel does indicate several times in the talks that Jesus is the Son of God, although detractors might complain that this is almost always done indirectly (e.g., by noting that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God,²⁷ or by pointing out that His followers believed it,²⁸ or by observing that Satan questioned it).²⁹ However, Gumbel never actually calls Jesus “the only begotten Son.” Readers may feel that “begotten” is an uncommon word, even though many modern dictionaries include it. But Gumbel is happy to use other uncommon words like “immanent,”³⁰ “theopneustos”³¹ or “syncretistic”³² and he could easily explain the meaning of “begotten” if he chose to—but he never does.

It is helpful that Gumbel (albeit very occasionally) calls Christ Jesus the “unique Son of God,” but this is unlikely to impress many hearers because everyone is “unique”—and Gumbel tells Alpha participants that every Christian is a son of God, too³³

22 The Greek Scriptures do likewise, but they (unlike Alpha) are given *in the context of the Hebrew Scriptures*, so there is little scope for misinterpretation! (See the last seven paragraphs of *Searching Issues* for another vivid example of Alpha ‘separating’ Jesus from Christ.)

23 Gumbel, like the New Age movement, also shows an inordinate affection for the tiny number of Bible verses that call Jesus “the Christ.” Gumbel calls Him this four times in Talk 2 alone. Sadly, Gumbel’s Bible version reads “the Christ” numerous times when it should not. It does this twice in Acts 17:3, a fact which Gumbel takes advantage of in Talk 12. It does so again in Acts 3:20 which Gumbel exploits on page 27 of *Searching Issues*. He doesn’t stop there though. Even when his Bible version *doesn’t* add “the” to “Christ,” Gumbel adds it all the same (see *30 Days*, p. 45). The Jewish historian Josephus said of Jesus “He was Christ,” as opposed to “He was **the** Christ,” thus showing that the “the” was not Hebraically necessary in this context. However, when Gumbel quotes Josephus, he inserts “the,” as if to suggest Josephus was wrong [*Questions of Life*, p. 24].

24 In other words, to have the same ratio of references to “Jesus” and “Christ Jesus” as appears in the Greek Scriptures.

25 Talk 14. In the same talk Gumbel says, “If you ask the question **where** is God? **The** answer is, ‘He is in the midst of his people.’” Gumbel thus implies that this is the *main* place God is! Gumbel writes “**God** ... has come to live in **us**” [*30 Days*, p. 51], but he does nothing to avoid the confusion these words could engender. What makes Jesus different from a Spirit-filled Christian in this case?

26 *30 Days*, p. 52.

27 Talk 2 uses phrases like “He **claimed** to be the Christ, the son of God.”

28 See the references to “Simon Peter,” “St. Paul” and “St. John” in Talks 2, 3 and 4 respectively. Likewise Gumbel seems to prefer for unbelievers to rely on the words of an angel [Talk 8] or on the weak logic of C.S. Lewis [Talk 2] rather than Gumbel stating it as his *own* belief and proving it. On the few occasions when he *does* indicate it himself, he invariably remains unable to say “Jesus is the only Son of God,” but instead splits the statement into separate sentences—as if to come as close as he can without actually having to state this truth [e.g., see *30 Days*, p. 16].

29 Talk 11.

30 Talk 6.

31 *Green Alpha Manual*, p. 17.

32 *Searching Issues*, p. 59.

33 Talk 9. In the booklet *Why Christmas?*, the fact that we are only *adopted* is obscured altogether! We simply “become children of God. He is our heavenly Father” [p. 21], we “become his sons and daughters” [p. 14].

(without ever clarifying that Jesus' Sonship did not come through adoption, like ours does). There are a tiny number of occasions when Gumbel calls Jesus "the one and only son of God," but the phrase "one-and-only" is also a euphemism for "unique." Anyway, Gumbel undermines the fact that the Lord Jesus is the only Son of God with statements like the one below:

"I love a character...called Billy Bray.... At the age of 29 he came to Christ.... He became this magnetic person...he said, "I'm a young prince. Because I'm the adopted son of God. I'm the son of a King!" [rather than "a son of the King"]. That was his favorite expression: "I am the son of a King." You can't get higher than that.³⁴ And that's what it means to be a child of God...."³⁵

Finally for this section, we need to return briefly to our Savior's conception as a man. As we saw in the first article, Nicky doesn't mention the virgin birth in any talk, and he teaches things like "Scripture...is 100 per cent the work of human beings...just as Jesus is fully human...."³⁶ This will suggest to many in Alpha that, while the Lord may have been adopted as a son by God, nevertheless He had a human father. Gumbel reinforces this belief when he quotes Philip calling Jesus "the son of Joseph".³⁷ Gumbel offers zero clarification. Many in Israel "supposed" Jesus to be the son of Joseph (Luke 3:22), but He wasn't, and none of the writers of the NT books called Him that.

We close this section with some more surprising facts on this topic:

I Even in the chapter supposedly devoted to "the Trinity" in Gumbel's

book, *Searching Issues*, there is not a solitary mention of the virgin birth.³⁸

I Regarding Jesus' claims, including His claim to be the Son of God, Gumbel says "What evidence is there, then, to support what he said? The first area we should look at obviously, [is] his life" [Talk 2]. But Gumbel doesn't look at this crucial aspect of His life, while suggesting to hearers that they are being presented with the evidence!³⁹

I Coaker observes that, in the whole of the book, *Questions of Life*, there are "no references to the birth narratives."⁴⁰ Could this be because such references would teach the virgin birth of the Lord?⁴¹ Certainly the natural assumption by most of the "unchurched" in Alpha will be that Jesus' conception was like that of any other man.

CONCLUSION TO PART 2

There are more concerns we could mention, but this article is already long enough and the pattern is obvious. On each of these questions Gumbel seems not just unwilling to state the whole truth in a categorical manner, but repeatedly damages these truths about our wonderful Savior who gave His life as a ransom for us.

The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to testify accurately of Jesus (John 15:26) and to glorify Him (John 16:14). No true believer will hedge on, let alone compromise on, His nature. So what does this tell us about Alpha? Is the same pattern evident when we examine the Lordship and Deity of Alpha's Jesus? The next part will seek to find out.



An Alpha Supper at Holy Trinity Brompton, London.
(Scanned from *The Alpha Course Directory*, July - October 2002, p. 27.)

34 Note the ambiguity in this sentence. Hearers may well assume that they will be at the same height as Jesus! The truth is, Jesus is higher than all.

35 Talk 9. Note that *all* of Gumbel's references to us being 'sons of God' *through adoption* occur in Talk 9, even though this is six talks on from the Gospel presentation!

36 *Questions of Life*, p. 171.

37 Talk 12. (See chapter 10 of our book for other examples of how Nicky Gumbel's Bible version undermines the Christhood and Sonship of Jesus.)

38 The *only* place we can find a proper reference to His "virgin birth" is in Gumbel's book *30 Days*, (p. 16), yet even here it is called "**the** virgin birth" rather than "**His** virgin birth."

39 Indeed Gumbel goes on to recommend participants start by reading John's Gospel, rather than one of the synoptic Gospels that would teach the Lord's virgin birth, etc.

