



NEW LIFE

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“For the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev 1:9)

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A BIBLICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE “ALPHA COURSE” (PART 1)

Introduction: Shadow Without Substance

The current craze in the ecclesiastical scene is the course started from the UK, called the “Alpha Initiative.” More than 5 million copies of the book have been sold worldwide. Dr George Carey, the Archbishop of Canterbury commented, “I have been encouraged to see the growth of use of Alpha courses.” His support for Alpha has been echoed by many others and church leaders of major denominations, including Luis Palau, R. T. Kendall, the late John Wimber, Charles Colson, Jack Hayford, J. I. Packer, and others. Even the *Daily Telegraph* (British newspapers) in February 1998, had a remark, “Alpha course have been run in **Roman Catholic**, Methodist and Anglican churches, and many report that it has been very effective way of drawing young people back into the church.”

The Guardian in UK, in March 98, said, “Where once there was Billy Graham, now there is Alpha...” International evangelist, Luis Palau, has teamed up with the Alpha to provide a follow-up programme for his evangelistic trips. *Christianity Today*, a popular US-based Christian magazine, has one whole coloured page on this course recently. The Alpha course has purportedly huge success with numerous courses run regularly three times a year, more than overseas courses conducted in US, NZ, Australia, Singapore and other parts of Asia, Russia, Europe and Africa as well. An estimate of more than 2 million people has attended the course (*Alpha News*, Feb 1997, 1). The widespread influence and popularity underscore the grave consequences it has on a large segment of the Christian community and the unbelieving world.

It has come to Singapore in the mid 1990s with a course conducted under the auspices of the Chapel of Christ the Redeemer, and many are planned for subsequent years. The course book, by Nicky Gumbel, on *Questions of Life* and *The Alpha Initiative*, with tapes and videos and other resources, are sold in local book stores as well. Quite a few have enquired about the soundness of this course. I am under duty to give an answer to those who have enquired and here it is.

The foundation of the Alpha course was originally laid in 1977 through the work of Charles Marnham, but Nicky Gumbel popularised it many years later. The author of the newly revised Alpha course, Nicky Gumbel, read law at Cambridge and theology at Oxford, practised as a barrister and is now ordained, and on the staff of Holy Trinity...

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Brompton, UK.

He popularised this Alpha course in 1993, and used a mnemonic which sums up the ingredients of the Alpha in this way (p. 51 of *The Alpha Initiative*, latest edition, Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 1999):

An anyone can come
Learning and laughter (i.e., having fun)
Pasta (i.e., food)
Helping one another
Ask anything.

Essentially, Alpha is a 10-week course, involving a total of 15 talks which include a weekend and a celebration party at the end (p. 26). While we are not against the idea of a course, it is the content that we are concerned about. Gumbel was very much enamoured with the charismatic movement and in this Alpha course, he emphasised heavily on the external manifestations of the Spirit as in signs, wonders, healings, miracles, and speaking in tongues. The course is hosted by Holy Trinity Brompton, London, a notorious charismatic church in the UK that supports the Toronto Blessing.

What is wrong (or right) with this course? Under the search light of the Holy Scriptures, there are certain things we need to know about the course that is affecting many Christians and non-Christians as well.

Examination of the Alpha Course (A Critique of the book, The Alpha Initiative)

Firstly, the Alpha course adopts an **ecumenical stance that is accepted by liberal, ecumenical, neo-evangelical churches**, including the Catholic church (with endorsement by the late Cardinal Basil Hume, former Archbishop of York). Under the guise of an evangelistic programme, it has presented a watered-down gospel that is acceptable to all, including the Catholics. It has come across to many as non-threatening, informal and user-friendly. Even New Agers find it perfectly at home as said by Nicky Gumbel himself, on page 29,

I have found on Alpha that those from an essentially Enlightenment background feel at home with the parts of the course which appeal to the mind, but often have difficulty in experiencing the Holy Spirit. Others coming from the New Age movement find that rational and historical explanations leave them cold, but at the weekend away they are on more familiar territory in experiencing the Spirit...

