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CAMBRIDGE MA.



September 25, 1990

City Council
City Hall
Cambridge, MA 02139

Dear City Council Members:

You may have noticed that an extremely anti-Catholic flyer has been found in Cambridge in the past several weeks. The source of this material is the Tony Alamo Foundation, a cult-like extremist organization that the ADL has monitored for a number of years.

Enclosed is an ADL report on the Alamo Foundation which may be helpful in addressing the concerns of those who may call to report receiving this flyer. I have also sent this report to the Mayor of the Cambridge, the Police Chief, the District Attorney, and the Human Rights Commission. Should you need additional information on this group, don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Sally Greenberg
Sally Greenberg
Civil Rights Counsel

SG/mas

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CAMBRIDGE MA.

ADL RESEARCH REPORT

The Tony and Susan Alamo Christian Foundation

Summer, 1984

ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE OF B'NAI B'RITH/823 UNITED NATIONS PLAZA/NEW YORK, NY 10017

THE TONY AND SUSAN ALAMO CHRISTIAN FOUNDATION

The Tony and Susan Alamo Christian Foundation, founded in 1966 as an evangelical Christian organization, is a cult whose multimillion dollar operations have included the spreading of virulent anti-Catholic propaganda across the United States. The Foundation has published millions of biblical tracts and other literature, and in recent months has featured blatant bigotry against Catholicism. It has also disseminated propaganda reflecting anti-Semitism.

Anti-Catholic Campaigns

Early in 1984, anonymous anti-Catholic posters began appearing in major cities, pasted up at night on Catholic church walls and property and on utility poles and car windshields, displaying a red "Warning!" headline and alleging that the Vatican owned the three major television networks and such publications as The New York Times, Newsweek, Time and Life magazines and used these media "to smear and malign who they will." The Milwaukee-based Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights figured that the posters had appeared in at least 40 cities in 18 states and maintained that the Alamo Foundation was responsible for their distribution. Tony Alamo told the Los Angeles Times that he knew the identity of those responsible but would not divulge it. "Maybe I am [the author] and maybe I'm not," he said. "I'm going to be mysterious like the Vatican."

Since May, 1984, the Foundation has distributed a preposterous and obscene leaflet by Alamo entitled, "The Pope's Secrets," labeling the Vatican as "the satanic queen" with vast power derived from its "one-world satanic canon laws of death" and as controlling "narcotics, prostitution, pornography, booze and black market." Alamo claimed that the Catholic Church also sponsored the world's terrorism and organized crime, controlled the news media and government agencies such as the IRS, and had ordered the assassinations of Presidents Lincoln and Kennedy. Late in May, Alamo told the press in several interviews that five million copies of "The Pope's Secrets" had been distributed and that he planned the distribution of 45 to 50 million more.

In a column published by the nationally-circulated newspaper USA Today on June 1, 1984, Alamo sought to justify his anti-Catholicism. He wrote:

"Why do I distribute my tracts, my literature? Because I want freedom of religion. I want the Constitution to be honored. I don't want anybody pushing canon law down my throat..."

"I want to reprove the judicial system, which the Vatican has infiltrated and dominates. If Catholics want to be homosexuals and child molesters, let them have that kinky stuff in their own church. But don't tell us we have to hire them and have our tax-exempt status taken away by the IRS if we don't."

"Catholics have secret cults - Jesuits, Masons, the Knights of Columbus. They have to swear that they are faithful soldiers of the Pope. Jesuits make an oath to infiltrate every religion. So it's not really Protestants or Jews against Tony Alamo, but priests in disguise.

"They're trying to censor what I'm saying. The Vatican tells newspapers, many of which they control, don't take that tract from Tony Alamo. They've threatened to kill editors who print the truth."

Alamo, Catholics, and Jews

At least a part of the Alamo Foundation's "truth" has been propaganda reflecting anti-Semitism. This was seen in a two-page advertisement published in the New York Daily News on February 4, 1983 and later as a full-page ad in the Los Angeles Times. This was a long discourse by Tony Alamo attacking the Internal Revenue Service, homosexuality, the Equal Rights Amendment, etc., with biblical quotations. One section denouncing communism and other evils included "international bankers" -- a standard hatemonger's euphemism for Jews. The text asserted that the "plot of the International and European bankers can also be found in their own document called by them 'The Protocols,'" from which Alamo then quoted. (This, of course, was "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion," the notorious anti-Semitic forgery of the early 1900's.)