40 Coaker, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

41 Gumbel does say, "The angel said [to Mary], 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God'" [Talk 8]. But the context in which Gumbel quotes this is *Mary being filled with the Holy Spirit*, not the Holy Spirit causing the conception of Jesus. Plus, on its own, this verse *still* doesn't tell unsaved hearers that Jesus' conception did not involve Joseph.

Part 3: The Divinity of Alpha's Jesus

A famous and beautiful hymn opens with this contemplation:

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

When He gave so much for us, the least we can do is to teach rightly about Him. There is a big question mark over whether the Alpha Course does so in regard to the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Readers will frequently be intrigued by the following superb article supplying the results of a very careful and thorough check.

Nicky Gumbel writes, "the most important question we can ever ask is, 'Who is Jesus?'"¹ In the same book, he states "This is the heart of the Christian faith: knowing Jesus Christ".² The Lord Jesus Christ is indeed the very centre of true biblical faith, and it is vital therefore to know who He truly is. Since Scripture warns believers to take serious care over everything we teach regarding the Faith (1 Timothy 4:13-16; James 3:1), we should be particularly conscientious in our teaching about the Person who is at the core of our Faith.

Whatever a fellowship may believe on subjects like the 'end-times', or the gifts of the Spirit, or church ordinances, or family-related matters, or any of the large number of other topics that Alpha touches on, the divinity of Jesus Christ is an absolutely crucial issue to salvation—as we shall see in a moment. It is therefore a matter about which participants must be left in no doubt.

Clearly, each one of the teachings about the Lord Jesus that we examined in Part 2 on His nature is intimately related to His divinity. But so are several of the topics we discussed in Part 1 on His character. For when Alpha's material is problematic over His sinlessness, infallibility, holiness and perfection, then the Godhood of the Lord is already damaged. However, for completeness we need to see what Alpha is like regarding its more direct statements on the divinity of the Lord Jesus.

DOES THE BIBLE TEACH THAT HE IS GOD?

There is only one true God (John 17:3), but He is "triune," meaning He is one God comprising three distinct yet indivisible Persons. At first this idea appears alien, but man is triune too in a very real sense. We each have a body, soul and spirit,³ each of which is "us." Hence we are said to have been made "in God's image" (Genesis 1:27; 9:6). But is Jesus one of the three Persons that constitute God, and is thus God Himself?

As anyone who has listened to Handel's famous oratorio Messiah will know, Isaiah 9:6 is quite unambiguous about this question: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God." Matthew quotes another portion of Isaiah when he writes, "Behold, a virgin shall be with child, ... and they shall call His name Immanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us." (Matthew 1:23).

We have already determined that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God. Many people assume, however, that this means He is not truly God but that He just enjoys a derived divinity.⁴ Holy Scripture settles that debate:

God was manifest in the flesh, ... believed on in the world, received up into glory. (1 Timothy 3:16)

Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down his life for us. (1 John 3:16)

(See also Romans 14:10b-12; Acts 4:24; Colossians 2:9; Acts 17:59; Hebrews 1:3; 1 John 4:19; Philipians 2:6, etc—all in the KJV.)

This subject matters greatly, for if Jesus was not God then He must have been born of Adam and tainted by Adam's sin. In that case He would have inherited a sinful nature and His shed blood could not have paid the required price for our redemption.

God is so totally holy that our sin requires that only God Himself could pay the price to save us. If we do not believe that the full price has been paid then we will naturally seek to "make up the difference." Any attempt by a man to pay any part of the price of redemption for his sins is an abomination to God and will result in that man's destruction (see Galatians). The Godhood of the Lord has such huge importance regarding other doctrines that we cannot afford to be even remotely complacent about this.

IS HE JEHOVAH?

The four letters 'YHWH' (often pronounced 'Yahweh', and Anglicised⁵ to 'Jehovah') make for a special, and unique, name for the true God:

God spake unto Moses, and said unto him, I Am the LORD:...My name [is] YHWH. (Exodus 6:2-3)

O my God...whose name *alone is* YHWH. (Psalms 83:13,18)

This matchless name was considered to be so holy that it was usually replaced by "LORD" out of fear and respect.

1 30 Days, p41. We would argue that an even more important question is 'What is **the truth**?' , because many people ask 'Who is Jesus?' but they then go to the wrong sources to find out.

2 30 Days, p42. Since Satan 'knows' Jesus Christ, this is not as helpful a comment as it might appear.

3 That our soul is different from our spirit is proved in Heb. 4:12 and 1 Thess. 5:23.

4 This idea can be picked up from Alpha resources, e.g. when Gumbel writes things like, "the unique Son of God – [is] on an equal footing with God" [*Why Christmas?*, p5], rather than saying "...is God Himself". Incidentally, Gumbel prefers the phrase "God the Father, **Jesus** the Son" to "God the Father, **God** the Son" or perhaps "God the Father, Jesus - God the Son" in *Questions of Life*, p116, and the equivalent video Talk (#8).

5 Many Hebrew names in the Bible have been transliterated into Greek, and/or Anglicized. Thus the Jewish name Miriam has been converted to Mary in English Bibles, and Jochanan has become John. As long as the name is *used* right, and the same person is clearly in view, then the Anglicisation is surely valid. Thus the Anglicised version of Yahweh is Jehovah (see Newbery's introduction to his Bible for the reason).

Since the one true God alone is called "YHWH," and since TWO YHWHs are referred to simultaneously in Genesis 18-19' (one of them appearing as a man), it becomes evident that Jesus Christ is indeed YHWH. As we saw in Part 1, the name Jesus means "salvation." Hence we get verses like Isaiah 12:2: "Behold, God is my salvation [or 'Jesus']; ... the LORD YHWH is...my salvation."

The name YHWH means "I Am," which is why "God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and He said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me" (Exodus 3:14). The phrase "I Am" is a way of saying "I have always existed," which is an attribute unique to God. As we saw in Part 2, it is an attribute of Jesus Christ. Jesus is YHWH God.

But what does Alpha say on this important issue? Although Nicky Gumbel is certainly aware of "the divine name," as he terms it, one will not actually find the words "YHWH" or "Yaweh" used in any Alpha talk. What one will find stated on Alpha is, "Jesus did not go around saying the words, 'I am God'" [Talk 2]. But this is slightly misleading because, as we have seen, "I Am" is God's name and the Lord Jesus did indeed claim that name:

Jesus...said unto them [the chief priests], Whom seek ye?

They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I Am...

As soon then as He had said unto them, I Am..., they went backward, and fell to the ground.⁶

Then asked he them again, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus answered, I have told you that I Am... (John 18:4-8).⁷

Other examples of the Lord calling Himself "I Am" occur in John 8:28 and John 13:19. This is a critical matter, for the Lord Jesus said that anyone who did not believe He was YHWH ("I Am") would die in their sins (John

8:24; c.f., v 58). Taught properly, this doctrine should not be hard to grasp. Hence Paul talked about "the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:3). It is wrong to complicate it and thus bring confusion.

DOES ALPHA SAY THAT HE IS GOD?

