

OPPOSITION NOTES

AN INVESTIGATIVE SERIES ON THOSE WHO OPPOSE
WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Catholic Answers: Scorning Man's Laws, Twisting God's

INTRODUCTION

After years of engaging in inappropriate electioneering with money raised as a tax-free charity, Catholic Answers has decided to restructure its activities rather than await its fate in an investigation begun by the Internal Revenue Service.

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what it deemed to be the five "non-negotiables" to be indirectly supporting "evil." Catholics for a Free Choice filed a complaint in 2004 with the IRS about the guide and other Catholic Answers activities; an investigation ensued, and Catholic Answers' leader, ex-attorney Karl Keating, opted

not to defend his work but to play a shell game. Complaining of harassment, he simply moved the challenged electoral activity into a new organization called Catholic Answers Action, set up under a different section of the tax code.

The legality of the new arrangement is unclear. Although 501(c)(4) groups such as Catholic Answers Action—that is, those incorporated under section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code—have more latitude for lobbying and electioneering than 501(c)(3) groups such as Catholic Answers, the former may still not conduct election work as a primary activity. Early indications suggest strongly that that is what Catholic Answers Action is doing.

Catholic Answers is based in El Cajon, California, near San Diego. The group's annual budget was fluctuating within the \$3 million–\$6.1 million range during the most recent years for which tax returns were available (2002, 2003 and 2004). Its primary activity is

Key Findings

- Catholic Answers challenged election laws related to 501(c)(3) charities when it published a voter's guide in 2004 that, in conjunction with accompanying documents, effectively constituted a plea to Catholics to vote Republican and accused Catholics who voted against what it deemed to be the five "non-negotiables" to be indirectly supporting "evil."
- Catholic Answers has restructured its activities rather than await the outcome of a federal probe into its electioneering, which appeared to violate its tax-exempt charity status.
- The organization's new structure, which places election activities into a 501(c)(4) social welfare organization called Catholic Answers Action, may run into similar legal problems as did its 501(c)(3): A 501(c)(4) group may not conduct election work as its primary activity, which is what Catholic Answers Action indicates it plans to do.
- The investigation and restructuring response may damage Catholic Answers' financial outlook, since founder Karl Keating announced the organization's new branch with an urgent appeal for funds to cover expenses already being incurred.
- Catholic Answers' support for Republican candidates and contempt for Democrats is clear, if sometimes presented in a nuanced language (e.g. using terms like prolife), in its voter's guide and many other communications, as well as in its donor base and positions on issues.
- Catholic Answers is committed to an extreme brand of Catholic apologetics, constructing tortuous arguments to excuse the church hierarchy for almost any crime or error, past or present.
- The group preaches an ultraorthodox, quasi-separatist, paranoid and intolerant brand of Catholicism that is not likely to win many converts, even though winning converts is a stated goal.
- Catholic Answers leaders have made various bigoted, fearful and regressive remarks about gays, women, Muslims and other groups that are far out of touch with mainstream American views.

apologetics: the defense of the faith, such as Catholic Answers interprets it, against attacks perceived or real. In Catholic Answers' case, this includes a radical commitment to the idea that almost anything the church hierarchy does is right, and an accompanying willingness to pursue obscure and tortuous arguments to prove it. For example, Catholic Answers' director of apologetics and evangelization Jimmy Akin recently claimed papal spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls did not lie but rather used a "mental reservation" when he contradicted himself about the papal view of *The Passion of the Christ*.¹

It is not known what Catholic Answers Action's budget will be, or how the new branch's existence will affect Catholic Answers' finances. Catholic Answers had thirty-six employees as of 2003 and maintains a three-member board² and a roster of about 10 speakers and apologists, who charge fees of \$1,000 and more for lectures at conferences and schools. The organization's consistent Republican bent comes through not just in its voter's guide but in many other communications, in its donor base and in its positions on social issues. The group has even received donations from former speaker of the US House of Representatives Tom DeLay.

The Catholicism promoted by Catholic Answers is ultraorthodox, nostalgic, quasi-separatist, superstitious and melodramatically defensive. The organization tries to present its version of the church as generic and official—its Web site is located at www.catholic.com, for example—but has no direct affiliation with the church hierarchy and is frequently at odds with the latter over social issues. Catholic Answers apologists and speakers are drawn overwhelmingly from the ranks of converts to Catholicism from other, mostly evangelical Christian, denominations; several have described having been attracted to Catholicism because they saw it as rigidly pure or craved an absolute authority to which to

submit. The group presents its mission in this way:

Catholic Answers is an apostolate dedicated to serving Christ by bringing the fullness of Catholic truth to the world. We help good Catholics become better Catholics, bring former Catholics "home," and lead non-Catholics into the fullness of the faith. We explain Catholic truth, equip the faithful to live fully the sacramental life, and assist them in spreading the Good News.³

Catholic Answers claims to be seeking to win converts and bring lapsed Catholics home, but it puts no stock in the adage that flies are best caught with honey, not vinegar. To the average American whether Catholic or not, Catholic Answers' brand of Catholicism will be unappealing in the extreme.

HISTORY

According to Keating's way of seeing things, Catholic Answers was founded under siege, and the church is similarly beset to this day. In 1979, when he was about 30 years old, he reacted to "Fundamentalist" leafleting of cars in a Catholic church parking lot in San Diego—"the fliers attacked the Eucharist and were riddled with misinformation"—by in turn leafleting cars in a "Fundamentalist" church's lot. From the beginning, he promoted the idea of a "clash between Fundamentalists and Catholics."⁴

"I guess I'm just contrary," he told the conservative Catholic magazine *Sursum Corda!* in 1996. "When I distributed that first pamphlet I wanted to get a reaction. So I rented a post office box and chose the name Catholic Answers."⁵

Keating's fit of parking-lot pique eventually led him to a complete career change. Although he continued in the early 1980s to practice civil law full-time, he became increasingly involved with his Catholic Answers apologetics activity.

Believing “that people were interested in the question of the fundamentalist attack on the Church,” he wrote 30 articles for the *Wanderer*, a highly orthodox Catholic newspaper, that would collectively become his book *Catholicism and Fundamentalism*.⁶

The *Catholic Answers Newsletter* began publication in 1986. During the same year, Keating engaged in his first debate as a Catholic apologist, squaring off against ex-Catholic friar Bart Brewer, who had been a Discalced Carmelite. Keating has claimed that he argued brilliantly and defeated the impolite and long-winded Brewer and that the overwhelmingly “fundamentalist” audience of 350 embraced Keating. “I had a hundred or more crammed around me” offering congratulations and apologizing for Brewer’s “screed,” Keating told *Sursum Corda!* “I could see across the room at the far end my opponent was standing all by himself.”⁷

In 1988, Keating published *Catholicism and Fundamentalism* and left the practice of law to “turn Catholic Answers into a full-time apostolate.”⁸ Two years later, the magazine *This Rock* replaced the less ambitious newsletter.⁹ The magazine has become the major vehicle for his writing. “God condescends to work through men to achieve his ends, yet achieve them he does.... We’re trying to cooperate through this magazine,” he wrote in the first issue.¹⁰

The major developments of the last fifteen years have been the increasingly political character of the organization—with the consequences outlined above and below—and the emergence of www.catholic.com, Catholic Answers’ misleadingly named Web site. Besides electioneering for Republican candidates, Catholic Answers leaders have used the site and their other communications outlets to become increasingly involved in the culture wars—obsessively denouncing *The Da Vinci Code*, for example, and refuting claims by other conservative commentators that SpongeBob SquarePants is gay.

ELECTORAL ACTIVITY

Catholic Answers for years has unambiguously indicated to supporters through its *Voter’s Guide for Serious Catholics* and other communications—starting with the first *Catholic Answers Newsletters* in the late 1980s and continuing today on the Web and radio—that they should vote for Republican candidates in elections. The group uses code words to refer to Republicans and Democrats, and it lays out positions it deems correct and invites readers to compare candidates’ platforms with those positions. Such activity is off-limits for 501(c)(3) tax-exempt charities, of which Catholic Answers is one.

The organization had to change its structure in 2006 as a result of its inappropriate electoral activity and a resulting IRS investigation into whether it was violating its 501(c)(3) status. A complaint from Catholics for a Free Choice to the IRS was at the origin of Catholic Answers’ decision to start a new offshoot, called Catholic Answers Action and incorporated as a 501(c)(4) social welfare organization. “We didn’t have much choice,” Keating acknowledged in an April 2006 letter to supporters. “We were forced to start it because of a

“We were forced to start [Catholic Answers Action] because of a complaint filed against Catholic Answers by...Catholics for a Free Choice.”—Karl Keating

complaint filed against Catholic Answers by Frances Kissling, president of... Catholics for a Free Choice.... In 2004 she filed a complaint with the IRS [about] our *Voter’s Guide for Serious Catholics*.... She claimed the guide violated IRS regulations that prohibit charitable organizations from engaging in political activity, and she asked the IRS to revoke Catholic Answers’ tax exemption.”

