

"REMEMBER THE ALAMO!"

The Second Coming of Tony Alamo

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with M. Kurt Goedelman

"Having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children" (2 Peter 2:14).

Short memories are not necessarily the product of dementia. Many Christians have short memories when it comes to old cult leaders. These aberrant teachers reinvent themselves even after major failures, prophetic misses, glaring exposés, and even jail time.

One such leader is Tony Alamo, (it is correctly pronounced A-lam'-o). Alamo was highly influential from the 1960s into the 1980s, in spite of his checkered past, weird propensities, and documented abuse. In his early beginnings, Alamo formed the Music Square Church, also known as the Holy Alamo Christian Church Consecrated (nowadays they have dropped the word "Consecrated").

Alamo gained even more attention from the national media when he kept the embalmed body of his wife Susan on display for a number of months. She died April 8, 1982, of cancer, despite the claim that she would be healed through prayer. Alamo had his followers kneeling by her coffin in shifts around the clock praying and expecting her to rise from the dead.

This eventually led to spiritism and necromancy. One newspaper reported that "people in and out of the foundation have seen [Susan] in visions."¹

Susan's body was temporarily laid to rest in a mausoleum on the grounds of the foundation in rural Arkansas. She is available now only through cassette tape.

INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHER

A macabre tale over Susan's remains unfolded in 1997 while Alamo was in a federal prison (for income tax evasion) and her body was reported missing. A news item headline read: "Evangelist's appeal of body ruling denied." The report coming out of Little Rock was strange indeed:

"When Mr. Alamo is released from the federal prison, he is subject to arrest in Crawford County, where a chancery court judge has ordered him jailed until he reveals the location of his wife's body. Susan Alamo's body has been missing since February 1991 and her daughter, Christiaon Coie of Los Angeles, wants to know where it is so she can bury her mother in a family cemetery in Crawford County."²

The battle for the body finally ended, but not before raging for another year and a half. A headline from an Associated Press story revealed: "Susan Alamo entombed in Tulsa," and went on to report:

"[Tony] Alamo was ordered in 1995 to return the body. The chancery court judge stipulated

that if Alamo did not produce the body, he would be sent to the local jail upon his release from federal custody. Last month [July 1998], Alamo's followers brought the body in a sealed casket to a Van Buren funeral home. The court order to deliver the body came when Christiaon [sic] Coie of Los Angeles, Mrs. Alamo's daughter, went to court because she wanted to bury her mother near relatives in Van Buren."³

THE REAL TONY

Alamo was born Sept. 20, 1934 in Joplin, Mo., as Bernie Lazar Hoffman. After moving West, adopting the name Marcus Abad, serving jail time for a weapons charge, he met Susan Lipowitz, "a platinum blonde who was married to a small-time Los Angeles hood."⁴ (Susan was born Edith Opal Horn.) According to *People Weekly* magazine, "In 1966 she and Tony were wed once in Tijuana and twice in Las Vegas to be 'triple sure,' Tony said."⁵

After changing their names to Tony and Susan Alamo, the pair grew a Hollywood street ministry into an established church. They would frequent Hollywood Boulevard, passing out tracts and witnessing all day, then transport people to their church for a service at night. They would target young street people, drug addicts, alcoholics, prostitutes, and criminals. They were part of the original "Jesus People movement" popular in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1975, their foun-

dation purchased land in Alma and Dyer, Ark. and relocated their Music Square Church. They established a few churches elsewhere.

The Encyclopedia of American Religions summarizes the Alamos and their church:

“Music Square Church is a Pentecostal church with doctrine similar to the Assemblies of God. It accepts the authority of the Bible (using only the King James Version) and places its emphasis upon the preaching of Jesus Christ as the son of the Living God who died for humanity. The church adheres to a strict moral code, and members condemn drugs, homosexuality, adultery, and abortions. Both Susan and Tony Alamo were Jewish and they developed a special interest in evangelism of Jews.”⁶

Tony, like many of today’s Charismatic superstars, also claims for himself many “visions, wonders, and signs.” For example, he describes for his followers one of his mystical experiences:

“...the Lord appeared to me in an oval, gold-framed mirror. I saw this vision when I was fully awake, with my eyes wide open. I could hear His voice, but it was like a radio being turned on and off. The words that He was saying were clipped. I couldn’t understand Him. After seeking what He meant, I learned from Him that I was not reading or praying enough, and therefore was not hearing His precious instructions.”⁷

