

Fake Catholic Groups and the “Catholic Spring” Emails

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Beginning in 2007, orthodox Catholic writers including myself wrote dozens of articles in an attempt to expose the funding and duplicitousness of two fake Catholic groups: the OSF funded Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good and Catholics United. (For example, see [here](#) and [here](#) and [here](#).) Now, with [the release of the leaked emails](#) this week from longtime Democratic Party operative and current Clinton campaign chair, John Podesta, there is confirmation that Podesta personally helped to launch these two progressive groups to infiltrate the Catholic Church in an attempt to provide a liberal revolt against the US bishops. Calling it a “Catholic Spring,” Podesta acknowledged that he “created” these groups to begin a progressive revolution in the Catholic Church.

In a 2012 email to Podesta—with the subject line of “opening for a Catholic Spring?”—a progressive activist named [Sanford Newman](#), President of Voices for Progress, conspired with Podesta to create a “Catholic Spring, in which Catholics themselves demand the end of a middle ages dictatorship and the beginning of a little democracy and respect for gender equality in the Catholic Church.” Podesta responded to the suggestion by claiming that he had already created Catholic groups ready to act when needed: “We created Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good to organize for a moment like this.”

This is not a surprise, but it is vindication for those of us who have been warning about these groups for nearly a decade. In 2008, some of us began to expose the source of the funding for Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good and Catholics United, as well as the devious activities they engaged in as they attempted to diminish the authority of those bishops opposing the Affordable Care Act. Some of us were punished by the Obama administration for our journalistic work through punitive political audits by the IRS. But most of us continued to defend the Church and her leaders against what we knew then was an orchestrated attack by the Obama administration. In a [2009 Wall Street Journal op-ed](#), I wrote that “when Mr. Obama was running for president, Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good and Catholics United tried to neutralize the abortion issue throughout his campaign—suggesting that his proposals on social justice issues like poverty were the real way to reduce abortion rates without restricting abortion rights.”

In the leaked emails to Podesta, Democrat activist Newman suggests that they exploit the US bishops’ opposition to the Affordable care Act’s mandate for contraception and asks whether the Catholic Health Association would side with progressives in their offensive against the Church. We know now that Sr. Keehan, as leader of the Catholic Health Association, did indeed side against the USCCB in helping to pass Obama’s health care act—an act replete with funding for abortion and mandates for contraception.

Once President Obama was elected, he appointed Alexia Kelley, formerly the founding Director of Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good, to head his Obama's Center for Faith Based and Community Initiatives. Her office became heavily involved in helping to pass the Affordable Care Act—despite protestations from the USCCB. Kelley brought a decade (1993-2002) of experience of working on the Catholic Campaign for Human Development for the Bishops Conference—during which time she helped funnel more than seven million dollars to ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now). Under criminal investigation in several states,

ACORN's voter registration drives helped to elect President Obama. Chris Korzen, then the leader of Catholics United—the sister organization of Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good—and a leader of the Catholic Voting Project in 2004 (another Democrat funded organization), organized support for pro-choice Kathleen Sebelius's appointment as secretary of Health and Human Services by gathering signatures for an online petition titled "Catholic for Sebelius." Enlisting the help of progressive Catholic leaders like Sr. Carol Keehan, and Catholic Sen. Robert Casey (D) to persuade people that the Affordable Care Act was "pro-life legislation," these organizations attempted to marginalize anyone who presented an alternative narrative.

While Sr. Keehan claimed that President Obama's health care reform "draws on Catholic social teachings," and was an "ethical necessity, a building block for the common good of the nation," the bishops realized that the health care act had contraception mandates that included abortifacients and could not be allowed. For all of her lobbying efforts, Sr. Keehan was awarded one of the signing pens from President Obama when he signed the Affordable Care legislation. In June 2015, President Obama was [asked to give the keynote address](#) at the Catholic Health Association's annual conference in Washington, D.C. "It has been my privilege," said Sr. Keehan in introducing Obama, "to work with the president and his team over the past seven years".

Korzen, as Director of Catholics United, claimed that his organization was simply a non-partisan Catholic social justice organization interested in "following Church teachings". Yet his statements and activities have always contradicted his assertions. The Catholics United website revealed that the organization began its advocacy work in the spring of 2004 when "a group of Catholic activists and friends formed the Catholic Voting Project to promote the U.S. Catholic bishops' 2003 document *Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility*." Claiming that the mission of the Catholic Voting Project was to encourage a public dialogue about faith and politics, the Voting Project was criticized early on by orthodox Catholics such as Catholic Answers founder Karl Keating as a "front" for electing Senator John Kerry as President.