Some Course leaders will be deeply offended at any suggestion that Alpha has the slightest flaw in this regard. They are convinced that chapter 7 of Gumbel's book *Searching Issues*, plus Talks 2 and 3 of the Course itself, leave no room for doubt that Jesus is God and that Alpha is therefore totally sound on the topic. There are, however, many reasons why we would beg such folks to continue reading this article. For a start, there exist a further six chapters of *Searching Issues*, not to mention all the other Alpha publications, so there is huge scope for problems to occur elsewhere. Likewise, it should be remembered that there are twelve further talks in the video set beyond Talks 2 and 3, which means there is plenty of room for errors to creep in and undermine any good statements in those two early talks.

Indeed, we will shortly see that, when checked very carefully, even the best Alpha statements are not as clear-cut as they could be, and none of the 21 Bible passages we cited above supporting the deity of Jesus Christ appears in any Alpha talk. Neither do they appear anywhere in *Questions of Life*, let alone in those chapters associated with Talks 2 and 3, nor even in the relevant part of *Searching Issues*.

If any readers are convinced that Alpha is beyond reproach over the issue of the deity of Jesus, and are therefore not interested in perusing our material further, we would encourage them to at least use the section headings of our articles to create a questionnaire for their Alpha graduates. According to our research, they will be dismayed by the feedback they get.

It may also surprise some readers to learn that we can find no sentence in any Alpha publication which simply says the words "Jesus Christ [or Christ Jesus] is God," or even "Jesus is God," easy, and very valuable, though it would be for Alpha to include one. But let us begin by acknowledging some of the things Nicky Gumbel does say about the deity of Jesus.

WAS HE, AND IS HE, THE ONE TRUE GOD?

While words like "deity" do not currently appear in the talks,⁸ the word "divine" does⁹—albeit not in relation to Jesus. Looking at Gumbel's books however, he certainly refers to the Lord's "divinity." In *Questions of Life* Jesus is called "the divine figure"¹⁰ and the Study Guide at the back asks, "What evidence is there that he [Jesus] was divine?" [p239]. The only problem is that, for many people, there is a fundamental distinction between being "divine" and being the one true God. The New Age movement believes in the "divinity" of Jesus, but not that He is the one true God.

Just about the only clear Bible reference to the deity of Jesus that Alpha covers is John 1:1, which reads, "...the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Unfortunately, Gumbel immediately weakens this crucial verse by giving the explanation that, "The Word [unnamed] was a person in fellowship with God, and the Word was ...eternally **divine**."¹¹ Why replace the perfectly good phrase "was God" with "was...divine"?

Nicky Gumbel favorably quotes someone saying: "I understood Jesus is fully God" [Talk 3]. This would be excellent, except that Gumbel then tells hearers how they should interpret the phrase "fully God":

[W]e say that Jesus is...fully God...let me use an analogy....We say Sir Christopher Wren built St.

6 That the Lord's enemies "went backwards and fell" on hearing "I Am" suggests these words had rather more significance than merely acknowledging that these people had found their man.

7 We have removed the word "he" after each occurrence of "I Am" because the word "he" does not appear in the Greek—which is why it is only displayed in *italics* in the KJV.

8 Neither do any of the words "Godhead," "Triune," or "Immanuel" occur in Talks 2 or 3 (or indeed in *any* Alpha talk).

9 Talks 9 & 11.

10 Page 76. Although the Bible uses the word "divine," it is almost always in the context of divination—a detestable practice in God's eyes. While the Bible says Jesus had a "divine" *power and nature*, it never actually calls *Him* "divine."

11 *Searching Issues*, p. 101.

Paul's Cathedral; in fact, he didn't lay a single stone.¹² Other people laid the stones. He used agents to do it, but he ...directed the whole operation" [Talk 5].

Gumbel is saying that Jesus is only "fully God" in the derived sense that God fully directed Him or fully inspired Him. Gumbel confirms this as the right interpretation when he writes, "Scripture is...100 per cent inspired by God just as Jesus is fully God."¹³ No clarification is forthcoming in either case. (Note also that St. Paul's Cathedral could never be said to be "Wren," thus it would be completely inappropriate to call Jesus 'God' from this analogy.)

Nicky employs the argument by C.S. Lewis that "Either this man [Jesus]¹⁴ was and is the Son of God or else a madman, or something worse..." [Talk 2]. Since the evidence discounts the last two possibilities, Jesus must logically be the Son of God. On the surface this looks great, but as we have seen, this does not quite settle matters, for hearers need to be sure what sort of Godhood results from being the "Son of God." Does it mean Jesus is the one true God, or instead that his "divinity" was of a lesser, derived nature?

Some readers will feel that this is a minor point. But does the Bible say so? In fact the precise "type," or definition, of Jesus' Godhood is extremely significant. New Agers believe Jesus Christ is a "god," having God living in Him. Unfortunately Lewis' own terminol-

ogy, also used by Gumbel, seems to permit this interpretation also, for he says, "God has landed on this enemy occupied world in human form,"¹⁵ rather than "as a man" or even "as a human." Despite appearances, this is not a trivial issue at all, as we shall see in the next section.

WAS GOD 'IN' HIM?

When we truly believe in Jesus, the Holy Spirit indwells our spirit (John 14:17; 1 John 3:24 etc).¹⁶ Since the Holy Spirit is God, there is a sense in which God is "in" every Christian, but this does not make us God. If we give people the impression that Jesus only had God "in" Him, rather than being the one true God Himself, then we are effectively denying His deity and are destroying the Gospel. This is why it is so worrying to see the excessive number of times that Nicky Gumbel uses expressions like the following:

"God has revealed himself in a person" ¹⁷ (Rather than "as a man"); God...as we see him...in Jesus"¹⁸ God, revealed in the person of Jesus Christ";¹⁹ "God...came to earth in the person of his son" [Talk 3]; "God's revelation in Jesus Christ."²⁰

The occasional use of such phraseology, preferably with some explanatory comment close by, would be fine, but Gumbel employs this sort of wording very frequently, with no clarification, in a single chapter of Questions of Life.²¹ The closing commentary in that

chapter teaches the following: "Paul says, 'God was...in Christ.' [elliptic Gumbel's] He was...in the person of his Son."²² This brings us neatly to a related point.

The Bible tells us that "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature....God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). If one considers the first occurrence of "in Christ" here it becomes plain that this passage is not saying that God was in Christ, but that we, if we are "in Christ," are reconciled to God. Corroborating verses are far too numerous to list but include Romans 3:24; 8:1; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 15:22; Ephesians 2:13; and Philippians. 2:1. Yet consider how Gumbel uses the passage:

Paul...says: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself"...What Paul tells us is that God was in Christ.²³

Gumbel mistreats this passage again in his book Searching Issues [p. 20]. The context there is the issue of suffering, so the unmistakable impression is that God knows about suffering because he was "in" Christ during the Lord's trials.²⁴ As Jesus is called "divine," Alpha participants are thereby encouraged to assume that His divinity was only partial or imputed to Him.

A final observation: Gumbel writes, "Jesus stood up and proclaimed, 'If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink'...It is out of the innermost being of Jesus that the river of life will

12 It seems a shame for Gumbel to use the word "stones" in this statement, when the Lord Jesus is *our* "corner stone" (Eph. 2:20).

13 *Questions of Life*, p. 71.

14 It is interesting that Lewis consistently avoids using the name "Jesus" when making his most unequivocal statements on Godhood. He instead uses phrases like "the man we are talking about" or "he", when it would be much more helpful and unambiguous to give His actual name.