Alma was a small town, with fewer than 3,000 people living there. At one time, Alamo owned as many as 29 of the city’s businesses. He staffed them with free help from followers.⁸ Negative court rulings have helped to shut down many of Alamo’s businesses. Currently, the church continues to solicit the volunteer labor of its members and potential members by inviting them to Alma. “The Alamo Christian Church provides room and board to all those who truly want to serve the Lord with all their heart, soul,

mind, and strength,” its *World Newsletters* declare.⁹

However, the description by one former member of the work and living conditions at the church should cause most to have serious reservations. The ex-follower who was with Alamo’s group during its days in the Los Angeles area reveals:

“The living conditions were disgusting. We slept body to body in sleeping bags on the floor. When I was there, I never saw a real bed. At the time I left though, I was sleeping on a cot. We loved it when the weather warmed up, so we could sleep outside where it wasn’t so crowded. The bathroom conditions were worse. The toilets were always full because we were told that if we flushed them, the leaching field wouldn’t hold it all. So about every two or three days they were flushed. There also wasn’t no more than three toilets per 50, 60 men [sic]. I do not know how it was for the women or the children. Showers were very seldom. We either never had time or the water was always cold. I took a shower about once a week.”¹⁰

All of the deplorable living conditions were apparently tolerated as service unto the Lord and because, as the ex-member stated: “We were taught that Tony and Susan were our spiritual parents. We were taught that our real parents were of the devil and that all people outside the foundation (except those who were for the foundation) were of the devil.”¹¹

During the 1980s Alamo stayed busy by remarrying and with court battles. Alamo’s new bride, Birgitta Gyllenhammar, was a 42-year-old Swedish native who owned a Western-style clothing firm in Southern California. They were married on June 23, 1984, in Las Vegas and because “they did not like the ceremony,” repeated the ceremony in a Santa Monica church on June 30.¹² Alamo also found himself encountering lawsuits from ex-members of his church and from the U.S. Labor Department.¹³

JAILHOUSE BLUES

Alamo was sentenced to prison for six years in September 1994 by the Federal District Court for the Western District of Tennessee. Court records provide details of the whys and where of Alamo’s imprisonment:



Alamo Christian Ministries World Newsletters are being widely distributed across the U.S.

"...one count of filing a false income tax return and three counts of failing to file. He is incarcerated in a federal correctional institution in Texarkana, Texas."¹⁴

In 1995, *The Virginian-Pilot & Ledger-Star* published an article entitled, "IRS Auctions Alamo Property." By selling off Alamo's designer clothes and associated items seized from his businesses the IRS hoped "to recoup some of the \$2.2 million Alamo owes in taxes," the article reported.¹⁵

In addition, the U.S. Parole Commission declined Alamo's appeal for March 1996 parole announcing that "its decision was warranted 'because of [Tony Alamo's] corrupt conduct in the exploitation (financial, personal, and sexual) of [his] religious followers, and [his] sophisticated effort to use this religious organization as a cover to defraud the IRS.'"¹⁶

A 1997 parole appeal was also declined because of late filing, however Alamo was scheduled for release on Dec. 8, 1998, some five months after being transferred to a Texarkana halfway house in July 1998.¹⁷

HE'S BACK!

Following Alamo's release, a tract claiming "NEW IRREFUTABLE EVIDENCE PROVES ALAMO WAS NOT GUILTY," was published and circulated under the auspices of the "International Coalition for Religious Freedom" in Washington, D.C. The pamphlet offers a series of convoluted denials and charges that his arrest and conviction were the result of a plot and that the federal government bribed witnesses.

"Old soldiers never die, they just fade away," goes the old adage. Not so with cult leaders and failed evangelists. They just keep reinventing themselves and making comebacks. Robert Tilton, Peter Popoff, Jim Bakker, and Jimmy Swaggart are prime examples. No amount of money-mongering, sexual scandals, protracted court fights, or negative press can keep them down for long and they always find an audience.

With Alamo's re-emergence in the last few years has come a resurgence of his printed materials — his full-color eight-page *Alamo Christian Ministries World Newsletters* are being widely distributed across the U.S. These newsletters are left on car windshields by faithful followers in various cities. These new materials present glowing reports of the worldwide impact of Alamo's ministries and present a kinder, gentler Alamo. Gone are his earlier diatribes.