“For more than a year her complaint has been wending its way through the IRS, which has been sending us loads of

Catholic Answers Action’s positions on “five non-negotiable issues”¹⁴	
Abortion	“It is a form of homicide.”
Euthanasia	“True compassion cannot include intentionally doing something intrinsically evil.”
Embryonic stem cell research	“Even if there were benefits to be had from such experiments, they would not justify destroying innocent embryonic humans.”
Human cloning	“The ‘rejected’ or ‘unsuccessful’ embryonic clones are destroyed, yet each clone is a human being.”
Gay marriage	“Legal recognition of any other union as ‘marriage’ undermines true marriage.”

interrogatories to answer,” Keating wrote. “We were forced to hire a top-flight pro-life law firm to represent Catholic Answers.... We see that pro-abortion groups will file complaints with the IRS each year that we distribute the guide. What a hassle—and expense! So we’re taking the voter’s guide out of Catholic Answers.”¹¹

In addition to publishing the regularly updated *Voter’s Guide* in booklet form, Catholic Answers during the 2004 US presidential campaign ran newspaper advertisements containing the text of the guide and asserting, “This is the ad that Frances Kissling of Catholics for a Free Choice doesn’t want you to read!”¹² Also during the 2004 campaign, Keating e-mailed supporters that Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry “flunks the test given in Catholic Answers’ *Voting Guide*.”¹³

Since the guide is in essence a coded plea to vote Republican, it is not surprising that the Democratic candidate would have flunked the test. The document lays out “non-negotiable,” Republican-friendly positions on which Catholics must ostensibly base their votes. The explanation of positions is followed by a section on “how to determine a candidate’s position” and an effectively anti-Democratic injunction, since Catholics have traditionally favored Democrats, to avoid basing votes on “your political party affiliation, your earlier voting habits, or your family’s voting tradition.” Votes for minor-party candidates are unacceptable, since only candidates with a “real” chance to win can be considered. The concept of conscience is acknowledged but completely eviscerated: “A well-formed conscience,” according to the guide, “will never contradict Catholic moral teaching.”¹⁵

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Catholic Answers’ version of the “non-negotiables” does not include any of the other mainstays of the Catholic faith on which Democrats tend to be closer to Catholic teachings, such as opposing war, concern for the poor, an increase in the minimum

wage and immigration reform.

Such electioneering is a textbook case of 501(c)(3) status violation. IRS materials specifically rule out 501(c)(3) electoral campaigning using code words such as “pro-life,”¹⁶ and the agency forbids 501(c)(3) groups to invite comparison of candidates’ views with the groups’ own positions. Keating acknowledged no wrongdoing, though, instead blaming the events on “political correctness” and on Catholic “inertia... due to poor catechesis,” which he said kept the faithful from rising up to defend his rights. “Catholics simply do not understand their faith. Catholic Answers Action will have the freedom of action to correct that shortcoming,” he sniffed.¹⁷ CFFC drew a different conclusion from news of the IRS investigation and Catholic Answers’ reaction: “Reporting violations works.”

Keating purports to believe that his new 501(c)(4) is by definition immune to a challenge such as the one that led to the IRS investigation. “Since Catholic Answers Action is formed under IRS section 501(c)(4),” Catholic Answers Action “will be free of any such restrictions” and may discuss what “Catholic teaching...means in specific instances” and “speak freely on the range of issues that affect our faith and our nation.”¹⁸ He has called it “perfectly legal for a 501(c)(4) organization to be overtly political” and has announced plans through Catholic Answers Action to issue “candidate surveys” that “name names.” He presents the new group’s agenda openly as being keyed to election years and campaigns.¹⁹

This approach is of dubious legality. Although a 501(c)(4) can lobby and electioneer more freely than a 501(c)(3), it still may not conduct such work as its primary activity.²⁰ It may set up a 527 fund to conduct electoral activities, but in order to do so must be a valid 501(c)(4) in the first place. IRS technical instruction is clear:

501(c)(4)...organizations may engage in political campaigns on behalf of or

in opposition to candidates for public office provided that such intervention does not constitute the organization’s primary activity. The regulations under IRC 501(c)(4) provide that promotion of social welfare does not include participation or intervention in political campaigns.²¹

In addition, the IRS recently reaffirmed a precedent that is not very different from the case of Catholic Answers Action and would appear to bode ill for the latter:

An organization exempt under [Internal Revenue Code] 501(c)(4) may engage in political campaign activities if those activities are not the organization’s primary activity.... In [a 1967 ruling], the Service held that an organization...whose primary activity was rating candidates for public office was not exempt under IRC 501(c)(4) because such activity is not “the promotion of social welfare.” The ruling stated that a comparative rating of candidates, even though on a non-partisan basis, is participation or intervention on behalf of candidates favorably rated and in opposition to those less favorably rated.²²

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Catholic Answers Action is either unaware of these rules or is rejecting them, since it indicates clearly that what it plans to do is an expanded and more explicitly political version of that which was challenged under Catholic Answers.

One clue to Keating’s motivation in establishing Catholic Answers Action may be found in 2003 IRS guidance: According to the tax agency, “An organization that loses its IRC 501(c)(3) status because of excessive lobbying or political campaign intervention may not be treated as an organization described in IRC 501(c)(4).”²³ Had Keating not established his 501(c)(4) before the IRS

probe concluded, he might have found himself prohibited from doing so at all. Although Catholic Answers Action may find itself similarly investigated, it will at least have bought a little time—possibly enough time to seek to influence the 2008 election:

We expect that even though 2006 has only an “off-year” election, we’ll have far more readers of our voter’s guide than we had in 2004. Back then, as many as 20 million Americans read the guide, either in booklet form on online or in full-page newspaper ads.... In 2006 we expect to increase that number a lot—and in 2008 (a presidential election year) we expect to increase it still further. If just 5 million more Americans voted in line with the five non-negotiables, the complexion of Congress and state legislatures could be changed considerably.²⁴

Jimmy Akin seems to relish presenting himself as a caricatural right-wing Republican, praising Fox News and trickle-down economics.

Catholic Answers’ consistently Republican bent is not limited to its five “non-negotiables,” as the writings of its director of apologetics and evangelization, Jimmy Akin, show clearly. Akin maintains a blog that he defends as strictly personal, saying constantly, “What’s mine is mine.” Catholic Answers’ Web site links directly to the blog. Akin not only uses it to promote Catholic Answers projects but also has acknowledged blogging while at work at Catholic Answers.²⁵ On the blog, Akin seems to relish presenting himself as a caricatural right-wing Republican, praising Fox News, trickle-down economics and the US military and trashing public media, the UN (“chief mouthpiece for the head shaking and finger wagging...complicit in this hypocritical shame game directed against the first world”²⁶) and the 1985 charity pop hit “We Are the World.”

Akin’s positions range from stunning right-wing extremism to run-of-the-mill Republican talking points. He has asked what “people who voted for” prochoice “presidents will say on judgment day,”²⁷ and has referred to the US Supreme Court sarcastically as “Darth Kennedy and Our Robed Masters.”²⁸ He demonizes mainstream media, from Agence France-Presse to Reuters to the *New York Times*, and is an unabashed Fox News enthusiast. (When the profoundly Republican-aligned channel debuted in Canada, Akin trumpeted on his blog, “Heads Up, Canucks! FOX NEWS IS NOW ON THE AIR IN THE GREAT WHITE NORTH!...Enjoy!”²⁹) He gushes about conservatives such as US Supreme Court justice Clarence Thomas, a Republican nominee whose 1991 confirmation hearings included detailed examination of sexual harassment charges against Thomas and were a watershed of polarizing partisanship. “I mean, he totally ROCKS! He’s even better than Scalia” (emphasis in original), Akin wrote of Thomas in 2006.³⁰

Akin maintains an “Economics” blog page on which he pays homage to conservative “supergenius” Thomas Sowell and writes long posts explaining his own Sowell-inspired brand of Reaganomics—condemning those who denounce the rich-poor wealth gap in the US, for example, for their “Envy... contrary to the virtue of Prudence.” He has referred to MoveOn.org, which supports liberal Democrats, as “fanning the flames of class warfare in America.”³¹ Shortly after the 2004 elections, he rejoiced both that liberal filmmaker Michael Moore had not been nominated for a best-picture Oscar and that Democrats had fared poorly at the polls:

Quick question: What does Michael Moore’s “L” hand gesture [in a photo included in the blog entry] stand for?

- (a) Liberal
- (b) Loser
- (c) Both

I submit that the answer is the same for both the election and the Oscars.³²

Akin wrote in 2004 that “the whole ‘red state/blue state’ thing”—code for Republican- and Democratic-leaning states—showed the country divided between “one group of folks standing for traditional American and *Christian* values” (emphasis in original) and “the other group standing for—well, hatred of traditional American and Christian values.”³³ Just before the 2004 elections, he extended to US politics an approach for which the Catholic church has frequently been criticized: Enthusing about new data showing red states had higher birth rates, he wrote, “If you harbor abortion, contraception, and an anti-child mentality, you have fewer kids.... The future’s lookin’ rosy.”³⁴ Also in 2004, he charged defeated 2000 Democratic presidential candidate Al Gore—who had lost the election by the thinnest of margins and ultimately conceded after the Supreme Court ended ongoing recounts—with “naked ambition and self-interest...put ahead of the common good.”³⁵

Despite his extreme sensitivity to others’ supposed sacrilege and heresies, and despite Catholic Answers’ claims of nonpartisanship, Akin is such a Republican true believer that he has even flirted with likening the Republican US president to Jesus Christ: One of his many blog entries on Moore’s Bush-skewering *Fahrenheit 9/11* was titled “The Passion of the President.”³⁶

COMMUNICATIONS

Besides publishing its voter’s guide, Catholic Answers engages in various other media, publishing and communications activities meant to advance its apologetics mission and its political agenda. The communications address church doctrine and canon law and also include social commentary and cultural criticism. The general theme is

defense of church and family, under siege by a corrupt modern world and at war with evil and error, the purveyors of which include all other religions.