15 Talk 2. Also *Why Christmas?*, p. 6; the *Green Alpha Manual*, p. 9, and elsewhere. Note that Lewis's choice of phrase suggests that God is a being from another planet. This is in line with Mormonism and the Word-Faith paradigm, but not the Bible!

16 Gumbel almost always uses the phrase "comes to live within us" of the Holy Spirit (see, for instance, Talks 6, 7, 8 & 9). But this is ambiguous and helps to encourage Toronto-esque manifestations in the *body* or *soul*.

17 *Questions of Life*, p. 71. Jesus was already "a Person," so this statement is very unhelpful.

18 *Searching Issues*, p. 13.

19 *Searching Issues*, p. 110.

20 *Searching Issues*, p. 31.

21 See pages 45, 48-50.

22 *Questions of Life*, p. 50. Note that Gumbel does not say "the **Father** was in the person of His Son."

23 Talk 3. Note how Gumbel exploits the KJV rendering when it suits his purposes. The NIV does not phrase the passage as "God was in Christ."

24 This notion is reinforced when Gumbel says only that "God...participated in the suffering of the cross" [*Searching Issues*, p. 24], as if there was *another* participant on the cross—one who wasn't truly God.

flow...Jesus was speaking about the Holy Spirit..."²⁵

There is a serious concern here. The Holy Spirit is another Person of the Trinity. He is not restricted to the "innermost being of Jesus," and neither is only part of Jesus holy. Gumbel's words suggest that only the "innermost being" of Jesus (or the "being" that lives inside Him?) is God.²⁶ The New Age movement, like other counterfeit versions of Christianity, believes Jesus was just a human receptacle for "the Divine," or, as New Age "Christians" would say, "the Christ Principle," or even "the godhead." This is a grave error which posits that Jesus was merely an enlightened man who attained divinity.

WAS HE DISTINCT FROM GOD?

Jesus is God. As such, He cannot be "separated" from God. There are three Persons in the Godhead, but God is indivisible (John 10:38; John 15:26; etc). God is not merely "one" in the sense of being unified; There is only one God.

Certainly there are some individual verses in Scripture that appear to separate God and Jesus,²⁷ but Gumbel's job is to explain these verses, not to use an unrepresentatively large number of them and invariably fail to inform his hearers of the bigger picture.

For example, Gumbel says in his book, *Questions of Life*, "On the cross, God transferred our wrong-doings (our iniquity) onto Jesus...That is why Jesus cried out on the cross, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'...At that moment he was cut off from God."²⁸ (In the equivalent video

talk—Talk 3—Gumbel even calls Jesus "Godforsaken.") There is a simple explanation for the Lord's words here, as we will see in a moment, so Gumbel's decision not to supply it obliges Alpha participants to believe that Jesus cannot truly have been God. How can He possibly have been "God-forsaken" if He was Himself God?

When we hit a "problem passage" like the above it is important to look carefully at it and to view it in the light of the rest of Scripture. In this instance Jesus was quoting the prophetic, Messianic Psalm 22, which refers to "El," not to Elohim or Adonai or YHWH. This is very significant, because "El" means "mighty one"²⁹ and would be an entirely appropriate thing for the Lord Jesus Christ to call His Father—the member of the Godhead who sent Jesus to us and gave Him His authority. On the cross, Jesus was certainly forsaken temporarily by His Father in some way, but He was not "cut off from God." Again the suggestion seems to be that Jesus' Godhood was merely partial.

For the overwhelming proportion of the time, Nicky Gumbel distinguishes between Jesus and God instead of Jesus and His Father. This seems to be true in every publication he has created. Following are samples of what we mean.

Why Christmas?

Take the booklet *Why Christmas?* written by Gumbel. After a handful of statements (mainly the C.S. Lewis ones) on pages 4-6 supporting the divinity of Jesus, everything changes on page 7 and Jesus seems to be separated

from God there and on every one of the pages from 9 through 22 inclusive (the booklet is only 22 pages long).

30 Days

Consider, too, the following excerpt taken from adjacent pages of Gumbel's book *30 Days*. Note that neither the word "Father" nor the phrase "God the Father" occurs anywhere on these two pages. Does one get the overall impression from it that Jesus is God?

"Jesus...Jesus...Jesus sets us free to be our true selves as God intended us to be. He sets us free to love God... Jesus says...Jesus is...revealed by God. Jesus is...God's ultimate revelation...Knowing God and Jesus broadens our minds."³⁰ (Gumbel gets so entangled here that, further down the same page, he says "Thank God ... for setting us free to love God.")

This example is especially strange because the Bible chapter on which Nicky is meant to be commenting here repeatedly supports the Godhood of Jesus and refers as much to God "the Father" as to "God" alone.

Questions of Life

Again, a smattering of sentences which appear to distinguish between "God" and "Jesus" are probably inevitable in any "introduction to the Christian faith," but Gumbel employs them in enormous numbers—and in every resource. Indeed, in *Questions of Life* alone, phrases like "God through Jesus" simply occur too frequently for us to cite them all.³¹ On several occasions this separation actually happens two, or even three, times on the same page.³² A few examples of separation, where the words "God the Father"

25 *Questions of Life*, p. 124.

26 Another erroneous idea propagated by this statement is that Jesus was only 'God' because He had the Holy Spirit inside Him—in which case, Christians would be divine too.

27 We must be careful to interpret rightly all occasions when the Bible appears to distinguish between Jesus Christ and God. For instance, Scripture sometimes has expressions like "God and our Saviour Jesus Christ," but grammatically these actually serve to *confirm* the deity of Jesus. The expression "God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" in Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1 uses the same grammatical construction as that in Gal. 1:4 to express the deity of the **Father**. (Also in 1 Thess. 1:3 and Phil. 4:20—"God and our **Father**.") The verses 2 Thess 1:12, Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1 are called *hendiadys*, from the Greek *hen dia dyoin*, "one by two." Grammatically it expresses an idea by using two nouns connected by *and*, instead of by a noun and an adjunct. No sensible person would deny the deity of the *Father* in those places where the Bible reads "God and the Father" (Jas. 1:27; Eph. 5:20; Col. 1:3; Col. 3:17).

28 *Questions of Life*, p. 61.

29 *Strongs*, 0410.

30 *30 Days*, pp. 64-65. For some other examples in this book where Gumbel infers a separation of Jesus from God, see pp. 46, 52 & 60.

31 Pages 175, 185, 190, 207 & 221 only represent a handful of the total.

32 e.g., Pp. 70, 85, 122, 133 & 154.

would have been so much safer, will hopefully suffice. (The situation in the video talks is worse still.)

[L]iving in a relationship with God and Jesus Christ. [p. 21]

I had hurt God's feelings...He loved me and...sent Jesus. [p. 51]

[W]e pray for God to heal in the name of Jesus...I prayed in the name of Jesus for God to heal him. [pp. 200-201]

God...God...Spirit of God...God...In these ways (the word of God, the work of Jesus and the witness of the Spirit), those who believe in Jesus can be sure that they are children of God...It is based on what God has promised, [and] on what Jesus died to achieve." [p. 64]

Again, it is not that any of these statements, taken individually, are a problem. There are sufficient references to Jesus as the Son of God in the Alpha Course. But it is when we take the entire Course into consideration that we find insufficient evidence of strong affirmations of Jesus Christ's deity as God the Son. Hence the separating of Jesus from God in consistent language does little to affirm that important truth.