PARANOIA AND HERESY

In bygone days, it was not uncommon to find materials by Alamo which launched angry attacks on the Vatican, even claiming that the Pope and his agents controlled the White House, Congress, the armed forces, the United Nations, and the media. And, according to Alamo, the Pope was positioning himself to take over the world. More details and evidence supporting such claims could be found in books offered by Alamo's organization, including, *The Vatican Moscow Washington Alliance* and *The Secret History of the Jesuits*.¹⁸ There is no doubt that Alamo led his followers into the weird paranoid world of conspiracy theories.¹⁹

People Weekly magazine called the literature written and distributed by Alamo "paranoid screeds" and disclosed the multimillion-dollar holdings he owned, including homes in Nashville and California, while his followers ate "supermarket-rejected spoiled food."²⁰ The way that Alamo ran his compound with mind control sounds like Jim Jones without the cyanide-laced drinks.

Ex-cult member Greg Wilson testified to the extreme brainwashing, manipulation and auto-suggestion. He informed the public about the tactic of shunning parents and being indoctrinated into believing that the Alamo Foundation was the only true church.

Wilson's story was told in Ron Enroth's *Youth, Brainwashing, and the Extremist Cults*. Enroth describes the strange mix of legalism and sinless perfection that Alamo taught in the 1970s:

"Despite their incredible legalism, members of the Foundation believe it is possible to live without sin. Greg notes, 'They say that you *can* sin, that there are people who *maybe* sin once in a while at the Alamo Foundation. But that's where grace comes in. God will cover those little teeny bloopers that you make — their term is "blowing it." But God has given you the power of the Holy Ghost, and if you are in the Spirit, He isn't going to allow you to sin. If you do sin, you are out of the Spirit and you better really watch out: the devil might gobble you up and you might end up in an institution someplace.' Anyone not part of the Foundation is considered to be outside the body of Christ."²¹

Some say that Tony and Susan Alamo's original street work in the 1960s on Sunset Strip had some validity and helped some young people. Twenty years later he ran his lucrative organization in Alma in a very shad-owy way — bodyguards and all.

THE TEACHINGS

Alamo teaches that believers can "unite yourself to the entire Godhead by simply uniting yourself to Christ's death, His resurrection, and to the keeping of all of His commandments."²² Apparently, part of keeping the commandments, according to Alamo, is for the followers to "take a vow of poverty agreeing to turn over all their real property to the church."²³ Keeping the commandments is shorthand for keeping all the Alamo rules.

Alamo's system is definitely a salvation by works system contrary to what is taught in Galatians 3:11 ("That no one is justified by the works of the law") and Romans 3:28 ("Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law").²⁴

Dave Breese deals with the issue of a false basis of salvation:

"Scripture teaches that all other forms of supposed salvation, based on human efforts, are cursed by God. ... How wonder-

ful is the message of the Gospel of the grace of God that is presented to us in Holy Scripture! A person is able to come to Jesus Christ without money, without human works, without vast promises concerning the future and accept salvation which was entirely purchased for him on the cross. When he comes in humble faith, he receives the *gift* of God, which is eternal life. And it is exactly this, a free gift. When he believes the Gospel, he receives eternal life and is justified in the sight of God."²⁵

Breese further affirms:

"No false religion in the world can possibly survive unless it is able to destroy the Gospel of the grace of God and introduce or encourage a system of human works as a basis of salvation. There is not room in the same world for the Pauline message of 'justification by faith without the deeds of the law' and the cultic religionist with his perverted gospel. Every cult in the world preaches 'another gospel' and is therefore cursed of God."²⁶

FROM KING JAMES TO ARAMAIC

Originally Alamo settled within the "King James Only" camp — that is he was committed to and used only the King James Version.²⁷ It appears that has changed. In his July 2000 *World Newsletter*, Alamo promotes the theories of occult metaphysician George M. Lamsa.²⁸

In the newsletter's front-page article, Alamo's headline announces: "According to Expert Aramaic Translators, Jesus Never Said, 'My God, My God, Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me?'" He then references the "*Holy Bible from the Ancient Eastern Text*, George M. Lamsa's translation." And further asserts: "Here are the true Words Christ spoke on the cross: Jesus really cried out, 'My God, My God for this I was kept' (Matt. 27:46, Orig. Text)." Later in the article, Alamo comments:

"The King James Version of the Bible is the Bible I use most of

the time, but this statement, taken from the original Aramaic text, of Christ dying on the cross, is incorrect in the KJV, probably because of the Greek translators."²⁹

Given the warning in Revelation 22 about altering God's Word, Alamo is on very shaky ground. Commenting on Psalm 119:21 ("You have rebuked the proud who are cursed, Who wander from your commandments"), Dr. Jay Adams' warning is very applicable to Alamo's interpretative gymnastics:

"**Pride** goes before a fall (Proverbs 16:18). God will **rebuke** all those who tamper with His Word. It is the essence of pride for any counselor — or anyone else — to think he is *above* the Bible. There are various ways in which one may assume that unenviable position. He may criticize the Bible. He may act as if he has every aspect of Scripture in hand. He may meddle with various passages, conjecturing what the original might have said, etc. But if he does any of these things, or anything similar, he may be sure that in one way or another God will severely rebuke him. He even speaks of such persons being **cursed**. That is serious; indeed, it is very heavy language."³⁰

Is it really true that Jesus never uttered the words: "My God, My God, Why have you forsaken Me?" Then what about many of His other words? Which ones can we trust? Which ones are right? Which ones wrong? How can we know for sure what He really uttered? Maybe the Jesus Seminar and their colored beads can tell us, or do we just trust Alamo for the answer? It begins to sound like a subjective guessing game. Here, Alamo claims academic knowledge and information about Aramaic and Aramaic translations. However, it is a sure bet that Alamo never studied Aramaic (unless he did it in jail) and as we'll see, he is deficient on Bible history, geography, and sociology.

The premise of Alamo (imparted via Lamsa) is that "The four first Gospels were written in Aramaic, not Greek."³¹ So there are supposed to be Aramaic originals. It is a strange claim since none have ever been discovered. No credible textual scholars make such a claim. There are only hypothetical Aramaic originals. The attempts of Charles F. Burney (1922), Charles C. Torrey (1933) and Matthew Black (1946) to reconstruct a fictional Aramaic original have been discredited with the finds at Qumran (1947) and more recent archaeological and textual discoveries.

This idea of Aramaic originals was first promoted by George Lamsa with the founding of the Aramaic Bible Society. It is a claim without textual proof. The late George Lamsa was of Iranian descent and came out of a Nestorian background. Lamsa's followers believed others were misunderstanding God's Word, spiritually blind, and that the Greek text of the Gospels was corrupted and unclear. Under historical scrutiny, the idea that the Gospels were written first in Aramaic just does not hold up. The simple and undeniable fact is that there are no Aramaic translations of the New Testament that can be produced before the fifth century A.D.

Lamsa's followers also learned from him the New Age idea of a spiritual Christ, as Lamsa spiritualized the Resurrection. His system is largely Gnostic, Nestorian, and modalistic.³² Lamsa denied many of the major tenets of Christianity, including hell, Satan, demons, and the deity of Christ. He was clearly out of the mainstream of orthodoxy.

Akin to this, but not directly related, is the teaching that the original Gospels were written in Hebrew, though Hebrew originals have never been turned up, either. This school of thought, The Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research, tells us that great and more precise insights can be gained if we would just jump aboard this train.³³

In some instances, this school relies on liberal Jewish teaching but ignores other Rabbis who dismiss their teach-

ing as erroneous. Since this school cannot prove its foundational premise with textual evidence and since our Systematic Theology is not based on the Gospels alone (but rather the whole of Scripture), the teachings of this "Jerusalem School" are wasted conjecture.

MORE UNFOUNDED CLAIMS

Alamo also claims that "Jesus and His disciples spoke Aramaic and Hebrew, not Greek."³⁴ Jesus and His disciples, like all the people of first century Israel spoke Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and possibly bits of Latin.³⁵ The superscription on our Lord's cross in three languages testifies to that. Old Testament quotes of Christ and the Apostles along with their recorded words and sayings indicate their familiarity with Aramaic, Hebrew, and Septuagint Greek.