Ironically, in "The Pope's Secrets" a year later, Alamo accused the Vatican of forging the "Protocols." Alamo denies he is anti-Semitic and claims to be a supporter of Israel. He has stated that some members of the Israeli Knesset are really Jesuits who became rabbis in order to function as spies for the Vatican. He has blamed the Catholic Church for all the misfortunes befalling Jews throughout history including the Holocaust. "Remember," he wrote in a tract, "Catholicism is not Christianity, never has been, never will be. The Vatican is our enemy. It is unfortunate that Jews do not know the difference between Christianity and Catholicism. The Catholics call themselves Christians, but they lie."

The Foundation's Background

The Tony and Susan Alamo Christian Foundation was founded in 1966 by music promoter Tony Alamo, now 49, and his wife Susan, a former actress who died in 1982 at age 56 and was considered the Foundation's "resident theologian." Neither of the Alamos had had formal religious training. Both reportedly were born Jewish, he being born Bernie Lazar Hoffman in a small Montana town, she Edith Opal Horn in Dyer, Ark. She reportedly converted to Christianity as a child and was instrumental in her husband's conversion in the mid-1960's at the height of his music business career.

With Susan Alamo in the lead, the couple began their preaching on Hollywood's Sunset Strip in 1966 handing out bible tracts from a brown paper

bag. Their first customers were "hippies," but other young people soon became attracted. After several years the Alamos moved out of Hollywood and purchased land in Saugus, Cal. In the mid-1970's, as their operation grew even more, they moved to Arkansas, to the towns of Alma and Dyer. They have been headquartered there ever since.

Church and Media Operations

The Alamo Foundation has become international in its thrust. It claims to operate churches in Saugus, Cal; Brooklyn, NY; Chicago, Ill; Nashville, Tenn; and Alma, Ark. It also claims to have "missionaries" in Italy, Greece, England, Israel, Monaco, and France, as well as Miami Beach, Fla; Phoenix, Ariz; and Tulsa, Okla.

The Foundation sponsors a network of radio and television programs nationwide. It advertises radio broadcasts in such cities as New York; New Orleans; Nashville; Little Rock; Washington, DC; Mobile, Ala; Des Moines; Memphis; Chicago; St. Petersburg, Fla; Philadelphia; Tulsa; and Minneapolis. It also advertises television broadcasts on the National Christian Network, aired in the U.S., Mexico, Central and South America, Canada and the Caribbean, and claims access to foreign shortwave broadcasts heard in England, the Soviet Union, France, Israel, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Africa, Canada, Japan and China.

Finances and Holdings

From its humble beginnings in Hollywood, the Alamo operation obviously prospered. After its initial purchase of land in Saugus, CA, the Alamo group acquired an old restaurant, where services were held every evening followed by the serving of hundreds of meals prepared by 55 cooks. The Foundation owned its own printing presses to print the 250,000 Bible tracts distributed daily.

Upon its move to Arkansas in 1976, the Foundation's holdings became vast. It built a multimillion dollar edifice as its world headquarters. In Arkansas the Foundation purchased large amounts of property and began opening retail and service businesses, ranging from a large restaurant to cement, car repair, grocery, recording and clothing operations -- as many as 29 businesses. It purchased motels and apartment houses throughout the area surrounding its headquarters as housing for members. In 1981, the group began construction of an extensive complex in the town of Dyer containing offices, day-care facilities, dormitories, apartments, and single-family residences. There are other holdings outside of Arkansas. Tony Alamo reportedly owns luxury homes in Saugus and Nashville, and the Foundation owns property in Arizona, Tennessee (a Nashville clothing store) Illinois, New York, and Florida.

The Alamo Foundation, a non-profit tax-exempt organization, has solicited and obtained public contributions. According to Internal Revenue Service Records, the Foundation received some half million dollars in contributions in 1971, and this grew to more than \$1.3 million within several years. Its net

worth has been estimated by Arkansas and California authorities at between \$25 million and \$60 million.

Foundation Membership

The Alamos have always been reluctant to give out specific figures or even estimates as to the number of Foundation followers, preferring to keep a low profile. A recent report suggested that the group had about 1,000 members. Tony Alamo, however, has claimed to win "between 400 and 2000 souls a day across the country" and to have 4 million volunteers worldwide.

The Trappings of a Cult

At the very outset of their operations, the Alamos were successful in attracting young people to their ministry. The many who remained with the Foundation were housed in dormitories, and Alamo claimed that they were "training for the ministry." It soon became apparent, however, that the Alamo Foundation was taking on the trappings of a cult movement.