Perhaps the most prominent of Catholic Answers’ platforms is www.catholic.com. At its misleadingly generic Web address, Catholic Answers sells its books and ephemera, speeches and merchandise—a T-shirt with drawing by noted *Family Circus* cartoonist Bil Keane, for example, under “Bargain Table—Deep Discounts”—and maintains chat boards and an online archive of deeply conservative apologetics articles catalogued by topic. The site includes an archive of Catholic Answers’ major media outlet, the magazine *This Rock*. Catholic.com promotes Catholic Answers’ quasi-separatist agenda by running prominent advertisements for Catholic-specific ventures such as a dating service and a mortgage provider. Advertisements for in-house and outside services are difficult to tell apart, partially obscuring the fact that to some extent, Catholic Answers is pushing a marginal agenda in a variety of forms.

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religious ultraorthodoxy. *This Rock* has published articles in favor of “masculine spirituality” and in opposition to altar girls; for saintly relics and against “New Agers”; for long homilies and against slow-speaking lectors; for Catholics’ right to support war and against ecumenical committees; for hospitality and against homosexuality; for “joyful Catholics” and against short skirts in church; for reading the bible and against describing the bible as infallible. The magazine obsessively refutes, under the umbrella term *sola scriptura*, all manner of non-Catholic Christian teachings. Most topics

are treated with shrill earnestness, strained humor, awkward self-congratulation and a whiff of paranoid rage. Besides *This Rock*, Catholic Answers publishes books, booklets and newsletters promoting its views.

Catholic Answers has claimed “tens of thousands of people” write letters each year seeking guidance from its apologists. The latter also take phone calls from people with questions about aspects of Catholicism. Keating in a 1996 *Sursum Corda!* article related the story of a “19-year-old homosexual man” who called “out of the blue” because he was “drawn toward the Church” and wanted to get “his homosexual tendencies more under

“When the car was invented people would begin a relationship simply because they found the other to be cute and fun.”—Catholic Answers’ Pure Love Club

control.” He explained, “So many callers seem to simply trust the people here.” The same article indicates that on a single day, Catholic Answers fielded calls from five people—“four of them were men”—who had come to accept the Vatican line on contraception but were concerned about their spouses’ reactions to that news.³⁷

In addition to fielding calls and letters, Catholic Answers apologists and speakers travel the country delivering paid lectures. Some also do so on their own account. Two of the apologists, Jason and Crystalina Evert, conduct such work substantially through Catholic Answers’ abstinence promotion branch, the Pure Love Club. According to the latter, “The new sexual revolution is here.... The peace and joy that come from chastity is worth more than all the pleasures of the world.”³⁸ The Pure Love Club’s perspective on love and sex hews closely to Catholic Answers’ nostalgia-fueled ultraconservatism and at times veers into a striking antimodernism: “When the car was invented...courting could be divorced from spending time with family because the couple could leave the family behind.... People would

begin a relationship simply because they found the other to be cute and fun.”³⁹

The radio program *Catholic Answers Live* airs on about 80 stations around the country, often small and specifically Catholic or Christian. Tax forms for 2003 indicate Catholic Answers paid \$101,000 for radio air time but do not specify for what programs or stations. Jerry Usher is the program’s host, and Keating, his staff apologists and various outside conservative Catholic figures are regular participants. Catholic Answers also produces *The Doctor Is In*, in which hosts Ray Guarendi M.D. and Colleen Mast discuss “marital situations; job-related questions; vocational discernment; and the gamut of parenting issues.”⁴⁰

Akin has since 2004 used his blog to promote a number of Catholic Answers “secret projects.” None, as of two years later, appeared to have progressed much. In August 2004, he said he had “finished writing a proposal” for “Secret Project #1,” which would entail “five years of hard work”; had “recently attended a legal seminar to get some background” for “Secret Project #2,” which “requires a special skill set”; and had “finished editing a proposal” for “Secret Project #3,” to be carried out with “the same major partner as Secret Project #1.”⁴¹ Grumbled one blog reader in response to Akin’s description of “Secret Project #4,” “9 paragraphs to say nothing.”⁴²

Two years later, Akin said he had not “been able to push forward the three previously mentioned secret projects of late”—but “I can, however, announce a new secret project—Secret Project #4.” He said the latter had “the potential to...what’s the right word?... ‘revolutionize’? (is that it?)...the field of apologetics” (ellipses in original).⁴³ The next month, he added that there were “around eleven people working full or part time on” the latest project, which “has a technological side and an informational side.”⁴⁴ The week after that, he sought help from “local folks”—“responsible older teenagers wanting some extra summer money,” for

example—to “accelerate the work being done on Secret Project #4.” The work, he said, would involve word processing and was “not at all hard or complex,” and “there would be some modest pay (\$\$) involved.”⁴⁵

ISSUES

“We’re trying to ‘convert’ people—even Catholics—to the Catholic way of understanding the five non-negotiables,” Keating wrote in 2006.⁴⁶ So far, they are far from success. Catholic Answers promotes views on a wide range of social issues that are always far to the right of the Catholic and American center, and usually more conservative than those of Catholic Answers’ favored Republican Party. In that sense, Catholic Answers can be seen as belonging to the right wing of its party.

In supporting a change in the law to completely ban all abortion, Catholic Answers promotes an ultraconservative **abortion** position: “Abortion is the intentional and direct killing of an innocent human being, and therefore it is a form of homicide.”⁴⁷ Akin has expressed a related pronatalist position that is superstitious and far out of touch with the average Catholic’s views. God wants to “get new saved immortal beings who freely chose their salvation,” he wrote in 2004. “Our job is to have...babies and point them toward God as their ultimate destination.... We have to live our lives in accordance with God’s known goals. We must be fruitful and multiply.”⁴⁸

Catholic Answers’ voter’s guide also condemns **euthanasia**, **embryonic stem cell research** and **cloning**. One reads in the guide that euthanasia comes from a “misplaced sense of compassion,” that “any medical cure that might arise from experimentation on fetal stem cells can be developed by using adult stem cells instead” and that cloning “ends up being a form of homicide” because some cloned embryos are rejected and destroyed.⁴⁹

Keating acknowledged frustratedly in 1998 that it is “very difficult to speak against” **contraception** because “most Catholics practice it.”⁵⁰ Catholic Answers nevertheless views contraception as gravely evil and expresses outrageous views about it. Apologist Michelle Arnold suggested in 2005 that pulmonary embolisms that may have resulted from contraceptive patch use were perhaps expressions of the wrath of God: “Isn’t it interesting how the physical consequences of morally-problematic actions seem to ‘mirror’ the morally-problematic action?” she wrote obscurely.⁵¹ A couple in which one partner has **HIV** and which has sex using a condom, Akin wrote in 2006, is engaging in “mutual masturbation with a piece of plastic in the middle,” a “mortal sin.”⁵²

Catholic Answers is steadfastly opposed to **gay marriage**, and its leaders often place quotation marks around the word “marriage” in that term. The voter’s guide says gay marriage “does homosexual persons a disservice by encouraging them to persist in what is an objectively immoral arrangement.”⁵³ Keating has said that a homosexual person should strive to be “somewhat

A couple which has sex using a condom is engaging in “mutual masturbation with a piece of plastic in the middle.”

—Jimmy Akin

like the alcoholic who, through a support group, is able to stay sober.”⁵⁴ Akin uses quotes around even the word “parents” when referring to gays and has argued that gay parents’ children should be barred from Catholic schools, since by allowing the children to attend school, “One harms not only the children in the school but the homosexual ‘parents’ as well if one communicates to them that their behavior is acceptable, or even tolerable.”⁵⁵

Keating and Akin have frequently expressed scorn for **Islam**, which they view as the wellspring of **terrorism** and

the adversary of the West. They link current Muslim-Western difficulties to the Crusades, which they view as a legitimate and holy campaign that, tragically, sometimes met with defeat at the hands of Muslims. Akin wrote in 2005, “That [the 1453 fall of Constantinople to Muslim forces] happened was a great tragedy and yet another instance of jihad being successfully waged against Christendom. The tragedy could have been prevented had European Christians worked together.... The fall of Constantinople also comes as a salutary warning for Europe today, whose demographic trends are dooming them to cultural extinction in the face of Muslim demographic jihad.”⁵⁴

Writing in 2006 about Afghan Christian Abdul Rahman, who was imprisoned for his faith but saw the charges dropped, Akin termed the

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decision “a victory in the process of getting Muslims to behave like civilized human beings.”⁵⁷ Keating has written that the “threat [of terrorism] does not come from a few individuals or groups” and that “many” people “in Islamist societies...would become Christian if they could do so in safety.” He portrayed Islam as inherently militaristic and dismissed its theology as “meager.” There is a need, he said, to “build a bulwark that will defend the Catholic faith”—especially, he claimed, because “much of our media is still asleep” and even seeking to “hide the truth from us” when it comes to Islamic terrorism.⁵⁸

Catholic Answers’ chief apologist appears to view the planet as engaged in a religious world war that may specifically threaten the church. Akin has referred to the post-9/11 era as “World War IV” and voiced fear about a scenario in which al-Qaeda would detonate “a suitcase nuke near the Sistine

Chapel and [kill] every single one of the cardinal electors during a conclave. They’d do it! They’re fanatics!... Let’s call it an ‘act of the devil’ since (even under the providence of God) it would likely be the devil motivating the terrorists.”^{59, 60}

