

Alamo Christian Ministries/Music Square Church

Founders: Tony and Susan Alamo

Headquarters: Alma, Arkansas

Sections

- I. Background on Tony and Susan Alamo
- II. Background on the Alamo Christian Ministry
- III. The Makings of a Cult
- IV. Lawsuits Weaken Alamo Christian Ministries
- V. Anti-Catholic Tirades

I. Background on Tony and Susan Alamo

Tony Alamo was born Bernie LaZar Hoffman in Missouri. His family was Jewish, but he was told to never tell anyone. His parents' feared their son would be persecuted, because Christians believed that Jews killed Jesus Christ. Hoffman spent some of his childhood in Montana and even worked as a delivery boy for Helena's *Independent Record*. He changed his name to Tony Alamo when he embarked on a professional signing career. He was a fairly well-known entertainer, record producer, and health club owner during the 1960s in California. He converted to Christianity while in the entertainment business, claiming God spoke to him one evening. It was after this conversion that he partnered up with Susan.

Susan, like Tony, was born Jewish. She was born Edith Opal Horn, but changed her name to Susan Lipowitz while pursuing an acting career. Tony and Susan were married in 1966, and she was the initial force behind the creation of Alamo Christian Ministries (ACM). Susan died of cancer in 1982, and ACM followers knelt around her coffin for days, praying and expecting her to rise from the dead.

II. Background on the Alamo Christian Ministry

Although Tony is recognized as the spokesperson for ACM, Susan was the reason they started their ministry. After his conversion, Susan would read the Bible to Tony for up to 14 hours a day. They eventually started evangelizing on the streets of California. Their own description of their message follows: "Repent the kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Jesus Christ is coming back to earth. Repent or perish." Tony says the group's theology is based on the Old and New

Testaments of the King James Bible. Over the years, ACM became rabidly anti-Catholic [see Section V].

When they took to the streets of California in the 1960s, Tony and Susan handed out leaflets every day to hippies, alcoholics, drug addicts, prostitutes and criminals. The leaflets invited people to attend their services held at night. In 1975, the Alamos established a compound in Arkansas, complete with a 16,500-square-foot mansion. ACM basically took over the small town of Alma (population 3,000). Eventually, ACM owned 29 of the businesses in the community and staffed them with church members. At its zenith, ACM operated a printing shop, grocery store, service station, restaurant, hog farm, trucking firm, and manufactured its own clothing line called "Alamo."

Although based in Arkansas, ACM still holds services in Los Angeles. The group's promotional material says that transportation is provided to the services, and a meal is provided afterwards. ACM operates a 24-hour prayer and information hotline. Most Americans only become aware of the group after finding its newsletters and pamphlets on the windshields of their car. This type of ACM distribution is done all over the country.

III. The Makings of a Cult

On the surface, ACM appeared to be very successful, especially through its business ventures. However, there were strange and illegal happenings going on behind the scenes. Although Tony and Susan claimed the church was the "most sound, fundamental, orthodox Christian church in the world," ACM came under increased scrutiny from cult experts and the government.

Ex-members of ACM claimed living conditions at the Arkansas compound were disgusting. Followers slept crammed together in sleeping bags on the floor. They were told they could not flush toilets without permission, and the toilets were only flushed once every three days.

Personal hygiene wasn't the only area where the Alamos had total control. Members had to take a vow of poverty and turn over all their possessions to Tony and Susan. The Alamos told followers they were ACM's spiritual parents, and followers' biological parents were the devil. Members were told, if they ever left ACM, they would be found dead. Ex-members also claimed the Alamos would break up and rearrange families and marriages at will. There were rumors that, after Susan died, Tony took two 15-year-olds as wives.

Along with its increasing anti-Catholic [see Section V] ideology, ACM integrated UFOs into its theology. The Alamos believed UFOs were "supernatural beings, angels from Heaven." Tony admitted he was initially skeptical; however, Susan convinced him when they were out driving one night. They stopped and prayed. Tony says UFOs showed up almost immediately. He claims that some pictures of UFO sightings show the same things he and Susan saw. However, other pictures show different images, which Tony calls "Satan's counterfeits."