We recognise the need to make the gospel understandable to ordinary people, but not devoid of the essence of biblical truth, and the principal teachings of saving faith. William Tyndale, the English Reformer and Bible translator, made the Bible understandable to the English people, but he did not concoct a new gospel to please them.

Secondly, the Alpha course meanders around with attractive (but deceptive) videos, and freestyle **homespun presentation of the gospel with little or no emphasis on evangelical repentance at all**. The words of John, the Baptist are grievously ignored. Matthew 3: 8 says, *“Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.”* Peter said the same in Acts 2: 38–39,

Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the...

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promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

A gospel without repentance and self-denial is no cross-centred Christian gospel at all. It is a different gospel as Paul puts it in Galatians 1:7–8. The course attempts to take away its “offensive elements” and give it a sugar coating to render it easy for others to “accept.”

It is a man-pleasing and man-centred gospel rather than a God-honouring and Christ-centred gospel. It is pandering to the emotional and psychological aspect of man and humanistic tactics are used to subtly draw people to Christ without requiring self-denial and repentance. Jesus says, in Luke 9:23, *“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.”*

It is a gospel of love only, without the teaching of the total depravity and the hopelessness of men (without Christ) and the heinousness of sin, with no wrath of God mentioned; and consequently, no judgment at all. It is like having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof (2 Tim 3:5). It is a broad way that leads to destruction, not the narrow way that leads to eternal life in Christ Jesus alone (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

(To be continued next week)

*By Rev (Dr) Jack Sin, Maranatha B-P Church, S'pore
(adapted from Evangel Weekly dated 6 July 2008)*

YOUTH CONTEMPORARY ISSUES BY DR JACK SIN Q&A – TRANSCRIBED BY KEENE CHEN (PART 2)

3. Should a Christian watch a movie?

Before 1983, I used to watch a lot of movies, especially kungfu shows. When I was young, Balestier Road used to have 3 theatres and we used to pay 50 cents for a movie. I was caught in the trend, to be honest. I don't want to pretend that I wasn't affected as a youth. Sometimes watching shows such as Dracula brings back fear, especially when one sees bats. Actually there's no relation, because some of the bats are just fruit bats. After I watched Dracula, it gave me a wrong understanding and I regretted watching it.

Why do you watch movies? The 3 main kinds of genres today are horror, sex and violence. Furthermore they mix them nowadays. It can be quite a waste of time and money and it is not profitable for a Christian to be seeing these unedifying movies, but that's how Satan slowly brings people in. It can be quite enslaving; after you watch it, you like it and you go back again. Movie tickets are about \$8.50 today. Every time you watch a show, you're giving \$8.50 to support a diabolical machine, Hollywood, which will generate more immoral and occultic movies to ensnare, deceive and even frighten people and create more immorality. I would not support something which would undermine the Word of God and the ministry of the Lord.

The worst date you can ever go on with your girlfriend or boyfriend, is to a movie. Why? When we want to have a date, we want a time of edifying relationship and good...

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communication. However in a movie, your girlfriend gets to know the actor better and vice versa. Do you want that? There is no communication between each other and instead you get to know someone else better which may be even more unedifying. I've never brought Angie out to a movie before, and I don't think I ever will. It's an absolute waste of money and time. And it is an event that does not build up our understanding of each other and faith in God at all.

We have to be very careful as this is the "in thing" today. There are a lot of other things to do besides getting lost in this form of entertainment. Hollywood is one of Satan's best machines and it has done so well to draw people away from God. Honestly ask yourself, does that movie bring you closer to God? After watching it, do you think of God? The movie industry is actually an enemy of the Bible, enemy of holiness, enemy of godliness, and enemy of Christians who love the Lord.

4. What do you think about social drinking of liquor?

Someone said to me "Pastor, don't worry, I won't get drunk". You know something? *"Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise."* (Proverbs 20:1) This is nothing to do with drunkenness even. Solomon was saying objectively why strong drink mocks and deceives us.