In a lengthy 2005 *This Rock* article, Akin endorsed then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger’s 2004 assertion of a “legitimate diversity of opinion among Catholics about waging **war** and applying the **death penalty**.”⁶¹ Akin uses his blog frequently to praise the US military and express approval of Washington war policy. Both Akin and Keating condemn the World War II firebombing of Dresden and use of nuclear weapons to destroy Japanese cities, seemingly to establish their bona fides as they support current wars enthusiastically and without exception. “The conscience of the nation has progressed” in this area, Akin has written.⁶² Catholic Answers speaker Mark Shea in 2003 displayed a willingness to challenge the Vatican on war in a manner that departed strikingly from Catholic Answers’ submissive stance on virtually all other subjects: Shea acknowledged it was “clear that both the Holy Father and the bishops urge strongly against war” but added, “I want to hear the reasoning behind it, which I’m not hearing. I’m hearing ‘Don’t do this,’ but I’m not hearing strong just-war arguments against the war.... The pope has just said, ‘I think this would be a bad idea.’”⁶³

Akin advocates a severe law-and-order approach to **crime**. In 2004, he suggested corporal punishment as “an alternative to prison”—but added that if high incarceration rates “are really needed to control the crime problem, I don’t have a problem with it.”⁶⁴ He has expressed contempt for the US right of arrestees to be read their rights, ensured by the 1966 Supreme Court decision in *Miranda vs. Arizona*. He uses scare quotes around the word “right” in this context and in 2005 wrote that “people at the time...thought it was absurd to compel police” to inform suspects of their rights.

“There is not one bit of the Constitution that states or implies that police have an obligation to do this,” he wrote.⁶⁵

CATHOLICISM

Catholic Answers attributes to what it sees as authentic Catholicism a long list of qualities the average person will view as extremely negative. Its Catholicism is a rejection of the church hierarchy's stances since Vatican II and is far out of touch with the views of the average American Catholic.

Akin's co-blogger Tim Jones crystallized this approach in 2005, in response to objections by the progressive Catholic group We Are Church to sainthood for Pope John Paul II. The list of objections described the late pope as practicing “repression and marginalization” of certain theologians, moving away from “collegiality in Church governance” and lacking control over church finances. Jones wrote, “This looks like a list of recommendations, to me.”⁶⁶

Apologetics in general is controversial within the increasingly ecumenical-minded post-Vatican II church, and Catholic Answers' brand of apologetics is extreme. In an article about Catholic Answers speaker Jim Burnham and former Catholic Answers vice president Patrick Madrid, the Associated Press in 1997 cited Catholic critics who said apologetics “runs contrary to Vatican II's call for Christian groups to work together.” The wire service paraphrased Archdiocese of Santa Fe, New Mexico, pastoral ministries director Frances Vogel as saying that “apologetics is out of step in today's ecumenical age” and as calling for “less confrontational evangelization efforts.”⁶⁷

Despite a stated desire to convert non-Catholics and less regressive Catholics to its brand of Catholicism, Catholic Answers' presentation of the faith often seems designed to drive away, rather than attract, its audience. Catholic Answers' Catholicism is:

Regressive.

Catholic Answers' viewpoint lies beyond traditionalism, but the group strategically uses the term “radical traditionalism” to demonize those few Catholics more extreme than itself. Catholic Answers apologists have been known to reject the views of priests, bishops and occasionally even the Vatican, and the group stresses its financial independence from the institutional church. Catholic Answers chastises priests regularly for what it sees as insufficient orthodoxy; Keating told *Insight on the News* that the priesthood has been failing Catholics since the 1960s by offering “almost no moral structure” in homilies. For priests, he chided, “It's very easy to talk about racism because everybody's against it. It's very difficult to speak against contraception because most Catholics practice it.”⁶⁸ Akin in 2005 instructed a Catholic questioner to stop having sex with his Protestant wife, to whom he had been married years before in a civil ceremony, until the two had a Catholic wedding; the man's priest had been “wrong,” Akin told the man, to tell the couple they could continue having sex.⁶⁹ In 1991, Keating told the *Orlando Sentinel*, “Lay people can do this

Catholic Answers apologists have been known to reject the views of priests, bishops and occasionally even the Vatican.

better than clergy...can because we're on the same level as the people we're talking to.”⁷⁰ Catholic Answers admonishes Catholics to submit to the hierarchy's views even as it refuses to do so itself. *This Rock* told a 1994 letter writer, “Conform your mind and will to those of the Church,”⁷¹ and Keating said that same year that “orthodoxy and joyousness go together.”⁷² In claiming orthodoxy while promoting views that clash with those of the church hierarchy, Catholic Answers implies that the hierarchy is as regressive and strident as itself.

Insulting.

“Jesus is harsh and condemning of sinfulness,” Keating said in 2000.⁷³ “There’s too much ‘tolerance’ rhetoric in the schools (and in society),” Akin wrote in 2005, “as it’s used as a codeword to stigmatize those who want to maintain traditional moral values.”⁷⁴ Accordingly, Catholic Answers leaders are frequently rude to those who disagree with them and do not shy away from gratuitous and juvenile ad hominem attacks. When Catholics for a Free Choice filed a complaint about Catholic Answers’ illegal electoral activity with the IRS in 2004, Akin said nothing in defense of his group’s work but referred to Catholics for a Free Choice president Frances Kissling as “Frances ‘Quisling.’”⁷⁵ In an exchange related to the 2004 US presidential election, Akin called *Newsday* columnist Bob Keeler a “barking moonbat” and a “hack”—in a blog entry

Catholic Answers’ defensiveness is intertwined with scorn for other faiths, which it accuses of anti-Catholicism and describes as based in untruth.

titled “Journalist Increases Own Chance Of Going To Hell”—after Keeler wrote that Catholics cared about a broader range of issues than those represented in Catholic Answers’ *Voter’s Guide*.⁷⁶ When television producer Steven Levitan, a Catholic, wrote in 2004 that he and his Jewish wife do not regularly attend religious services, Akin called the pair “a couple of sell-outs on the single most important subject in life...trying to mask that fact to yourselves with pious-sounding pleasantries.” Concluding his attack on the “clueless lefty,” he added: “You’re not just from a different planet. You’re from a different universe.”⁷⁷

Defensive.

Catholic Answers complains constantly of anti-Catholicism and displays a generally defensive mindset that fuels its quasi-separatism. In fighting this rear-guard battle, Catholic Answers leaders often

preach religious bigotry and complain about it in the same breath. Keating suggested in 2004, for example, that persecution of Catholics persisted, but that in any case, any decline in anti-Catholicism over the past century could be attributed to Protestants’ decadence. “That old Catholic bogeyman has not disappeared,” he wrote. “If the Church is no longer as fiercely attacked as it once was, that can be attributed less to an openness of mind and heart than to the weakening of belief among English-speaking Protestants. Fewer of them believe their own religion, so fewer of them hate ours.”⁷⁸

In defending the faith against perceived attacks, Catholic Answers spends much time, ink and bandwidth refuting media productions ranging from the crude, bigoted comic books of “Christian” cartoonist Jack Chick to Hollywood blockbusters. “TV programs run all the time that if they attacked Jews or blacks the way that they attacked Catholics, then all kinds of people would be up in arms,” Keating wrote in 1994. “But, hey, everyone knows Catholics are cruel and repressive.... In the media our priests are all pedophiles.”⁷⁹ Perhaps no cultural production spooked Catholic Answers as much as *The Da Vinci Code*, a 2006 fantasy and whodunit whose central conspiracy involved Opus Dei and the Vatican. Akin criticized the movie with ad hominem insults and irrelevant aesthetic pronouncements. “Opie’s latest opus,” he wrote, referring to director Ron Howard’s role four decades earlier in the *Andy Griffith Show*, “is boring! B-O-R-I-N-G!” Referring next to Howard’s 1970s role in *Happy Days*, Akin added, “Somebody must have spiked Richie Cunningham’s drink with a tab of acid.”⁸⁰ Catholic Answers’ frustration was surely intensified by the massive box office Howard’s Grail fantasy was doing at the time—*The Da Vinci Code* opened at No. 1 and stayed in the box-office top ten for two months.

Anti-ecumenical.