Holy Scripture

We have seen the way in which Gumbel approaches his own books on this issue, but it is more revealing still to examine his approach to God's book. As if Gumbel's Bible version was not already problematic enough in this area, he regularly rewords Scripture in a way that separates "God" from "Jesus" when the passage itself does not. An example is his treatment of Ephesians 2:18:

A verse we've looked at...is Ephesians 2:18 which says, "we have access...to the Father by one Spirit."

We have access to God through Jesus by the Spirit. [Talk 9]

Gumbel's paraphrase here changes the meaning of the text, but it is no accident, for he repeats the alteration almost verbatim later in the same talk when he says, "We have access to God through Jesus Christ by the Spirit." He does exactly the same thing in two separate chapters of Questions of Life [pp. 85, 132].

Similarly with Luke 11:13, Gumbel replaces "your heavenly Father" with "God" and thereby helps to obscure the deity of Jesus.³³ Gumbel replaces "Father" with "God" in John 14:6 as well, with the same harm to the Lord's standing.³⁴ Likewise Gumbel alters John 17:3, this time without even admitting that he is paraphrasing, to suggest that knowing God is not the same thing as knowing Jesus Christ [Talk 3]. Once again, this causes the divinity (as opposed to "deity") of Jesus Christ to appear as no more than partial and derivative. Little wonder "Jesus" and "God" are often separated in Alpha testimonies—on the rare occasions that Jesus receives a mention.³⁵

HOW AMBIGUOUS IS ALPHA ON THE MATTER OF HIS DEITY?

Many Course leaders are adamant that, at least in two or three places, Alpha materials unequivocally state that Jesus is God. However, given that the four books at the center of Alpha contain a combined total of well over 700 pages, this is really nothing of which to boast. There are some moments when Jesus' Godhood is implied in Alpha materials, but in every single case an ambiguity of one type or another is present—and often multiple types of ambiguity are involved simultaneously. Here is a selection of the things we are referring to:

- It would be a total irrelevance if it did not happen so very frequently, but Alpha's statements on this whole matter are consistently, and unnecessarily, spread over multiple clauses or sentences, which almost always results in the pivotal phrase on Jesus' deity being less than totally direct because it reads "he" or "him" rather than "Jesus" or similar. Every example in the remaining set of bullet points exhibits this indirectness—along with at least one other, much more serious, problem.

- Gumbel is sometimes prepared to indicate that other people (e.g., the disciples, or the early "Church" generally) believed in the deity of Jesus Christ, but he regularly avoids saying that he personally believes these people were correct. Thus, instead of "I believe Jesus is God, we are merely told "He is the one whom the early church worshipped as God".³⁶ This is not the same at all, because it gives participants little reason to assume the early Church was right to do so, particularly in view of Gumbel's lack of testimony to the truth.

- The truth of Jesus' Godhood is often needlessly convoluted. Instead of "Jesus was (or is) God," we get "I think there's little doubt that he was conscious of being a man whose identity was God" [Talk 2], or, "Jesus said a number of things which were not direct claims but show that he regarded himself as being in the same position as God" [Talk 2].³⁷ This introduction of superfluous words simply confuses and obscures the issue.

The infinitesimal number of Alpha statements that avoid the above problems still fail to state categorically that

33 *Questions of Life*, p. 154. Gumbel's exact words are, "Jesus goes on to say that in comparison with **God** we are evil." Would hearers be likely to realize from this choice of words that Jesus Himself was *not* evil? Jesus said "**you** are evil," not "**we** are evil."

34 *Questions of Life*, p. 27.

35 See, for instance, *Alpha News*, #14, p. 3; *Alpha News*, Nov 2001 – Feb 2002, p. 11; or *Telling Others*, (Kingsway, 2001), p. 152.

36 *Searching Issues*, p. 27. See also page 100. Adding the suffix "as God" implies that Gumbel believes there are forms of worship which can be legitimately offered to beings other than God.

37 All three of these problems are manifested in a quote by Lewis. Instead of Gumbel saying "I accept that **Jesus** was and is God," he quotes Lewis saying, "I **have to** accept the **view** that **he** was and is God" [Talk 2]. Gumbel does not say he agrees, and the sentence nowhere mentions "Jesus," but there is a third problem. Just accepting that people hold a certain "view" is very different from believing the truth of that view.

Jesus is the one true God, instead introducing a degree of doubt (e.g. via the use of a judiciously placed hyphen or comma). These few statements are also always weakened by surrounding comments which repeatedly separate Jesus and God.³⁸ Again, given that Gumbel was a practicing courtroom lawyer before being ordained into the Anglican Church there seems no excuse at all for being remotely unclear about this fundamental topic.

The following is another example of multiple ambiguities. Gumbel writes that, "The early Christians...came to see that there was something special about Jesus that could only be expressed as God."³⁹ Christians reading such words are reassured that Gumbel is sound on the issue of Jesus being God, yet the passage does not teach unbelievers that Jesus is God. Firstly it is predicated on them accepting that the "early Christians" were correct. Secondly, these Christians cannot have "come to see" the deity of Jesus after they were Christians; they must have recognized that Jesus was God in order to become Christians to begin with. Thirdly, the passage only says that something "about" Jesus was God, rather than Him being intrinsically God Himself. Fourthly, the impression is that this "thing" could only be expressed as God due to language limitations.

The Biggest Ambiguity

There is one last group of statements that needs to be covered. The comments in question all utilize the word "identity":

"Jesus claimed...that he really was a man whose identity was God" [Talk 2]; "claims made by Jesus about his identity";⁴⁰ "Jesus [made]...another indirect claim to have the identity of Almighty God".⁴¹

Whilst these statements are obviously more convoluted than they need be, nevertheless believers naturally

take them to be thoroughly in support of the deity of Christ Jesus. Unfortunately Nicky does not appear to mean the same thing that you and I normally do by the word "identity." In standard parlance, if a man is said to have the "identity" of John Wesley, then either he has stolen Wesley's passport or else he is John Wesley. But to Gumbel, having the "identity" of God does not mean the person is God—a fact demonstrated by the following quote from the last chapter of *Searching Issues*: "They [the early Christians] came to see him [Jesus] as a man whose identity was God and yet who was not identical to God" [p100].

An alternate meaning for the word "identity" is "personality." Someone who feels depersonalized is said to have "lost their identity." But just having the same personality as somebody else does not make you that same being. Thus Gumbel is not calling Jesus "God" here. He has moved into the realm of psychology and its false distinction between the conscious and the subconscious.⁴² Hence, "Jesus...was conscious of being a person whose identity was God."⁴³

Even if the reader strongly disagrees about these ambiguities, or perhaps finds a totally unambiguous sentence somewhere in the Course materials, he or she must surely still accept that any such comments are rare and are submerged under a flood of damaging ones that nullify their effect. Other readers may believe they can safely run Alpha by simply correcting this particular teaching as the Course progresses. But that is to avoid a more important question. If Alpha is so unsound on this—the most important topic imaginable—can it really be trusted on the other subjects it covers? The unsaved deserve that churches check the Course thoroughly on the other major topics too, which is precisely why we have written our book Alpha – the Unofficial Guide.