Dr Martin Lloyd Jones wrote a book on causes and cures of depression. He said that drinking is not a way to deal with depression as alcohol is a depressant in itself. He uses the contrast of Ephesians 5:18 which says *"And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;"*. The Spirit of God is a "stimulant". Wine actually depresses our senses, which is not what we want. The Spirit of God actually stimulates our senses to be more effective for the Lord. Some other effects of drinking can cause sclerosis, and cause some forms of cancer. Our body is not designed for that purpose, but rather, designed to take certain kinds of liquid like water, fruit juices, which help to build up the body. Liquor is not designed for us. Our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, so why do we take on something that will cause us to be depressed and render us less sensitive to the prompting of the Holy Spirit?

I remember when I was a new platoon commander in the army a number of years ago during NS, the commander wanted us to drink. I said "Sir, I'm sorry, I don't drink". In the end, they sang "under the falling chestnut tree" and I had to do the actions. After that, he told me to drink 6 glasses of water. I was happy as I was so dehydrated that I could do with more water. I was never asked to drink liquor after that. There were 2 other Christians in that group got drunk, vomited and were asked to drink at every officer mass function. So stand on your ground and God will honour you. I'm sure it's something that we have to be in, but we're not of the world.

5. Pop songs and contemporary music. What are your views about it? Should we as Christians listen to them?

Music is not neutral. It has its own character. When one plays a drum beat, it affects your heartbeat. Some disco music is even louder than firing a recoilless anti tank gun which I used to fire in the army. Many people listening to such loud music will be deaf by the time they reach their 30s and 40s.

When you listen to songs, what is the genre? What is the character of the song? What are the words and lyrics of the song? When I was young, I used to listen to one song...

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entitled “Hotel California”. Later, I realised to my horror that this song was about a spirit, or ghost, living in hotel California and I was singing it and playing on the guitar as well. A lot of these songs have an enslaving effect, even for songs that seem good. There was this song “Bridge over troubled waters”. Do you know that the song is about drugs? There was also another song by Boney M on the rivers of Babylon and the lyrics are taken from Psalm 137. However the way it was presented was dishonourable and unedifying. These are the things as a youth I was exposed to.

In those days, songs were in cassette form. When we moved house to Hougang, we threw them all away. My sister and I used to buy them, but after we became Christians and grew in our faith, we realised that we shouldn’t be listening to them. If you’re listening to good classics (i.e. Beethoven, Mozart) and learning a musical instrument, there’s a proper place for that. However, beware of these worthless and sensual worldly songs which are enslaving and tempting, especially some of these New Age songs. (Phil 4:8)

6. Is it proper for a girl to invite her male friend to stay over at her house after a game at her place and they go to church together the following day?

My answer is twofold. Yes and No. While there may be nothing wrong in itself, you ask yourself: Why do you want to invite the person to stay overnight? Are you interested in him or her? If you are, then you need to ask yourself, how old are you? Are you 12, 16 or 26? Do your parents approve of it and will they be at home? How often will you do this? What do you do when you invite this person to your house? Sometimes it is yes when it is not too often and done in a meaningful and edifying way and when both of you are old enough for a serious relationship. Even then, keep to the bounds of chastity and purity, and wait upon the lord, he will bless you in due time (Isa 40:31).

However, the danger I want to caution you of is when you have people staying overnight and you spend time together in the same room and behind closed doors, the temptation can be quite great. A lot of people have fallen because of this. Someone asked, “Can I go on holiday with my friend? Just the two of us.” Two of you, one boy, one girl, and not married? “Don’t worry, we’re okay, we’ll stay in separate rooms”. Even then we need to ask ourselves, even if nothing happens, is it a good example and are we exposing ourselves to unnecessary temptation? Ask your parents or another friend to come along. That will be wise and prudent. That is an important consideration for a Christian too.

We may be interested in somebody, but is it the right time, the right place, the right age? Yes, for some who are of a certain maturity, for some, you may have to be more careful as you’re in your mid and late teens. I got married at 27. On average, a Singaporean gets married around 26-29. If you start at 15, can your courtship last for 12 years? If you start too early and can’t sustain it, it becomes a problem. We need to pray and be patient and wait upon the Lord, and he will give you the best. As for me, after almost 7 years of courtship, God gave me Angie, literally the best for me (Psa 27;14).