Catholic Answers’ defensiveness is intertwined with scorn for other faiths,

which it accuses of anti-Catholicism and describes as based in untruth. “Some of the Protestant churches call their ministers priests or bishops, but we know that those are terms of courtesy, not reality,” Keating wrote in 2000. The Anglican archbishop of Canterbury, he added, “is a Christian layman, not even a priest.... I use ‘church’ in a colloquial sense when referring to the Anglican or other Protestant bodies.... There is one true Church, and there are many faux churches.”⁸¹ In 2005, Arnold summed up the Anglican Church as one “created because of one man’s sexual indiscretions and rationalizations for his immoral behavior.” She linked Henry VIII’s place in Anglican history to the church’s being “at the forefront of...the rationalization by some Christians of sexual behavior traditionally recognized to be immoral”—that is, homosexuality.⁸²

Akin is particularly concerned with other faiths, those purveyors of sin and error. In 2006, he counseled a blog reader not to attend a brother-in-law’s baptism as a Jehovah’s Witness because “it is more loving to an individual (and others) to be honest with them about the fact that a sacrament is not valid—and to prove that you’re serious about that by not showing up.”⁸³ In 2005, he recommended another reader skip even the reception that was to follow a Catholic acquaintance’s non-Catholic wedding. He earnestly explored the question of whether going to the reception would constitute a mortal sin.⁸⁴ He lectured and condemned activists concerned about potential inspiration for anti-Semites in the movie *The Passion of the Christ*, a Catholic Answers favorite; Jews who criticized the movie, he said, were “hypocrites” and “reactionaries.” In an apparent attempt at ecumenical understanding, he added that it was understandable that the “ulterior motives” of Jewish *Passion* critics might include “keeping the *goyim* from getting worked up about their religion.”⁸⁵

The Vatican-Catholic Answers gulf on ecumenism was illustrated by a 2006

episode in which, faced with news reports about and photographs of Pope John Paul II kissing a Qur’an, Akin said the pope “may have overestimated both the need for and the utility of” gestures aimed at fostering “world peace and religious harmony.” If the latter was the pope’s motive, Akin wrote, the kiss was “a mistake to my mind.” John Paul II, he wrote, “may not have been attending to the gravity of the false elements in the Quran” and may “without fully thinking through his action” have kissed the book. “Fortunately,” Akin sniffed, “the infallibility of the pope and the indefectibility of the Church do not extend to such actions.”⁸⁶

A curious aside to Catholic Answers’ intolerance of other religions is its obsession with breakaway Catholic groups, minor religions, spiritual movements and outright cults. Keating seems to fear such groups may draw converts from Catholicism but also to hope they may provide converts to Catholicism. Akin also fiercely denounces “New Age” beliefs, which he embraced in younger days.⁸⁷ “Communism was done in by its record. So will the New Age movement be done in,” Keating wrote in 1990. “New Agers...know nothing about

The Anglican Church was “created because of one man’s sexual indiscretions and rationalizations for his immoral behavior.”—Michelle Arnold

Christianity.... They are unable to handle syllogisms. Their minds aren’t geared to logical processes.... They are their own gods.... These people don’t even know who John XXIII was, let alone Gregory the Great.... The New Age movement will corrupt and disappoint millions more before it too is relegated to the dustbin of history.” On the other hand, he continued, “New Agers will someday be ex-New Agers, hollowed out and ready to be filled with something, anything. And why not with the fullest form of Christianity, Catholicism?”⁸⁸

Sheltered.

Catholic Answers’ stance toward the general culture is one of religious quasi-separatism and heavy censorship and filtering of cultural productions. The organization promotes Catholic-specific dating services and mortgages, and Catholic Answers leaders have participated in all-Catholic cruises on the Royal Caribbean line.⁸⁹ Their ultimate plans are seemingly much grander: In 2005, Arnold criticized Cory Burnell, leader of the separatist group Christian Exodus, over his plan for a theocratic settlement in South Carolina—but only because Burnell had committed an error of timing with his “‘outside-the-box’ pet brainstorm,” which was “not yet ready for primetime.”⁹⁰ While awaiting utopia, Catholic Answers followers are to shelter themselves from much of modern life. In response to a reader whose priest had warned him the devil is in nightclubs,

No past crime of the church hierarchy goes undefended by Catholic Answers.

Akin claimed he had never been to a nightclub and advised square dancing.⁹¹ The sheltered ideal is in a sense a wish to go back in time, and Catholic Answers sees itself as a bulwark between its fellow nostalgics and a comparatively modern church. “Even with those fine priests who represent the faith as they should, it is no longer enough,” Keating has said. “It used to be that in places like Chicago you could find four Catholic churches at one intersection—German, Polish, Irish and another. We no longer live in that kind of a Catholic ghetto.... By default there is a need” for Catholic Answers, he said.⁹²

Revisionist.

No past crime of the church hierarchy goes undefended by Catholic Answers, even though Vatican leaders have expressed regret for many things. Catholic Answers oscillates between denying some of the church’s crimes and

claiming others were committed by wayward leaders who do not represent the institution. “Pius XII...was ceaseless in his solicitude for persecuted Jews,” Keating wrote in 2000, complaining of an “affective incapacity” to “distinguish between the Church’s teachings and some of her wayward members.”⁹³ In 2000, he wrote that the Inquisition as generally understood “just wasn’t so.”⁹⁴ The Crusades were “eminently defensible,” he wrote on another occasion, “even though, like all wars, excesses and venality and acquisitiveness were to be found in them (along with discipline and valor and generosity).”⁹⁵

Akin has seen fit to exculpate members of the hierarchy for even banal missteps. When in 2004 papal spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls contradicted himself about whether the pope had said of *The Passion of the Christ*, “It is as it was,” Akin embarked on a tortuous and legalistic argument that excluded utterly the possibility that the spokesman could have lied, considering instead whether Navarro-Valls might have been guilty of a “mental reservation.” After Navarro-Valls had denied media reports that he had confirmed the papal quote’s accuracy, reporters had published e-mails demonstrating that Navarro-Valls had changed his story.⁹⁶

Antifeminist.

In response to Loyola University theologian Susan Ross’ questioning whether it is good to “perpetuat[e] an image of the Eucharist where a man is always at the center,” Keating wrote in 2000, “In every Mass ‘a man is always at the center’—the man Jesus Christ.... The Mass is a divine drama, and the male lead needs to be played by a male.” He rejected the very concept of feminist theology and wrote sarcastically that since “promoters of women’s ordination...cause divisions” that “hurt,” “I hope Susan A. Ross feels my pain.”⁹⁷

Akin is radically regressive on relations between the sexes. In 2004, he

said the role of women in Catholic families stems from “differences in the genders.” Although some women may be bigger than or understand spatial relations better than some men, he wrote, “In a few cases, the differences in roles are absolute: Only women can give birth; only men can be priests.” In families, he said, “Men are configured physically and cognitively to serve as the primary leader/protector of the family, while women are configured physically and cognitively to serve as the primary nurturer/caregiver.” Such roles may be altered in a marriage, he said, if one spouse is “physically or mentally incapacitated.”⁹⁸

Antigay.

Catholic Answers’ leaders are viciously antigay. They scapegoat gays for the church hierarchy’s problems and reject the reality of gay life in America. Keating wrote in 2004 that “widespread theological dissent and the toleration of homosexual behavior,” rather than sexual abuse of young people, were the reasons that “the Catholic priesthood in America has not been getting a good press.” He blamed gay priests for “most (not all, admittedly) of the abuse cases.” Brushing aside the facts and generally accepted tenets of the psychology of abuse, he said, “The priestly scandal has not been so much about priests abusing children as about homosexual priests acting out their homosexuality with teenagers and young adults.” Barring from ministry all priests who “have chosen to live the homosexual lifestyle,” Keating wrote, “would solve the abuse scandal almost overnight by getting rid of the priests who cause most of the abuse.” He further recommended that all “homosexual” men—in his terms, not just the “gay” ones, who have “chosen to live the homosexual lifestyle”—be refused entry to seminaries.⁹⁹

The organization’s antigay stance reflects its generally sheltered and nostalgic conservatism. Akin railed in 2006 against “those in the gay

community” who seek “to reinterpret wholesome American icons in homosexual terms” and “take a kind of perverse delight in reinterpreting icons of goodness and decency in this fashion.” He slammed Warner Brothers for marketing *Superman Returns* to gay as well as straight people and lambasted DC Comics’ decision to portray Batwoman as a lesbian—“particularly disgusting to me,” he wrote, “since I remember the original Batwoman from

The organization’s antigay stance reflects its generally sheltered and nostalgic conservatism.

reprints of old Batman stories that I read as a child, and the original Batwoman was created as a love interest for Batman himself.”¹⁰⁰ Also in 2006, he criticized “homosexual activists” who have “delighted in corrupting” the image of the quintessential gay icon, Judy Garland: “I’m not about to let the fact that some of them have tried to subvert [Garland’s *Wizard of Oz* character] Dorothy into some kind of gay icon stop me from enjoying *The Wizard of Oz*.”¹⁰¹

Apocalyptic.

Writing about the fall of the Roman Empire, Keating said in 2005, “We are entering a new dark night, but many people are oblivious to the fact, just as many were oblivious in the fourth century. No matter. As it did then, the Catholic Church will be the carrier of not only religious truth but civilization itself.”¹⁰²

PEOPLE

Karl Keating

Keating is much less public a figure than most leaders of like-minded organizations. His name and words appear comparatively rarely in news articles, and Catholic Answers publishes little information about him and virtually none about his life before 1979. According to Wikipedia, he was born in

1950 and attended college at the University of California San Diego and law school at the University of San Diego.¹⁰³

Despite this dearth of information, one period is well-documented: the beginning of Keating's apologetics career and of Catholic Answers itself. In 1979 in San Diego, according to the oft-recounted tale, Keating reacted to "Fundamentalist" leafleting of cars in a Catholic church's parking lot—"the fliers attacked the Eucharist and were riddled with misinformation"—by leafleting cars in a "Fundamentalist" church's lot with a defense of Catholicism.¹⁰⁴ During the early 1980s, Keating practiced civil law full-time but became increasingly involved in his apologetics activity. Believing "that people were interested in the question of the fundamentalist attack on the Church," he wrote 30 articles for the *Wanderer* that became his 1988 book *Catholicism and Fundamentalism*. "I guess I'm just contrary," he told *Sursum Corda!* in 1996. "When I distributed that first pamphlet I wanted to get a reaction. So I rented a post office box and chose the name Catholic Answers."¹⁰⁵