WHAT DO CHRISTIANS MEAN BY 'THE TRINITY'?

Many people feel that Nicky Gumbel MUST be genuinely trinitarian, given that a chapter of his book *Searching Issues* is titled "Is the Trinity Unbiblical, Unbelievable, and Irrelevant?" Once again, however, the problem revolves around Gumbel's definition of terms—in this case the term "Trinity." Let us quickly see the biblical meaning of the word.

The Bible makes plain throughout that there is only one God (Gal. 3:20; Matt. 19:17 etc). However, there is a plurality to the Godhead, thus one of the names of God is Elohim—a plural word. The plurality of the Godhead is also shown in verses like Genesis 11:7 and Genesis 1:26. The latter reads "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness," which is again why every human also possesses a "three-ness" of sorts whilst remaining one being.

Where Gumbel mentions the three members of the Trinity one would expect him to talk about the Father, Son and Spirit, or the Father, Word and Spirit, but usually he does not. As we saw above, the word "Father" is often replaced by "God," weakening the participant's understanding that Jesus is God:

"[T]he main way we know about God, about Jesus, about the Holy Spirit..." [Talk 5]; "[T]he word of God, the work of Jesus and the witness of the Holy Spirit";⁴⁴ "We have God as our Father, Jesus Christ as our Saviour and the Holy Spirit as our indweller."⁴⁵

For someone who hails from a church called Holy Trinity Brompton, Gumbel seldom uses the word "Trinity" in his teachings. When he does, he seems to make a point of separating the members of the Godhead shortly before or afterwards and specifically drawing

38 See, for instance, *Questions of Life*, pp. 31, 129 & 233.

39 *Searching Issues*, p. 100.

40 *Questions of Life*, p. 239.

41 *Questions of Life*, p. 30.

42 Psychologists refer to the "inherited, instinctive impulses of the unconscious" as the "Id." It seems that Gumbel is trying to teach that only the "entity" occupying the Lord's "Id" is God. This would help explain the repeated reference to "Id-entity".

43 *Questions of Life*, p. 27. See also page 39.

44 *Questions of Life*, p. 55.

45 *Questions of Life*, p. 207. See also page 9.

a distinction between “God” and “Jesus.”⁴⁶ Once more we are apparently left with a Saviour possessing a divinity of a partial and derived nature.

Gumbel's Heroes

Nicky Gumbel regularly, and approvingly, quotes men whose doctrines seriously undermine the deity of Jesus Christ (e.g., Tillich,⁴⁷ Moltmann,⁴⁸ Küng,⁴⁹ Muggeridge⁵⁰ and Hort⁵¹). He even seems happy to endorse, or even cite as Christians, people who have effectively denied the deity of Jesus altogether (e.g., Tolstoy,⁵² Newton,⁵³ Fromm,⁵⁴ Ruskin,⁵⁵ Hammarskjöld⁵⁶).

It is a telling clue to the true religious or philosophical view of a person when he is favorably disposed toward those who in essence deny Jesus Christ. We may quote such persons to compare what they say against what Scripture says, and to disprove their fallacious arguments, but we cannot be true to our Savior while pressing for the arguments of anti-Christ, even when those arguments contain some truth.

Searching Issues, Chapter 7

Despite all of the above, there will still be a hard core of folks who imagine that Gumbel must be trinitarian since he devotes a chapter of one book to “the Trinity.” Let us therefore focus purely on that chapter and see just how trinitarian it really is.

Very Confused

This chapter is the one place we would expect clear teaching on the

Trinity, yet Gumbel spends much of it encouraging people to believe that the Trinity is very hard, if not impossible, to understand.⁵⁷ This can only serve to demote Christ. The Trinity may be hard to picture (men are not allowed to picture God anyway) but hopefully our article has proved that it is not hard to understand.

Gumbel uses a bewildering array of analogies for the Trinity, most of which are seriously inappropriate and mutually exclusive. Yet the simplest analogy—that of a human being's tri-part nature—is absent. We are instead informed that “God cannot be put in a neat box...” [p105], and that we can only “get a sort of faint notion of” the Trinity [p109].

While it is impossible for our finite minds to fully understand the nature of the Godhead, it should not be difficult to derive from Scripture—and to relate to others—those truths that are essential to the Faith. This is essential, particularly in regard to the many references to Jesus' deity. A lawyer such as Nicky Gumbel should certainly have that ability.

One confusing analogy offered by Gumbel is that of a house possessed by three people, where God the Father is the “architect,” God the Son is the “purchaser” and God the Holy Spirit is the “tenant” [p106]. We would not blame any Alpha participant for interpreting this to mean that Jesus somehow “purchased” His Godhood and

that He is only God in the (partial) sense that He has the Holy Spirit dwelling in Him.

Crucially, Gumbel is unable, or unwilling, to explain why the Trinity is, as he says, “fundamental to the Christian faith” [p. 105]. If Gumbel unequivocally told readers the truth, in such a manner that they could clearly realize the infinite holiness of God and the futility (not to mention fatal danger) of trying to work towards their salvation, then they would be much more keen to understand—or at least to accept—the fact that Jesus Christ is God.

The Deity of Jesus Christ Undermined

In a chapter which ought to be completely devoted to proving the deity of Jesus Christ we have already listed several ways in which it does the opposite. In the whole chapter there are no more than a handful of sentences where the doctrine is even suggested. Furthermore, each one in this handful is ambiguous, either because (a) Jesus isn't explicitly mentioned [pp99,106],⁵⁸ or (b) early Christians just “found themselves” believing it [pp100,101], or (c) God is only present “in” rather than “as” the person of Jesus Christ [p110]. This compares with the plethora of times in the chapter when a clear distinction is drawn between Jesus and “God” as opposed to Jesus and “His Father”:

“[A Christian lady] trained in psychology...realized that God is our point of reference, Jesus is our role

46 See, for instance, *Questions of Life*, p. 55, plus Talks 4 and 6.

47 *Questions of Life*, p21. We are indebted to Peter Burden-Teh for his excellent research on the theologies of some of the heretics whom Gumbel quotes without any obvious problem. Regarding Tillich's errors, see Burden-Teh's article in the journal *Christianity and Society*, Jan. 2001, p. 7. See also Burns, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

48 Talk 9. See Burden-Teh, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9. Gumbel must impress some hearers when he quotes Moltmann using the term “the crucified God” [*Questions of Life*, p46], but again we must ask the questions “What sort of God is in view?” and “Does he mean there are other Gods?” Moltmann's confusing theology included the belief that God is dead.

49 Talk 15. See Burden-Teh, *op. cit.*, (April 2001), p. 17.

50 *Questions of Life*, p135; *30 Days*, p. 109. Gumbel quotes a lot of Catholics besides Muggeridge (e.g., Tom Forrest, Pope Paul VI, Chesterton) and claims he can find nothing wrong with *Vatican II*, in which case he is supporting another Jesus.

51 Talk 2. Hort admitted he was a “staunch sacerdotalist,” and he denied Christ in other ways too. See D.A. Waite, *Heresies of Westcott and Hort*, for details.