Edwin Yamauchi agrees:

"Recent discoveries of inscriptions in Palestine, especially from Qumran and Murabbaat, have shed some valuable light on the use of Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic in Palestine in the first and early second century A.D. (Latin was used by the Romans in Palestine.) ... Of the inscriptions found on ossuaries discovered on Mount Olivet and dated before A.D. 70, seven are in Hebrew, eleven in Aramaic, and eleven in Greek. From this evidence of a trilingual 'language milieu,' [Robert H.] Gundry suggests that some of the sayings of Jesus may have been uttered by Him in Greek."³⁶

What is the Aramaic language? Aramaic is a Semitic language that had its roots in an ancient near-eastern people called Aramaeans, whose origins date to around 2000 B.C. As well, fifth-century A.D. Aramaic is vastly different than first century A.D. Palestinian Aramaic — a fact lost to Alamo. The people were assimilated into Muslim culture in the seventh century A.D. and the language disappeared from common use.³⁷

The Hebrew language is a near cousin to Aramaic. When the Jewish nation was taken into captivity, both in Assyria and Babylon, they acquired the Aramaic language. This is how Aramaic sayings found their way into Palestine and the New Testament. We know that the people of Israel were multilingual.

We know also that some Aramaic documents were found with the Dead Sea Scrolls and that early forms of the Talmud were in Aramaic.³⁸

Bible scholar F.F. Bruce has done extensive studies on the translation history of the Bible and informs us regarding Aramaic:

"As for the influence of Palestinian Aramaic on the Greek of the New Testament, this is found particularly in the conversations and discourses recorded in the Gospels and the earlier chapters of Acts, and in the book of Revelation. Some scholars have argued that our Gospels were actually written in Aramaic and then turned into Greek. The evidence, however, is against this. There were no doubt Aramaic summaries of the story of Jesus and collections of His sayings in circulation in the primitive Palestinian Church, but while our Gospels may have drawn upon these, they are not in themselves translations. ... The study of the Aramaic background of the language of the Gospels and some other parts of the New Testament is an interesting and illuminating one, though it has its limitations and is not, as some imagine, the key to unlock all mysteries."³⁹

PESHITTA

The Aramaic New Testament is clearly a later translation from Greek with misty and obscure roots. It is also called the Syriac version from the Syrian Church in India and is labeled the Peshitta (or simple) Text. Aramaic translations of the New Testament of necessity originated when Christianity finally reached into that section of the world.

When it comes to textual and translation history, Alamo is really out of his element. There is no historical evidence to propose an Aramaic version before A.D. 400. The Syriac/Peshitta dates to Bishop Rabbula of Edessa between A.D. 411 and 435.⁴⁰ Bruce points up other deficiencies in the Peshitta:

"The original Peshitta version of the New Testament did not include 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude and Revelation. It was not until 508 that these five books appeared in a Syriac version. ... Because the Syriac Bible is written in a variant dialect of the language that Jesus spoke, extreme views are sometimes expressed about the forms in which His sayings appear in the Syriac Gospels, as though His actual words in the language in which they were uttered might be found there. The ordinary reader, for example, may readily infer from the writings of Mr. George Lamsa that the Peshitta Gospels preserve the very words of our Lord better than the Greek Gospels do. This, of course, is quite wrong; the Peshitta New Testament is simply a translation of the Greek."⁴¹

Confirmation of the later production of the Aramaic/Peshitta can be found in other sources as well.⁴² Apologists and researchers John Ankerberg and John Weldon point up the deficiencies and discrepancies with Lamsa's Aramaic premise:

"1. Scholars reject the basic premise of Lamsa's Aramaic originals. 2. The evidence declares that the Aramaic texts were derived from Greek texts, *not* vice versa, and therefore the Peshitta is the one with translation errors. 3. Lamsa was not the objective scholar he is made out to be; he ended his life in close agreement to many New Thought heresies (for example, he denied the deity of Christ and the atonement). 4. Aramaic is used by more than a dozen cults to *reject* biblical doctrines, rather

than to elucidate the meaning of the text."⁴³

The simple logic is that if the Gospels were originally written in Aramaic, they would have been available to only a select few in a select part of the world. It would make the Bible virtually unavailable to us today. Paul could not have taken the Gospel out to the ancient world as it would have been locked and hidden in an obscure language.