In 1986, he began to publish the *Catholic Answers Newsletter* and engaged in his first debate, against former Discalced Carmelite Bart Brewer. Keating has sought to mythologize the debate to an extreme degree. Brewer, he claims, droned on after Keating had made his own points brilliantly, and the mostly "fundamentalist" audience of 350 dramatically embraced Keating afterward: "I had a hundred or more crammed around me" offering congratulations to Keating and apologies for Brewer's "screed," Keating told *Sursum Corda!* "I could see across the room at the far end my opponent was standing all by himself."¹⁰⁶

Keating left law practice in 1988 to run Catholic Answers full-time¹⁰⁷ and in the same year published *Catholicism and Fundamentalism*. Two years later, he replaced his *Newsletter* with the more ambitious *This Rock*, which became the major vehicle for his writing. "God

condescends to work through men to achieve his ends, yet achieve them he does," he wrote. "We're trying to cooperate through this magazine."¹⁰⁸ By 1991, the *Orlando Sentinel* was describing him as "a defender of the Catholic faith," a title he did not reject: "The faith needs to be defended because so many people are leaving it. The reason they're leaving it, for the most part, is because they never were taught the faith," Keating told the *Sentinel*. He added that he wanted to combat "fundamentalist misconceptions about Catholicism," including "that we worship statues, that we worship Mary instead of God."¹⁰⁹

Keating is married to a Japanese woman from Kyoto who is a Catholic convert from Buddhism. In December 1992, he wrote in *This Rock* about her father's burial in Japan. His father-in-law was cremated, and Keating described refusing to participate in a ritual in which each mourner approached the altar and sprinkled incense on a brazier. "By engaging in it I might have allowed some to think I believe my religion is on the same level as their custom. Since I don't, I couldn't," he wrote.¹¹⁰

Jimmy Akin, director of apologetics and evangelization

Before settling on his current ultraorthodox Catholicism, Akin espoused various religions and beliefs he now staunchly opposes. Born in 1965 in Corpus Christi, Texas, he was raised and schooled by Protestant parents in Arkansas and began his career teaching philosophy at the University of Arkansas, seemingly on the basis of a pending postgraduate degree.¹¹¹ He has written that before becoming Catholic in 1992,¹¹² he attended a Church of Christ, became obsessed with the "end times," joined the "New Age movement," harbored an "intense dislike of Christians" and became a "devotee" of televangelist Gene Scott, who before his death in 2005 preached on not only the Gospels but also the sunken city of Atlantis, lost Celtic tribes and countless other such topics.

Akin converted to Catholicism while married to a Catholic, the late Renee Humphrey. By his account, she held “many New Age beliefs” but he convinced her that reincarnation was false, and his initial insistence of the falsehood of Catholicism led her briefly to call herself Anglican before reverting to Catholicism after their wedding. She appears to have been extremely dependent on him—she had no driver’s license, he says, and he refused to drive her to mass—and gives her little credit for his conversion, which he attributes to study (“I noticed for the first time a structural feature in the text which required that Peter be the rock...”) and to “problems with the two fundamental doctrines of Protestantism: sola fide...and sola scriptura.” Before Akin converted, he started acceding to his wife’s requests that he drive her to mass, and they were remarried in a Catholic ceremony. He hid from her his plan to convert—“I could not cruelly get her hopes up and then disappoint her if I discovered some fatal flaw in Catholic teaching”—and worried that “people might think I was converting to please her.” He writes of telling her he planned to convert, “Ironically, I seemed more excited about it than she did.” He was received into the church in an “emergency” rite beside her deathbed.¹¹³

Akin maintains a voluminous blog, to which Catholic Answers’ catholic.com links prominently. He insists constantly that it is his personal blog for legal purposes—“what’s mine is mine,” he writes frequently in closing blog entries—but refers often to Catholic Answers matters on the blog, invites blog readers to get involved in Catholic Answers “secret projects” and has acknowledged blogging while at work. The blog reveals him to be a devotee of ultraconservative economist Thomas Sowell, whom Akin has more than once called a “supergenius,” and a general enthusiast for fads and trends in popular economics. Akin has held forth about the *Star Trek* franchise and various other

science fiction and fantasy works and obsessively refuted *The Da Vinci Code* and speculated anxiously about its filmed version’s chances for success. He has riffed from an ultraorthodox, stridently conservative perspective on such varied subjects as the US Supreme Court and its members “Darth Ginsburg” and “Darth Kennedy,” “Abortion and Battlestar Galactica,” Sunday mass obligation, the permissibility of attending non-Catholic weddings, his weight-loss efforts and the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band.

Jimmy Akin has riffed on his blog on such varied subjects as the US Supreme Court and its members “Darth Ginsburg” and “Darth Kennedy.”

Akin occupies himself with tortuous reflections on church hierarchy teaching, canon law and their application, seldom making reference to the broad moral and doctrinal themes that guide the lives of ordinary Catholics. In September 2005, he provided an excellent example of his superstitious legalism:

When I was first learning about the Christian faith, I was a non-Trinitarian (not because of any organization teaching me to deny the Trinity, just because I was still too green and independent-minded). I came to accept the doctrine, but in later years I was not sure if I had done so before or after my baptism, and it caused me no end of worry. I’m pretty sure that I was a Trinitarian at the time of my baptism, but just to make sure, I *insisted* on a conditional baptism at the time I was received into the Catholic Church.... This situation *doesn’t* arise because you didn’t understand the Trinity or had a shaky acceptance of it at the time of your baptism. It arises *only* because you had a history of prior, conscious *rejection* of the Trinity and are not sure if you were rejecting it at the time of your baptism....¹¹⁴

One is inevitably reminded of John Cleese’s headmaster in *Monty Python’s The*

Meaning of Life. “Those of you who are playing in the match this afternoon, move your clothes onto the lower peg immediately after lunch, before you write your letters home, if you’re not having your hair cut, unless you’ve got a younger brother who is going out this weekend as the guest of another boy, in which case collect his note before lunch....” Akin, of course, is not joking.

Raymond Ryland, *board member*, This Rock *contributing editor*

Catholic priest Ryland, an Oklahoma native and former Episcopal priest, converted to Catholicism along with his wife and five children in 1963. He is an adjunct professor at Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio, an assistant pastor at a Steubenville parish and the chaplain of the Coming Home Network and Catholics United for the Faith.¹¹⁵ According to *San Diego News*

few years earlier based partially on the idea that “Catholics didn’t have to figure things out for themselves; they just did what the priests told them.” Although she acknowledged that idea had been a “misunderstanding,” she added counterfactually that Catholics “are free of the doctrinal squabbles Protestants suffer from and can trust the infallible magisterium to teach them truth.”¹¹⁸

Jason Evert, *apologist*

Sexual morality specialist Evert writes books, mainly to promote sexual abstinence, and travels the country speaking to groups of teenagers in schools. He has referred to the fact that condoms prevent disease transmission as “the biggest lie” in sex education.¹¹⁹ In 2005, the student newspaper editor at Berkley High School near Detroit complained, as paraphrased by the *Detroit News*, that “sex education at Berkley, at least so far as he’s experienced it, is being handed over to Evert”: The student editor, Gabe Downey, had received no sex education from the school’s faculty but now saw Evert—who says he was a virgin when at age 27 he met his future wife—invited to promote abstinence. The *News* reported that about 300 of Berkley’s 1,300 students were expected to attend the talk.¹²⁰

He holds undergraduate and graduate degrees from Franciscan University in Ohio. His wife, the former Crystalina Padilla, is also a Catholic Answers apologist and abstinence specialist, and the two frequently give speeches together. At this writing, they charge \$1,800 for a joint speech and \$1,300 for a speech by Jason Evert alone, plus travel expenses.¹²¹ Jason Evert founded Catholic Answers’ “chastity outreach program,” the Pure Love Club.¹²² Both Everts are members of the National Abstinence Clearinghouse board.¹²³

Tim Staples, *apologist*

Staples is a former Southern Baptist, Assemblies of God youth minister and US Marine who became Catholic in

Jason Evert has referred to the fact that condoms prevent disease transmission as “the biggest lie” in sex education.

Notes, Ryland was a close adviser of late San Diego bishop Leo Maher when Maher in 1989 barred California assemblywoman Lucy Killea from communion, becoming “the only United States bishop on record to have denied Holy Communion to a Catholic politician who supports abortion.”¹¹⁶ [Other bishops have since announced they would do so.]