52 Talk 1. See Burden-Teh, *op. cit.*, (April, 2000), p. 10. Tolstoy wrote of Christ, “[T]o regard...[him] as **God**...I deem the greatest **sacrilege**” [*Tolstoy's Letters*, (Scribner and Sons, 1978), Vol 1, p. 298 as quoted in Burden-Teh, *op. cit.*, (Jan., 2001), p. 7].

53 Newton is called “a believer” in Talk 1, yet he was an alchemist and famously denied the deity of Christ.

54 *30 Days*, p. 137. See Burns, *op. cit.*, p. 258.

55 *Questions of Life*, p. 56. See Burns, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

56 *30 Days*, p. 72. Ruskin and Hammarskjöld are just two of several Unitarians that Gumbel legitimizes.

57 That it is supposedly “so difficult” and “complex” is reiterated in the Study Guide. See page 124.

58 While Gumbel quotes portions of the Athanasian creed, he (a) implies it is incomprehensible [p. 99], (b) does not mention Jesus by name there, or give any other clarification as to who is in view, and (c) never states that he agrees with this creed!

model and the Holy Spirit is our facilitator" [p. 111];⁵⁹ "the God who raised Jesus Christ" [p. 110]; "the Holy Spirit was identified with God and Jesus and yet was not identical to either" [p. 101].⁶⁰

Elsewhere in the chapter, Gumbel separates the Lord Jesus Christ from "God" eight times in just two pages [102-103]. Later on he closes the chapter by focusing on Ephesians 3:19, a verse which reads, "...know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." But instead of using this valuable verse to teach that Christ Jesus is God, Gumbel only uses it to distinguish between Christ and God. He does so three times in the space of the final page—twice in the very last paragraph. What are participants to think?

A False Definition of 'Trinity'

Gumbel certainly uses the word Trinity (and, much less often, "God-head") in this chapter, but he fundamentally changes its meaning. The word Trinity, from the idea of trinity, originally meant three divine persons having one nature. But to Gumbel it means three divine persons having one purpose. This is a world away, yet time and again the chapter suggests that the Trinity merely involves three supernatural beings (only one of whom is truly God) who are closely related and work in co-operation with each other. This is reflected in

Gumbel's use of phrases like "one God ...and three Persons" [p. 104], or "Three persons, and one God" [p. 101],⁶¹ instead of something like "three persons comprising one God."

Gumbel smooths the way to this crucial redefinition by claiming that the New Testament contains "no formal credal statement about the Trinity" [p. 103]. But this is untrue, for 1 John 5:7 plainly states, "there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one." Surely Gumbel is aware of this verse, even if his preferred Bible version omits it. Indeed, he appears to paraphrase the final section of this very verse when he writes "the three are in one" [p. 112]—although the extra word obliterates a central point about the Trinity.

Gumbel goes on to insist that, "it was only later that a coherent and systematic doctrine [of the Trinity] was defined..." [p. 103]. Does Gumbel really believe that Paul did not have a "coherent and systematic" understanding of the Trinity? Besides, the Trinity can easily be demonstrated from the Hebrew Scriptures alone (and in numerous ways), yet Gumbel will only concede that "Some would say that there are hints of this doctrine even in the Old Testament" [p. 101]. (Incidentally, Gumbel seriously misrepresents both of the other Persons of the Trinity, too! See our book for details.)⁶²

HOW WOULD YOU SUM UP ALPHA'S VIEW OF HIS DIVINITY?

Readers have now seen Gumbel systematically teach that Jesus' divinity was only partial and derivative. By his own admission, the common term for the great bulk of Gumbel's teaching on the Trinity is "Arian", after Arius (cir. AD250-336)—a man who popularized this falsehood among the early Christians and who was "excommunicated" as a result. But surely, some will protest, Gumbel exposes Arius as a heretic on page 103 of *Searching Issues*? This is easy to answer:

- In the final analysis, if Gumbel's material can be shown to be overwhelmingly Arian then what Gumbel says about Arius himself is largely irrelevant. Indeed, within three pages of mentioning Arius, Gumbel is employing Arius-friendly analogies of the Trinity.⁶³
- If one checks the precise wording of what Gumbel says about Arius, one soon notices that Gumbel never categorically states that Arianism is a heresy. He does say that Arius was "excommunicated from the church for heresy," but Gumbel does not say he agrees with the view of the early church that Arius was heretical, and he does not make it all clear as to whether it was Arius' view of Jesus that was considered heretical, or whether his other

59 Quite apart from this statement separating Jesus from His Godhood, it also lessens His ministry from that of our Saviour and Lord to being a mere example.

60 A few pages on, Gumbel again separates Christ from God when he writes: "When the Holy Spirit fills us, we experience the Fatherhood of **God**, the love of **Christ** and the power of the Spirit" [p. 112]. Since the *true* Holy Spirit glorifies Christ Jesus rather than demoting him, and since Gumbel demotes the Lord Jesus so much, it is no wonder that many discernment ministries believe a counterfeit spirit is operating on Alpha Courses, producing counterfeit fruit. After all, it is a counterfeit Christ being presented. EXACTLY the same fruit is produced by New Age therapies. See our book for proof.

61 This problem is not confined to *Searching Issues*. On page 116 of *Questions of Life* we are told, "...the Holy Spirit is **just** like Jesus." This, too, leans significantly towards the idea of three divine beings that merely operate in harmony. Sadly, it also encourages people to pray to the Holy Spirit—as Gumbel often does—even though there is not a single example of anyone doing so in the whole of Scripture. We are only supposed to fellowship with the *Father and the Son* (1 John 1:3). See our book for a much fuller treatment of this. In contrast, Gumbel says, "We need to...ask **God's** forgiveness...turn to **Jesus Christ**...and ask the **Holy Spirit** to come" [*Searching Issues*, p. 66]. To go from three supernatural persons with a unified substance to three supernatural beings with a unified goal, allows the enemy to operate!

62 See our Web site (www.bayith.org) for outlets. Just as the enemy counterfeits every other aspect of Christianity, so there is a counterfeit trinity (Rev. 20:10). Since Gumbel is preaching "another" Jesus, we believe he is also dispensing "another" *Spirit* (2 Cor. 11:2-4)—a spirit that *imitates* elements of salvation but which does not result in the true Christian life described in 1 John.

63 Gumbel's Arian-friendly analogies include the *shamrock* (three identical parts which are partially linked—this is a very Eastern example); the *union jack flag* (three individual flags differing only in color and operating in concert); and the grossly Arian analogy of "a family with a father, mother and child" [p. 107]. Gumbel will only admit that this last one "**tends** towards" the idea of three gods, and he avoids any mention of Arius here (apparently preferring to make Arius look reasonable by referring instead to Philoponus—as if *his* view of three gods was effectively different).

views were the cause of his excommunication.⁶⁴

- Crucially, Gumbel appears to distance himself from Arius by misrepresenting what Arius actually taught. He says of Arius "The Three he envisages are entirely different beings, not sharing in any way [spends several pages the same nature or essence]" [p. 103]. This serves to exaggerate Arianism and enables Gumbel to appear both non-Arian and reasonable! Also, Gumbel devotes vastly more space to attacking the opposite error of Sabellianism⁶⁵ (the false idea that God is just one Person who acts differently in different situations) than he devotes to Arius.⁶⁶

CONCLUSION

The topic of this article matters enormously for a reason not stated up until now. One of the main tests God has given His people for identifying someone as a true brother is whether or not he will happily confess that Jesus the Messiah is God incarnate (1 John 4:1-3;⁶⁷ 2 John 1:7). We believers should ask each other this question regularly. A true brother will have no hesitation or difficulty in consistently confessing that Jesus Christ is God.