Alamo then continues and makes a baffling statement:

"This term, even at present, is only used by the Aramaic-speaking people in Assyria, who speak the same language the Galileans spoke at the time of our Lord."⁴⁴

Aramaic is, for all intents and purposes, a dead language. It has long been displaced in the Middle East by Arabic. There are a few dialects derived from Aramaic that are reported to be spoken "by only a few thousand persons, mostly in Kurdistan and Syria."⁴⁵

Then there is the issue of "Aramaic-speaking people in Assyria." Perhaps Alamo is ignorant to the fact that Assyria does not exist. Ancient Assyria lay in what is today northern Iraq. The population of Iraq is almost entirely Moslem and the people speak Arabic. It has a 3% remnant of largely Roman Catholic people who also speak Arabic.

Alamo may intend to mean the Assyrian Church of Iraq, which is virtually obsolete because of slaughter and suppression by the Iraqis since 1920.

The ancient Assyrians were defeated and swallowed up in the empire of the Babylonians in the 600s B.C. The Babylonians, in turn, were conquered by the Persians, and the Persians by the Greeks until the time of Roman domination of the world. Assyria forever ceased to exist and is only available to us in its archaeological ruins and ancient monuments.⁴⁶ As noted above, the seventh century A.D. brought the Muslim hordes. They rolled through the Middle East

and North Africa, bringing their religion and language.

Alamo takes the text from Matthew 27:46 and says the writer was wrong in his interpretation of "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" as "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" By extension, Mark must be wrong as well because he says the same thing in Mark 15:34. Alamo denies that it is a prophecy of Messiah from Psalm 22:

"David was foolishly saying that God had forsaken him. This part of Psalm 22 was not a prophecy of Christ's death. Jesus did not quote this Psalm."⁴⁷

If one accepts Alamo's statement, it seems that the Church was wrong until the Peshitta text was constructed and then continued to be wrong for 1600 years because it read only Greek or a translation from Greek.

Alamo says that the words, "Eli Eli Lama Shabakthani" [sic] actually means "My God, My God, for this I was kept [this was My destiny — I was born for this]."⁴⁸

No reliable translation contains the reading Alamo imposes or anything like it. They all translate it with the idea of being forsaken or abandoned. Linguist Adam Clarke dissects these words and comes up with roughly the same gist as both Matthew and Mark: Abandonment — being forsaken or left — is Clarke's conclusion. Clarke writes:

"The Deity, however, might restrain so much of its consolatory support as to leave the human nature fully sensible of all its sufferings, so that the consolations might not take off any part of the keen edge of his passion; and this was necessary to make his sufferings meritorious. And it is probable that this is all that is intended by our Lord's quotation from the twenty-second Psalm. Taken in this view, the words convey an unexceptionable sense, even in the common translation."⁴⁹

The translators of the *New Geneva Study Bible* offer these comments:

"Jesus' desolate cry is a fulfillment of Ps. 22:1 showing the depth of His distress as He suffers separation from His Father. Later the apostles realized that Jesus was enduring the dreadful wrath of God's judgment on sin. This was all the more agonizing to One whose relationship with the Father was perfect in love. The cry is Aramaic, except the Hebrew 'Eli.' Mark gives the Aramaic 'Eloi.'"⁵⁰

Likewise, Cambridge scholar J.R. Dummelow expounds:

"It is not certain whether Jesus spoke in Hebrew or Aramaic, for most MSS contain a mixture of both. These words are a cry of the human nature of Jesus, which alone could suffer desertion, when He experienced the bitterness of death."⁵¹

Alamo has put all his eggs in the Lamsa basket. Noted researcher and historian Dr. Edwin Yamauchi has been quick to point up that Lamsa mishandled and manhandled Aramaic and was reckless in his use of it. Yamauchi advised that we lend no "credence to the fantastic claims of Lamsa."⁵²

There are substratums and differences between early Aramaic and later Aramaic and nuances in eastern Syriac and western Aramaic that make it a language that only a careful and very knowledgeable scholar can handle. Apparently Lamsa was not that, according to the experts. Besides Lamsa's claim, this is all Alamo has to offer us.