*Dr Jack Sin
Maranatha Bible-Presbyterian Church, Singapore*

WELCOME TO NEW LIFE B-P CHURCH LONDON
CHURCH THEME: WORK OUT YOUR OWN SALVATION WITH FEAR
AND TREMBLING. (Philippians 2:12)

Our worship services begin promptly at **11.00 am and 4.00 pm.**

Please stay back for Bible Study and fellowship lunch after the morning worship and for tea after the evening service. Do invite your friends to come to Church.

| Worship Services | | | WELCOME |
|---|---------------------------------|---|--|
| Morning | <i>Today: 10/08/2008</i> | <i>Next Week: 17/08/2008</i> | We extend a warm welcome to all worshippers this Lord's Day. |
| <i>Chairman:</i> | Pr Mark Chen | Pr Mok Chee Cheong | |
| <i>Preacher:</i> | Pr Mok Chee Cheong | Pr Mark Chen | |
| <i>Message:</i> | Living by Faith in God's Supply | From Bread Basket to Death Basin | NEWS/ANNOUNCEMENTS |
| <i>Text:</i> | Philippians 4:15-19 | Ruth 1:1-6 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pray for Journey Mercies: Jonathan (Jul/Aug, US), Josh & Hannah (Jul/Aug, UK & Europe), Evelyn (Jul/Aug, Ghana), Sophia & Grace (Jul-Sep, Singapore), Rachel (Singapore & China), Constance (Aug/Sep, US), Daniel & Maureen & Anthony & Helen (Aug/Sep, Malaysia & Singapore), Chin Kiong (Aug, Singapore), Esmeralda (Aug, Singapore), Mok & Carol (Aug/Sep, Israel & Singapore). • Pray for those who are sick: Douglas (knee pain), Maria (ankle and joint pain), Mr Morton (infection), Constance (shoulder pain), Josh's grandma (stroke), Hazel (wrist injury). • Those serving on the Lord's Day for both morning and evening worship services: Please gather behind the pulpit area at 10.30am for prayer. • Family Worship: For those who would like to open up their homes for family worship, please contact Pr Mok. • Book Table: Please feel free to browse the book table for materials that are of interest to you, especially some new books that have just been displayed. Please note that materials without price tags are free. |
| <i>Organist:</i> | Anthony | Anthony | |
| Evening | | | |
| <i>Chairman:</i> | John Poh | John Poh | |
| <i>Preacher:</i> | Pr Mok Chee Cheong | Pr Mark Chen | |
| <i>Message:</i> | Diary of a Wise Old Man | Provoking Unto Love and Good Works | |
| <i>Text:</i> | Proverbs 30 | Hebrews 10:24-25 | |
| <i>Pianist:</i> | Pr Mark Chen | Hubert | |
| Other Duties | | | |
| | <i>Today: 10/08/2008</i> | <i>Next Week: 17/08/2008</i> | |
| <i>Ushers</i> | Chin Kiong / Hui Min | John / Josiah | |
| <i>Sunday Sch:</i> | Esmeralda | Hui Min | |
| <i>Lunch:</i> | Maureen | Volunteers | |
| <i>Washing-up:</i> | Volunteers | Volunteers | |
| <i>Bible Study:</i> | Catechism Class | Catechism Class | |
| Appointments of the Week | | | |
| Fri 15 Aug | 7.30pm | Young Adults Fellowship: Led by Pr Mark Chen | |
| Sat 16 Aug | 4.00pm | Prayer Meeting & Bible Study: Led by Pr Mok | |
| Last Week's Worship Service Collections | | | |
| Offering: £301.00 | | Lunch: £30.50 | |
| <u>Memory Verse</u> | | | |
| <i>Last Week (August 08 Wk 1): Psalm 139:14</i> | | | |
| I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. | | | |
| <i>This Week (August 08 Wk 2): Psalm 139:15</i> | | | |
| My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. | | | |