Those readers who have promoted Alpha in the past should not be unduly shocked if they missed many of Alpha's failings in this area. Even high-profile watchmen undertaking extensive investigations into Alpha, have missed some of these things.

"On the doctrine of the Trinity, [and] the Deity of Christ, ... Alpha is thoroughly sound" [Bayes⁶⁸]; "I was encouraged by his emphatic belief in the deity of Christ" [N. Richardson⁶⁹]; "Alpha's defence of the Deity of Christ is reasonably good. It makes the case quite well and succinctly" [Hand⁷⁰].

Believers may "fill in the gaps" when studying Alpha materials, and often imagine that unbelievers come to Alpha already knowing a fair amount about the Lord. The combined effect is to believe Alpha is adequate when it is not.

Much of our fellowship is among people who are relatively reliable. We can become conditioned to trusting others who have not earned it. We may thus end up approaching such things as Alpha trustingly and not think to look particularly closely at it. However, it is far better to err on the side of caution and be pleasantly surprised, than to be duped over such a vital thing—especially in the last days before the Lord's return, days about which He warned us:

Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name...and shall deceive many ...Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another...And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved...For there shall arise false Christs, and false proph-

ets, and shall shew great signs and wonders... (Matthew 24:3-24).

Gumbel does a good job in Talks 2 and 3 of giving believers the impression he is orthodox on the deity of the Lord. Many do not notice that the remaining 12 talks whittle away at this doctrine. Gumbel's mistreatment of the "Word made flesh" is, along with his mistreatment of the written Word, the subtlest aspect of the whole Alpha Course. Gumbel has used his immense talent for wordplay to the full, so these things are not simple to spot. It is only God's grace that has allowed us to see most of them.

People who primarily attend Alpha because of their temporal needs (e.g., a desire for friendship or healing from past hurts) easily accept Alpha because it gives them a form of "love" and brings a degree of mental recuperation often confused with salvation. (Obviously their "testimonies" never seem to suggest that Jesus is God.) But thinking people who are primarily searching for truth are rejecting Alpha because it is so illogical and inconsistent. They want answers, not therapy. As such, they are unlikely EVER to show an interest in Christianity again because they will suppose, after attending 15 long talks, that they have checked out the faith very thoroughly. Alpha is jeopardizing souls in the churches and those outside them. This is an unspeakably important truth. Please consider prayerfully copying this article and giving it to anyone you know who is capable of benefiting from it. v

64 Gumbel's ambiguities continue, for his phrase "heretical beliefs" [p. 104] is only categorically attached to the diametrically opposite position of *Sabellius* rather than to those of Arius. (As an aside, JWs are Arian and appear to have no problem with Gumbel's position on the divinity of Christ.)

65 See pp. 105-106, plus pp. 103-104 & 107.

66 The New Age movement is a deception and a counterfeit version of Christianity, thus it comes as close as it possibly can to saying Jesus is truly God without ever doing so. As stated previously, New Agers believe Jesus was "divine" but we have now seen that this is not the same as being the God of the Bible. We would expect Alpha to be absolutely rock-solid on this matter if it was a Course inspired by God. But what if it was from a New Age source? Every genuine Trinitarian who studies the Alpha material would want to check if the Course teaches the Deity of Christ. If the Course is from the *other* kingdom, then we would expect it to use every trick in the book to make it superficially appear to do so to most Christians whilst actually injecting a huge amount of doubt about the Deity of Christ and causing unbelievers and younger Christians to deny it. In other words, if this scenario is correct and Gumbel *is* Arian then one would *expect* him to distance himself from Arius in this way.

67 Even 1 John 4:3 has been corrupted in Gumbel's Bible so that a false brother merely has to "confess Jesus", rather than to "confess Jesus Christ has come in the flesh," in order to be acceptable. Thankfully, 2 John 1:7 has been less molested by the NIV in this regard.

68 Jonathan Bayes, *A Look at the Alpha Course*, (FIEC Video, 1999). Towards very start of tape.

69 Neil Richardson, in his (otherwise very useful!) booklet *A Tale of Two Cities: Nicky Gumbel and the Alpha Course*, (CWM, 2000), p. 20.

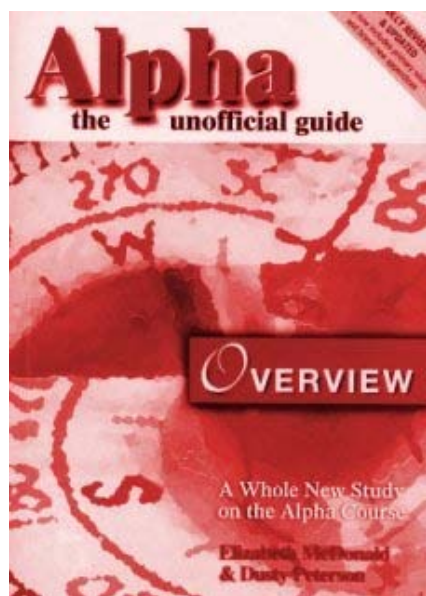
70 Chris Hand, *Falling Short?*, (DayOne, 1998), p. 3.

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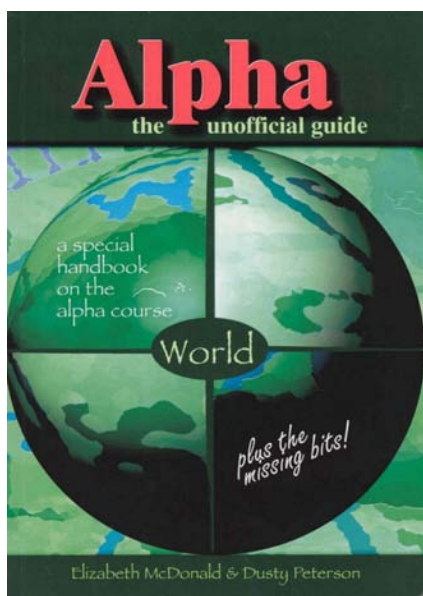
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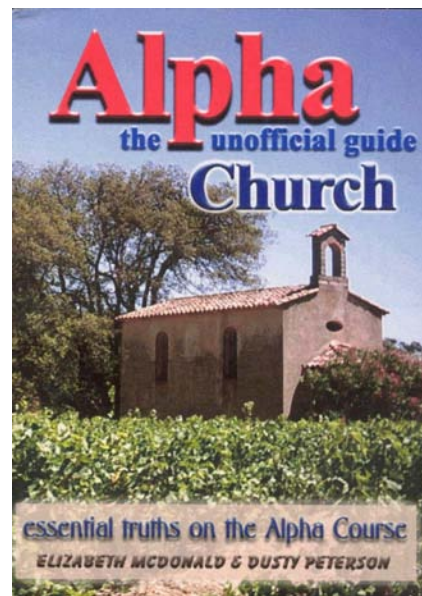
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