LOST IN SPACE

Alamo, in his new incarnation, says he is now disclosing "other visions, signs, wonders, and messages God has given me that I've never written about."⁵³ Of course, Alamo states that it is God who is behind making these revelations known:

"I never thought I'd write an article regarding this particular experience that Susie and I had with UFOs, but the Lord has

commanded me strongly to tell it now. That is why I'm informing the world of it at this time."⁵⁴

In the article, Alamo reveals:

"[Susan] also told me that God had revealed to her that the flying saucers some people were seeing were supernatural beings, angels from Heaven, surveying the earth just before Christ's return to earth. ... 'Come on Tony, let's hold hands and pray that God will show us flying saucers.' I said, 'All right.' She was driving and I took her hand. She prayed, 'Oh Lord, God Almighty, if there are such things as flying saucers, show them to us, Father, in the name of Jesus.' I said, 'Amen, Lord.' No sooner had she said this prayer, and I said, 'Amen, Lord,' than a squadron of flying saucers began approaching us very quickly from far in the distance. They descended from way up high, down within a fraction of an inch of the windshield of the car with a speed as fast as lightning. ... There were at least one hundred of them. ... At the same time I was praying, 'God, please turn it off! Stop them. We've seen it. I got the message. That's it. I know that they exist now.' ... I don't play games, and I don't tell lies or stories. ... Flying saucers from the Lord do exist."⁵⁵

Apologist and pastor William Alnor, in his book, *UFO Cults and the New Millennium*, addresses the fallacy and danger of an angelic-UFO connection:

"Yes, I believe in angels, but the image Hollywood and the New Agers have given us of them does not reflect their reality and purpose. It doesn't take long for one reading UFO literature, for example, to find out that in addition to having contact with aliens, many claim contact with angels as well. This is the same type of deception UFO contactees are involved in, and the Bible calls trafficking with any type of

entity or familiar spirit, witchcraft, sorcery, and spiritism. The Bible also tells us that Satan can sometimes appear as an 'angel of light' (2 Cor. 11:14)."⁵⁶

Alamo again takes dangerous liberty with the Word of God when he asserts that:

"The Lord told me to write and release this for the month of May, 1999. He has been warning the world 'at sundry times and in divers manners' that He is coming back to earth soon (Heb. 1:1)."⁵⁷

Alamo's employment of Hebrews 1:1 to his own self-aggrandizing UFO delusion (along with his blatant misapplication of the verse as a warning of the Second Coming) is the height of spiritual deception. Time and again, Alamo has demonstrated his inability to rightly divide the Word of Truth.

When one thinks of Tony Alamo, one can remember his last name and think of five areas of concern:

- Aggressive manipulation,
- Loose living,
- Aramaic errors,
- Monetary focus, and
- Occupancy in prison.

The second coming of Alamo is nothing but more of the same. Unless we learn from the past, history will be doomed to repeat itself in the life and ministry of Tony Alamo. In the 1980s, it was a fixation on his dead wife. After six years in prison, it is now a fixation on dead theories and deadly New Age delusions. Christians have a living Book and a living Savior. It is the return of the Savior which should have our attention.

Endnotes:

1. Jane Nicholes, "Article called lies by Alamo," *Southwest Times Record*, Fort Smith, Ark., June 8, 1983.
2. "Evangelist's appeal of body ruling denied," *The Dallas Morning News*, Dallas, Texas, Feb. 20, 1997.
3. "Susan Alamo entombed in Tulsa," *Texarkana Gazette*, Texarkana, Texas, Aug. 12, 1998.
4. Chet Flippo, "Siege of the Alamos," *People Weekly*, June 13, 1983, pg. 30.

5. *Ibid.*

6. J. Gordon Melton, *The Encyclopedia of American Religions*. Tarrytown, N.Y.: Triumph Books, 1991, Vol. 1, pg. 251.
7. Tony Alamo, *Steamed Abominations*, pamphlet, copyright date 1999, pg. 1.
8. *People Weekly*, op. cit., pg. 29.
9. This solicitation is made on the masthead located on the back page (pg. 8) on all current *Alamo Christian Ministries World Newsletters*.
10. "With the Alamos out in California," letter to the editor, "Name Withheld, Bakersfield, Calif.," *The Press Argus*, Van Buren, Ark., April 21, 1983.
11. *Ibid.*
12. No title, UPI wire service report, July 7, 1984.
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22. Tony Alamo, *Satan's Secret Agents*, pamphlet, February 1999, pg. 1.
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32. For more on the Nestorians, see Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1910 (reprinted 1994), Vol. 3, pp. 714-722.