Michelle Arnold, *apologist*

Arnold is a former Seventh-Day Adventist and current Catholic who has worked for Catholic Answers since 2000 and volunteered for the organization before that.¹¹⁷ She has criticized her former church as “anti-Catholic” but appears less stridently anti-ecumenical than Catholic Answers’ leaders, writing for example that she has “little doubt” her Adventist great aunt “is in heaven.” Arnold in 1997 described having felt “strong tugs” to the Catholic church a

1988 and spent six years in an ultimately unsuccessful bid at the priesthood. The “Catholic Apologist Extraordinaire!” from Virginia is a graduate of St. Charles Borromeo Seminary near Philadelphia and attended Mount St. Mary’s Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland. His basic fee is \$1,000 for a lecture on “the Real Presence of our Lord in the Eucharist using the text of John 6,” “what it means to truly confront the ‘culture war’” or any of numerous other topics.¹²⁴ The *Orange County Register* portrayed him in 2000 as a person who had been known to “kneel before a TV set” broadcasting evangelical Protestant programming but now moved himself to tears preaching strict Catholicism—before taking another stage later in a muscle shirt to flex his bulging biceps, bend a steel rod and exhort a teenage audience, “Let’s give it up for Jesus!” Staples is 42,¹²⁵ married with an infant son and lives in Southern California.¹²⁶

Rosalind Moss, apologist

Ex-corporate executive Moss converted in 1977 from Judaism to evangelical Protestantism and in 1995 to Catholicism. She became a Catholic Answers staff apologist in 1999. The New Yorker’s apologetics activity includes a radio program, two shows on the Eternal Word Television Network and books such as *Home at Last: 11 Who Found Their Way to the Catholic Church*. For \$1,600, she will speak on “the journey of ‘Howie’—a Hell’s Angels biker—who ‘found Christ,’” on “how the family is not our idea, but God’s” or on “a whole family of saints we rarely think of—from our Jewish beginnings!”¹²⁷ As a guest in 2003 on a radio program with a Protestant audience, Moss told a caller Catholicism could not be “man’s doing” since it could “still exist in unity after 2,000 years, while in less than 500 years Protestantism has split many thousands of times.”¹²⁸

Moss has acknowledged interrupting the prayers of observant Jews who were hosting her for lunch to tell them Jesus was the messiah, and finding it

“heartbreaking” that they responded by stating Jewish belief.¹²⁹ She is at odds utterly with the Catholic hierarchy over how to view her ancestral faith: In 2002, when US Conference of Catholic Bishops Jewish-relations chief Cardinal William Keeler wrote that Jews carried a “divinely given mission” and that Catholic attempts to convert them were “no longer theologically acceptable,” Moss wrote the cardinal to convey her “considerable distress.” She rejected the hierarchy’s view that Jews could be saved without converting to Christianity and told Keeler his view was “opposed to the temporal and spiritual welfare” of Jewish people. “The Jewish people would be very pleased with this document,” she wrote of Keeler’s reflections, but “one day they *will* bow before” Jesus (emphasis in original), “and in that day, we will hang our heads in shame.”¹³⁰

Peggy Frye, apologist

Frye is a former agnostic and Lutheran who recounts being “fascinated” as a girl by “Catholicism’s mysterious, almost magical appeal.” She describes her involvement in “the ‘60s counterculture movement” with its “sex, drugs, rock ‘n’ roll” as having “opened a door to things

Rosalind Moss has acknowledged interrupting the prayers of observant Jews who were hosting her for lunch to tell them Jesus was the messiah.

I wish I never knew existed,” and says that in 1974 she “had a moment of grace” while working for an insurance company: “Some born-again Christians” pressed on her a copy of C.S. Lewis’ *Mere Christianity*, which “for reasons I cannot fully explain, I felt compelled to...read,” leading her to devout evangelical practice and 18 years later to Catholicism. Typical of Catholic Answers apologists, she sees “no middle ground” between Catholic ultraorthodoxy and viewing Catholicism as “the greatest heresy in the history of the world.” “I...bent my knee to Rome,” she says,

and “accepted the faith under the teaching authority of the Church.”¹³¹

Mark Shea, speaker

Seattle-based Shea is a former evangelical Protestant and active *Da Vinci Code* antagonist who is on Catholic Answers’ roster of speakers. Among the \$800 lectures he offers are several on aspects of his conversion and one on how college students should reject “tiresome PC twaddle” in favor of Catholic “heroism.”¹³² He has been active in running the Covenant Keepers, a Catholic version of the Promise Keepers masculine-Christianity group. He is senior content editor for Catholic Exchange, a Web site out to “evangelize the world” through the writings of such right-wing figures as Frank Pavone and Chuck Colson,¹³³ and he holds forth voluminously on a personal blog and a closely related Web site on which he markets his speeches, writings and

Mark Shea recommends that college students should reject “tiresome PC twaddle” in favor of Catholic “heroism.”

recordings. The tone of these Web writings is often patronizing and aggressive, as when in 2006 Shea responded to a reader’s acknowledgement that Shea “might have made somewhat of a point”:

Note what you are doing here. Our calling as Christians is to love the truth, not just go around trying to build up our egos by winning arguments. The fact is, I didn’t just ‘make somewhat of a point.’ I demonstrated that the argument you were making was fallacious. A lover of truth will rejoice when a fallacious argument is shown to be false.... A lover of self will quickly brush past the disproof of a fallacious argument and look for new ways to WIN. Which are you doing here? Think about it.¹³⁴

Shea in 2003 reported having been married 20 years and having four children, all sons.¹³⁵

Christina King, speaker

Catholic Answers speaker King is a sexual abstinence advocate from Wrightstown, Wisconsin. The University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point graduate markets a program she calls Pure Freedom, speaking to groups of teenagers for a fee of \$800.¹³⁶ She began giving speeches around her state in 1991 and at this writing, her Web site indicated she was 36 years old and married with seven children.¹³⁷ King has called it “defeatist” to acknowledge that adolescents have sex. In an undated article from the *Post-Crescent* of Appleton, Wisconsin, that she features on her Pure Freedom Web site, she is described as coming from a “broken home” and having endured “sexual abuse and teen pregnancy.” King is quoted in the article as saying teen sex “can lead to illnesses, shame and jealousy which, in turn, can lead to stalking and rage.”¹³⁸

Phil Lenahan, speaker

Lenahan is a Catholic Answers speaker who in 2005 reduced his role with the organization to a part-time one after serving previously as Catholic Answers finance director, a position in which he earned \$170,000 in 2003. Early in his career, the Southern Californian and California State University, Fullerton graduate worked for the prefabricated housing and recreational vehicle maker Fleetwood¹³⁹ and the accounting firm Arthur Andersen.¹⁴⁰ Lenahan heads Veritas Financial Ministries, which says its mission is to develop “Stewards of Providence by equipping people to manage their personal finances according to Catholic principles.”¹⁴¹ His basic recommendations include tithing, saving and reducing debt and spending; he cites examples of people who began tithing and soon got raises and promotions.¹⁴² Catholic Answers, Veritas and Lenahan as of this writing are all touting his 2006 book *7 Steps to Becoming Financially Free*, published by Our Sunday Visitor.¹⁴³

Jim Burnham, speaker

Burnham is an apologist and Catholic Answers speaker who contributes articles

to *This Rock*. He touts himself as “internationally known” and, nearly two decades after the fact, as the valedictorian of his graduating class at Hillsdale College in Hillsdale, Michigan. He and his father in the 1990s founded San Juan Catholic Seminars, an apologetics group that produces books and tapes.¹⁴⁴ Burnham’s apologetics is nearly indistinguishable from that of Akin and Keating, and he shares their melodramatic preoccupation with non-Catholic critics of Catholicism and how to refute them. Catholic Answers describes one standard Burnham lecture as revealing the “shocking truth” about the scriptural basis of Catholic institutions, in order to confound “Fundamentalist” and “Evangelical” opponents, and another as providing ammunition to “target and refute” the beliefs of Mormons whose “one goal” is to “pull you out of the Catholic Church.”¹⁴⁵ Burnham at this writing charges a basic speaking fee of \$1,200, according to Catholic Answers, or \$1,800, according to the Covenant Keepers masculine-Catholicism group. The latter, which touts him as a speaker, says he has been married 11 years and has five children.¹⁴⁶

Marcellino D’Ambrosio, speaker

D’Ambrosio holds a Ph.D. in theology, having written his Catholic University dissertation under the guidance of the well-known theologian Cardinal Avery Dulles. D’Ambrosio has taught at the University of Dallas and published work in scholarly journals. His basic fee as a Catholic Answers speaker is \$1,200 for lectures with titles such as “Do Catholics Worship Mary?” “Who Needs Confession?” and “Parenting as a Means to Holiness.”¹⁴⁷ D’Ambrosio’s Crossroads Initiative markets his books, recordings and lectures, and its Web site refers readers to his Wellness International Network, a franchising venture offering herbal and other products sold mainly in the \$40-\$60 range and pitched in pseudoscientific jargon. The offerings

include citrus aurantium extract for weight loss, vitamin pills and herbal supplements promising various benefits, a CD called *Build an International Business Anytime, Anywhere, with Anybody* and a Wellness International Network license plate frame. The company also offers telephone, Internet and television services and a “discount health program” that it warns is “not insurance.”¹⁴⁸

Jerry Usher, radio program director, Catholic Answers Live host

Catholic Answers hired Usher as a consultant in 1997 after he had started a Catholic radio station in Reno, Nevada. The Franciscan University graduate was a Keating devotee who intended to become a priest. Instead he became host of Catholic Answers’ radio program *Catholic Answers Live*, which bought radio

Jim Burnham claims that the “one goal” of Mormons is to “pull you out of the Catholic Church.”

airtime and streamed its broadcast over the Internet, and which he insisted would address “no politics, no sports and no soap opera.”¹⁴⁹ As of 2003, the *Buffalo News* reported, the program was carried almost exclusively on specifically Catholic stations. “We would be on any station that would put us on,” Usher said.¹⁵⁰

Gary Walterscheid, fundraiser

Visalia, California, resident Walterscheid was as of 2003 earning \$60,000 annually for contract work on Catholic Answers solicitation letters. He is an antichoice activist and general social and economic conservative who has worked in advertising. The Alliance for the Separation of School and State touts him, alongside such notables as Domino’s Pizza founder Tom Monaghan, as a “lay leader” who endorses “liberating schools from political influence.”¹⁵¹

An avid writer of letters to newspaper editors, Walterscheid wrote the *Los Angeles Times* in 1985 that a National

Donors

Republican former speaker of the US House of Representatives **Tom Delay** (TX) contributed \$4,159 to Catholic Answers in two separate transactions during the 2003-04 electoral cycle. The DeLay transactions are the only reference to Catholic Answers that turns up in a search of the Center for Responsive Politics' exhaustive Web catalog of spending in US elections.¹⁵⁸

Tax documents from 2002 provide a rare look at some other Catholic Answers donors. A few have found themselves in the public eye; generally, they are politically active conservatives and ultraorthodox Catholics.

