

Letter to Nicky Gumbel, developer of the Alpha Course

✘ No reply ever received

Dear Nicky and Pippa,

It was so lovely to see you both yesterday and to be given such a warm reception that I felt I had to put pen to paper. (... in fact one of my few remaining sheets of rather special writing paper, sourced in Eilat 21 years ago !).

What you two, + all the other Nickys have achieved is wonderful and wondrous. I sat upstairs in the gallery next to a Canadian catholic and her daughter – her son was just starting at Christ Church – who said there was nothing like Holy Trinity Brompton in her denomination. Your congregation was impressively diverse ... there was me expecting just Barbours and red cords!

Chacun a son gout of course and that musak isn't my cup of tea along with the length of the service (!), so I shall not be deserting my default Southwark Cathedral. Being an old-fashioned traditionalist I like the message to come rooted in the Christian calendar albeit with an up-to-date theme – for instance yesterday was the Patronal Festival of the Blessed Virgin Mary who little Leanne Roberts, the Treasurer at Southwark described as an early teenage pregnancy statistic who married a much older bloke ! Who am I to dare to suggest to someone who has brought 20 million people (wow !) to Christ that perhaps perhaps a little mention of the Magnificat wouldn't have gone amiss yesterday?

Some 18 weeks ago I dropped in at St. Mark's, Battersea Rise (where incidentally in early 1980 I experienced a 'vision' when it was a derelict wreck) – there was a rather spurious 'healing service' being conducted by an overweight Canadian

who kept going on about the Thursday night 'Jive Night' which was only £6 a ticket etc. I left the noisy band (not as good as yours !) and the people using their mobile phones and waited for the vicar near the bookstall. He was flustered when I reminded him that Thursday was actually Ascension Day (he hadn't known this). Apparently, for the next few days all the guy could talk about was Ascension Day ! Aren't I awful !

Anyroads – once again, brilliant to see you both & looking so well. I would love you to come to supper maybe one evening soon – I shall only be in this house for perhaps 6 more weeks before moving on to becoming a 'property spiv' and hopefully 'author' of Henry Root-style stuff + somewhat spiritual Israel diaries 92, 95 and 2013. Your lives must be incredibly busy but it would be great to meet up for a longer chinwag ! All love –

Yours in Christ,

Jamie xx