Stories have been written about Tony and Susan Alamo living a life of luxury, while the young people they had attracted became unpaid "volunteers" working in the various Alamo enterprises. In 1976, the U.S. Labor Department sued the Foundation for not paying a minimum wage to members who worked at various Alamo businesses. Investigations showed that the Foundation owed some \$19 million in back pay to members. In December 1982, a Federal district judge in Little Rock ruled that members of the Alamo Foundation were subject to all Federal wage and hour laws, and decreed that Alamo workers would be allowed to file claims with the Foundation under the Fair Labor Standards Act. The judge refused to award specific amounts of money to the workers. However, it was doubtful that many Foundation workers would file claims. Those who testified in a trial held in April, 1982 said that they did not want the money and that they considered their commercial work for the Foundation voluntary. In 1983, Tony Alamo blamed the Catholic Church for the investigations leading to the court action.

Criticism of the Cult

Susan Alamo's daughter (apparently from a previous marriage), who had helped organize the Foundation and had kept its books, quit in 1971 and criticized her mother, saying that Susan Alamo had made "a fortune at this organization, an absolutely raving fortune." She also said that "You are told to get down on your knees and accept Jesus Christ." "Unfortunately," she added, "you are not accepting Jesus Christ. You are accepting my mother."

Tony and Susan Alamo sported their wealth. Tony would travel by limousine to the Foundation accompanied by bodyguards, and Susan wore beautiful clothes and expensive perfumes. Their followers, in the meantime, were, as Susan Alamo's daughter put it, "giving her [Susan] their baby-food money and literally feeding their own babies garbage."

Allegations have also emerged about the Alamo Foundation brainwashing its adherents and preventing them from returning to their homes. A typical adherent was described in a June 13, 1983 People magazine article as a "confused daughter rebelling against Jewish parents" living in an exclusive Los Angeles neighborhood. This woman, who joined the Alamos in 1970 and stayed for 11 years, said that she was "brainwashed" by sleep deprivation, poor nutrition, isolation from society, and forced labor, and was told that her family was "satanic."

The Alamo Foundation has been involved in legal action by parents attempting to regain custody of their children. One parent said, "The organization is like Hitler and the Storm troops. It's a very ugly thing. Our children were never allowed to leave the compound. They were held by fear in the compound." Another parent claimed that his son "works for Susan Alamo 12 hours a day, seven days a week and gets nothing but a roof over his head." In general, legal efforts by these parents to regain custody of their children have been unsuccessful.

Alamo's "Save The Babies" Campaign

Tony Alamo is greatly opposed to abortion, and in the summer of 1982 his group began actively recruiting unwed mothers, mostly young and poor, to come to Arkansas as part of his anti-abortion campaign. Alamo's offer: "We will pay for the delivery of the child and raise the child until he or she is an adult, educate the child and pay all expenses until fully grown." The mother could become a volunteer and work. Or she could leave. If she did leave, she might be able to reclaim the child in five years if she "finds a good husband and a happy family life," Alamo has said.

The project attracted the attention of the Arkansas social services authorities, who came to investigate. After being turned away by Alamo gate guards, officials obtained a court order and entered the Foundation compound with the state police. They found a child-care center - with no children. Arkansas Assistant Attorney General Robert Waldrum, who went in with the police, said, "Tony had said that there were at least 70 children. There were none. We found 17 little beds and four cribs and two potty chairs and one commode....We believe the women were to have their babies in Memphis. Then they would come to Alma to be proselytized and sent to work. The mother gives the child to Tony. At first we thought it might be a black market adoption racket. Now we think he's raising workers."

The Death of Susan Alamo

Susan Alamo died in April, 1982, after battling cancer for several years. Following his wife's death, Tony Alamo decreed that she not be buried. Instead, he had her body embalmed and installed in a coffin in a darkened prayer room in his mansion. There, Foundation followers, in two-hour shifts, 24 hours a day, reportedly kneel by the coffin and pray for Susan Alamo's return. Tony claimed to have received a vision that Susan would be resurrected, and he has since been attempting, through prayer, to raise her from the dead.

AIDL RESEARCH REPORT

is a periodic report of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, 823 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017.

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Comm. from Sally Greenberg, Civil Rights
Counsel, Anti-Defamation League of B'nai
B'rith, transmitting a report on the
Alamo Foundation.

In City Council,

Oct. 1, 1990

Placed on file