James Holman

San Diego Reader publisher Holman gave Catholic Answers \$10,000 in 2002. Holman in 2005 was the main financial backer of California's Proposition 73, providing \$1 million to promote the ultimately unsuccessful ballot measure, which would have required notification of parents of minors seeking abortion.¹⁵⁹ As of this writing, Holman had provided another \$2 million in 2006 to back a new version of the measure.¹⁶⁰ Holman has been jailed for illegal abortion clinic protest, has been picketed for refusing to sell *Reader* advertisements to abortion providers—he has also refused to accept personal ads from gays—and has given money to electoral candidates who oppose abortion rights.¹⁶¹ The Association of Alternative Newsweeklies says the *Reader*, with a circulation of 170,000, is the largest publication of its kind in the country. Holman also publishes four ultraorthodox Catholic papers: *La Cruz de California*, published in Tijuana; *San Diego News Notes*, which has prominently featured Catholic Answers on numerous occasions; *Los Angeles Lay Catholic Mission*; and *San Francisco Faith*.¹⁶² The *Los Angeles Times* reported in 2005 that Holman has been called a “recluse and ultraconservative ideologue” but that his friends, the closest of which include priests, “say that portrait is off the mark.” He grew up near Los Angeles, attended Carleton College in Minnesota and served in the US Navy.¹⁶³

John Wakelin

Poway, California, resident Wakelin donated \$10,000 to Catholic Answers in 2002. His wife, Jan Wakelin, has reviewed books for Catholic Answers' *This Rock*. John Wakelin is a trustee of the new John Paul the Great Catholic University in San Diego,¹⁶⁴ which began recruiting students in late 2005 and opened its first building in early 2006.¹⁶⁵ The retired US Army brigadier general served as a communications deputy for the Joint Chiefs of Staff before leaving the military to work in Army research at the defense contracting behemoth Science Applications International Corporation.¹⁶⁶

Conference of Catholic Bishops pastoral letter was “absolutely a piece of trash” because the bishops supported “liberal” economic policy rather than an unfettered free market.¹⁵² He stepped up his letter-writing in 2003, publishing at least three letters in his local newspaper: In January in the *Visalia Times-Delta*, he suggested pollsters employ the term “child-killing” instead of “abortion” to “focus people’s attention on the child instead of the mother’s so-called ‘rights’”¹⁵³; in April, he decried golfers who used US flag towels to wipe their clubs, since “the flag was not meant to be a rag”¹⁵⁴; and in September, he blasted “God-haters” over the removal of a Ten Commandments monument from a state building in Alabama, suggesting a completely unrelated Chicago murder might not have happened if there had been more public displays of the commandments and asking whether “God-hating liberals and leftist attorneys” would be arguing the murderer’s case before God.¹⁵⁵

Patrick Madrid, former vice president

Madrid left Catholic Answers in 1995, saying, “A lot of my energy was spent on administrative duties.” The Southern California native remains a Catholic Answers-aligned apologist, publishing *Envoy* magazine from his home in Ohio.¹⁵⁶ At this writing, the magazine’s Web site featured a fawning profile of Keating, an article debunking “the myth of overpopulation,” “a step-by-step explanation of why two men or two women cannot be married” and a series of “top ten lists” from Madrid (“Orthodox Catholic Pickup Lines.... 8. Sorry, but I couldn’t help but noticing how cute you look in that ankle-length, shapeless, plaid jumper. 7. What’s a nice girl like you doing at a First Saturday Rosary Cenacle like this?...”). A graduate of the University of Phoenix, an online and part-time institution for students in the working world, Madrid is behind the *Surprised by Truth* series of books and other materials about converts to Catholicism. He has

also been a leader of the Covenant Keepers, a Catholic version of the better-known Promise Keepers.¹⁵⁷

FINANCES

In 2004, the last year for which tax returns were available, Catholic Answers took in revenue of a little more than \$6 million, of which more than half came from contributions and the rest from sales, consulting, seminars and the like. Revenue from all activities increased substantially in 2004, bumping up overall revenue by \$1.35 million over 2003, which in turn was an increase of \$1.2 million over 2002. Sales of products accounted for about 65 percent of Catholic Answers' non-contribution revenue. The group paid \$657,500 in 2004 for goods on which it turned a \$1.56 million profit.

Total expenses for 2004 were \$6.16 million, of which \$3.8 million went for program services, \$577,000 for management and \$1.77 million for fundraising. Catholic Answers told the IRS it spent \$1.18 million to distribute books, tapes and similar products; \$587,000 on printing and publications; \$187,000 on "special projects"; \$162,000 on list rental; \$156,000 on advertising; and \$60,000 for radio air time.

Salaries and wages, with associated benefits and taxes, cost Catholic Answers about \$2.53 million in 2004, accounting for more than two-fifths of total spending. The organization's upper echelon was paid handsomely. Keating received \$207,900, treasurer Philip Lenahan \$190,000, director of development Frank Norris \$163,400 and Akin \$113,900; 11 employees earned more than \$50,000. The largest program service expense other than salaries was \$1,184,000 for postage and shipping.

It is not yet clear what effect the establishment of Catholic Answers Action will have on Catholic Answers' finances. Keating announced Catholic Answers Action with hat in hand, asking

Donors *continued*

Charles LiMandri

Litigator and Catholic Answers donor LiMandri is the West Coast director of the conservative Christian, antichoice Thomas More Law Center. In 2004 and 2005, he won the Ronald Reagan gold medal for service to the national Republican Party. As of this writing he was leading the opposition to a court's order that San Diego remove a 29-foot cross from public land. LiMandri has served as president of the San Diego chapter of the exclusive conservative-Catholic business executives' group Legatus, and he has appeared on Fox News as a legal expert. The San Diego native's law firm, the Law Offices of Charles S. LiMandri, works throughout Southern California.¹⁶⁷

LiMandri is a graduate of the University of San Diego and Georgetown University Law Center. He and his wife Barbara LiMandri gave \$5,000 to Catholic Answers in 2002.

Ivan Garcia

Garcia is the sole Maryland physician listed by One More Soul among doctors who refuse to prescribe or perform, or even refer patients for prescription or performance of, contraception, sterilization, in vitro fertilization and abortion¹⁶⁸; it seems unlikely that, as an ophthalmologist, he has much occasion to refuse such care. The University of Puerto Rico graduate's home-schooled daughter in 2004 won the Miss Maryland Pre-Teen pageant and was reported on that occasion to pray the rosary daily.¹⁶⁹ Garcia gave Catholic Answers \$6,000 in 2002.

Ronald Wolf

Wolf is a lumber company vice president who lives just outside Pittsburgh. He contributed at least \$2,500 to Republican US presidential and congressional campaigns in 2004 and gave Catholic Answers \$5,000 in 2002.

supporters in April 2006 to provide what he portrayed as urgently needed funds:

We already have employees who are working, in part, for [Catholic Answers Action]. We already are incurring printing and other expenses on its behalf.... But we have no funds to pay these employees or to pay these vendors because, at the moment, Catholic Answers Action has a bank account but no money of its own.... Under the law we aren't allowed to transfer any money to it from Catholic Answers.

Keating asked his “best supporters” to provide a total of \$200,000, since “we need quick start-up money.”¹⁷⁰

CONCLUSION

Catholic Answers is an antimodern and ultraorthodox refuge for nostalgic lifelong Catholics and, more frequently where its staff is concerned, for converts to Catholicism who seek absolute authority to which to submit. Although the Catholic hierarchy has modernized far less than many other mainstream Christian denominations, it has still done so to a degree that is unacceptable to Catholic Answers Catholics. The organization’s leaders have been known, after all, literally to mourn the defeats of the Crusades.

The organization’s leaders are far out of step with mainstream America. They

sneer at women’s equality, write vicious tirades against gays, demonize Muslims and belittle other faiths, just to give a few examples. The group is not likely to produce anything like the mass conversion and reconversion to its brand of Catholicism that it hopes for. While awaiting such a conversion, Catholic Answers appears content to advocate a Catholic quasi-separatism, in which Catholics spend their money among themselves and heavily filter cultural productions.

The main activity of Keating, Akin and their acolytes is producing endless flows of text that amount to wishing the world were other than it is. They do not stop there, however: Catholic Answers has risked its charity tax status in conducting electoral activity that seems to encourage support for Republicans. The group’s leaders’ positions on issues are nearly always aligned with the Republican Party, in particular its right wing.

Now, the organization has been forced to account for its inappropriate electioneering by embarking on a financially perilous restructuring in response to an intense IRS investigation. Whether Catholic Answers Action’s work to influence elections will be deemed an allowable primary activity for a 501(c)(4) is more than doubtful. For the time being, though, Keating has bought himself a little more time in his quixotic quest to remake America in his ultraorthodox Catholic image, one tiny step at a time.

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Catholic Answers:

Scorning Man's Laws, Twisting God's

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Published October 2006. ISBN: 0-915365-80-4

Please cite as: Catholics for a Free Choice, "Catholic Answers: Scorning Man's Laws, Twisting God's," 2006.

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