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36. Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic, or Syriac?" *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. 131, October 1974, pp. 320-321.

37. See further, *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, Mich.:

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38. *Ibid.*, pp. 254-255.

39. F.F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments*. Westwood, N.J.: Fleming Revell, 1963, pp. 71-72.

40. *Ibid.*, pg. 194.

41. *Ibid.*, pg. 200.

42. *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, op. cit., Vol. 5, pg. 874. We also recommend the academic and hard-hitting article on this issue in John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 2000, pp. 357-365.

43. *Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions*, op. cit., pg. 358, italics in original.

44. "According to Expert Aramaic Translators..." op. cit., pg. 1.

45. *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, op. cit., Vol. 1, pg. 249. Also, given the date of the encyclopedia's report (1970s), there may not even be a few thousand at this point in time who are familiar with Aramaic.

46. *Ibid.*, pp. 372-391.

47. "According to Expert Aramaic Translators..." op. cit., pp. 1-2.

48. *Ibid.*, pg. 1, brackets in original.

49. Adam Clarke, *The New Testament of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*. New York: Abingdon Press, no date, Vol. 5, pg. 277.

50. *New Geneva Study Bible*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995, pg. 1554.

51. J.R. Dummelow, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*. New York: Macmillan Company, 1958, pg. 718.

52. *Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions*, op. cit., pg. 360.

53. Tony Alamo, *Flying Saucers are End-Time Prophecy*, pamphlet, May 1999, pg. 1.

54. *Ibid.*

55. *Ibid.*, pp. 2, 4.

56. William M. Alnor, *UFO Cults and the New Millennium*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1998, pp. 159-160. In addition, any serious study of UFO claims should involve a reading of Ron Rhodes, *Alien Obsession — What Lies Behind Abductions, Sightings, and the Attraction to the Paranormal*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishing, 1998, and Kal Korff, *The Roswell UFO Crash*. Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1997.

57. *Flying Saucers are End-Time Prophecy*, op. cit., pg. 5.

BEING SAVED AFTER DEATH

(continued from page 1)

Armstrong in the early 1930s.⁴ But after Armstrong died in 1986, the group began changing its doctrines, and by the mid-1990s, many churches, Christian organizations, and prominent Christian personalities had accepted the WCG as an orthodox, evangelical church. The WCG even boasts that it has, since 1997, been a member of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). But the NAE has recently informed this writer concerning the WCG's teaching of post-mortem evangelization that it is now in dialogue with WCG leadership "in order to further understand the issues involved."⁵

AMBIGUITY TOWARD ARMSTRONG

Of significance is the fact that the organization has never acknowledged that its founder distinguished himself by being one of the most notorious heretics of the twentieth century who was proud of his unorthodox beliefs and his attacks against Christian doc-

trine. This lack of forthrightness about Armstrong can be seen on the WCG's web site, where Armstrong is said to have had "many unusual doctrines,"⁶ but where Armstrong is also said to have emphasized that "Christianity is a total way of life," and it is implied that his ministry came from God: "[Armstrong] certainly didn't envision a career as a minister. But by the spring of 1931, God began to direct him and his wife Loma to exactly that."⁷

Also, as part of the supporting evidence it presents to show that Armstrong "accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior," the WCG quotes Armstrong as writing,

"When I read and studied the Bible, God was talking to me, and now I loved to listen! I began to pray, and knew that in prayer I was talking with God. I was not yet very well acquainted with God. But one gets to be better acquainted with another by constant contact and continuous conversation. So I continued in the study of the Bible. I began

to write, in article form, the things I was learning."⁸

Then, in the next sentence, the WCG says, "As Herbert Armstrong studied the Bible, he came to a number of unusual conclusions."⁹ The WCG makes no attempt to explain how, if Armstrong was a Christian whom God was preparing for the ministry and to whom God was talking through his Bible study, Armstrong could in his Bible study have been coming to such "unusual conclusions." And earlier, this same article admits, "many of his [Armstrong's] doctrines were not biblical."¹⁰

We all make mistakes, but not to the point of establishing a heretical system of belief as did Armstrong. Yet the WCG continues to paint a picture of Armstrong as merely someone who made some mistakes, as "Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, Augustine, and many others made mistakes in their personal lives and in their practical theology. This generally does not detract from the positive things they contributed to the church."¹¹ But Armstrong did more