While the Alamos denied running a cult, Tony has repeatedly supported other self-styled cults in ACM publications. He is an avid defender of David Koresh and the Branch Davidians. In 1993, the federal government raided the Davidian compound near Waco, Texas, because the group was

converting semi-automatic rifles into illegal machine guns. There was a standoff between the Davidians and federal law enforcement that ended with a disastrous raid. The Waco compound burned to the ground, killing more than 70 Davidians.

The Waco situation was one of the main recruiting tools for the militia movement of the early 1990s. Waco isn't the only thing Tony Alamo has in common with radical right-wing ideology. Like most militia groups, Alamo believes that the government was responsible for the Oklahoma City bombing. He also believes the federal government had a hand in the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Finally, he promotes one-world-government conspiracy theories. In his version of global-government conspiracy, Alamo believes the Catholic Church is plotting to take over the world [see Section V].

IV. Lawsuits Weaken Alamo Christian Ministries

Along with gaining the attention of anti-cult groups, ACM also came under the suspicion of the law:

- In 1976, the Labor Department brought charges against Alamo for violating labor law. Alamo's defense for not paying salaries to the church members working in ACM's business ventures was that the church covered all of the workers' basic necessities. Alamo lost the case.
- In 1985, the IRS revoked ACM's tax-exempt status. It also began an investigation into Tony Alamo for tax fraud.
- In 1988, ACM's property was raided by authorities after a complaint stated Tony Alamo had ordered four men to paddle an 11-year-old-boy 140 times. These charges were eventually dropped.
- In 1990, the IRS filed liens of more than \$8 million against ACM for not paying taxes on its business ventures. Within a year, the IRS had seized ACM businesses and property for payment.
- In 1994, Tony Alamo was convicted on charges of filing a false income tax return and for not filing any return for three years. The IRS claimed he owed \$2.2 million. This conviction led to more ACM property being seized and sold by the IRS to pay off the debt. He was sentenced to six years in prison and was released in 1998.

Tony has not repented for failing to pay taxes. Instead, ACM's website says that, "Tony Alamo is not guilty of failing to file taxes, or tax fraud. A true Christian work is biblically tax exempt."

V. Anti-Catholic Tirades

ACM routinely attacks the Catholic Church. On its website, it has a section called "Antichrist." It contains tracts such as *The Pope's Secret* and *The Queen of Whores*. The first title promises an "Expose of the antichrist one-world church government." The latter title says it discusses "The ungodly Roman Catholic worship of the Virgin Mother Goddess." The quotes below come from ACM newsletters distributed in Helena.

April-June 2003

- “The United States of America’s law enforcement agents are enforcing the Pope in Rome’s will on U.S. Citizens.”
- “Mr. Bush is advocating Catholic-Nazi terrorism, which is Roman canon law. The Vatican has been terrorizing the people of the world for centuries.”
- “The Pope is the very antichrist.”
- “This sort of cruelty [the Oklahoma City bombing and destruction of the World Trade Center] is what made the anti-Christ Roman Vatican cult infamous for hundreds and hundreds of years...The above mentioned atrocities are the work of Rome’s satanic Nazi Party...They have deceitfully weaseled their way into the very fabric of the former true and excellent United States government....”

January – March 2003

- “Rome and her false prophets, who disguise themselves as children of the Lord...have been preaching a Jesus and a God who do not exist. This cult and her false prophets, according to God’s Word, are all anti-Christ.”
- “Hitler was Catholic. He studied to be a Roman Catholic priest, but the Pope thought he could be used more effectively in the position of the Fuhrer.”
- “They [Hitler’s Nazis] were barbarians, wicked Catholics, the founders of Nazism, Socialism, Fascism, and every other evil ‘ism’ in the world.”

Sources

1. Alamo Christian Ministries website
2. *Alamo Christian Ministries World Newsletter*, January-March 2003
3. *Alamo Christian Ministries World Newsletter*, April-June 2003
4. New England Institute of Religious Research
5. Ozarks Watch
6. Personal Freedom Outreach
7. Signal Staff and News Service