During the 2008 presidential campaign, Kelley teamed with Democratic Party operatives James Salt, Korzen, and other leaders of Catholics United to help neutralize the abortion issue by casting it in pro-Democratic Party terms, claiming that reducing poverty was the better way to reduce abortion. Kelley was joined at Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good by other colleagues from the USCCB, including John Gehring, Tom Chabolla and Francis Xavier Doyle. Gehring parlayed his position as assistant media director at the USCCB to a communications position at Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good. Today, Gehring works as a senior writer and Catholic outreach coordinator at Jim Wallis' Soros-supported Faith in Public Life where he continues his attacks on the Catholic bishops who disagree with his progressive politics. Gehring, who wrote a [2015 book about Pope Francis'](#) "radical" challenge to the "American Catholic Church", was assisted in his work to

helping to elect progressive politicians at the offices of Faith in Public Life by Nick Sementelli, another former employee of Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good.

Like Alexia Kelley, Tom Chabolla worked at the USCCB's Catholic Campaign for Human Development before he went to work as the assistant to the president of the SEIU, the Service Employees International Union. Chabolla served as one of several union leaders on the Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good Advisory Board. The highest level "graduate" of the USCCB is Francis X. Doyle who was the associate general secretary of the USCCB before he became the treasurer-secretary of Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good. In this capacity, Doyle played an important role in helping to pass the Affordable Care Act. Publicly identifying himself as a former associate general secretary of the USCCB, Doyle always implied that he speaks for Catholics.

During the time Korzen led Catholics United as a lobbying organization (501c4), he used bullying tactics against faithful Catholic writers who attempted to expose his questionable activities. Korzen was instrumental in triggering the political audit of William Donohue, the leader of the Catholic League. Donohue found out about Korzen's role in triggering the audit from a CNN reporter. It is likely that Korzen also played an important role in triggering my IRS audit also—although the Obama administration has refused to respond fully to three Freedom of Information Act requests from Atty. Charles LiMandri on my behalf.

Now, with the release of the Podesta emails, there is confirmation that the claims of the two organizations were lies from the start. The two groups were never created to help support the bishops. On the contrary, they were created from with the intention of provoking a revolt against the bishops who are, as Sanford Newman snidely wrote, still "stuck in the Middle Ages." While Korzen seems to have disappeared from politics, Alexia Kelley is [now ensconced](#) as the leader of yet another major Catholic philanthropy organization. And Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good continues its commitment to electing Democrats primarily through its newest initiative [Millennial](#)—a journal founded and funded through Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good targeted to young Catholics. Like its parent organization, *Millennial* continues the misleading claims that they "aim to move beyond partisan and ideological divisions, bringing together all those who support the global common good and the worth and dignity of the human person." While they have attempted to remove all traces of their connection with Podesta's Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good on their website, [their donor page is still hosted](#) on the Catholics in Alliance website.

Newman, in his [February 11, 2012 e-mail](#) to John Podesta, wrote:

This whole controversy with the bishops opposing contraceptive coverage even though 98% of Catholic women (and their conjugal partners) have used contraception has me thinking . . . There needs to be a Catholic Spring, in which Catholics themselves demand the end of a middle ages dictatorship and the beginning of a little democracy and respect for gender equality in the Catholic church. Is contraceptive coverage an issue around which that could happen. The Bishops will undoubtedly continue the fight.

Yes, there needs to be a "Catholic spring", but not the sort envisioned by the clueless Newman (who admitted his "total lack of understanding of the Catholic church"), and Church leaders need to continue the fight, even if some of them lack a stomach for the so-called "culture wars". It will require, among other things, an attentiveness to how underhanded, misleading, cynical, and even bigoted are the constant political machinations.

Thankfully, some do understand. In [an essay posted earlier today](#) on the *First Things* site, Archbishop Charles J. Chaput recounts being approached in 2008, prior to the Obama-McCain presidential election, by two Catholics United operatives:

They voiced great concern at the manipulative skill of Catholic agents for the Republican Party. And they hoped my brother bishops and I would resist identifying the Church with single-issue and partisan (read: abortion) politics.

It was an interesting experience. Both men were obvious flacks for the Obama campaign and the Democratic Party—creatures of a political machine, not men of the Church; less concerned with Catholic teaching than with its influence. And presumably (for them) bishops were dumb enough to be used as tools, or at least prevented from helping the other side. Yet these two young men not only equaled but surpassed their Republican cousins in the talents of servile partisan hustling. Thanks to their work, and activists like them, American Catholics helped to elect an administration that has been the most stubbornly unfriendly to religious believers, institutions, concerns and liberty in generations.

As Archbishop Chaput notes, “I never saw either young man again. The cultural damage done by the current White House has—apparently—made courting America’s bishops unnecessary.” Perhaps. But what is necessary is a clear vision of the serious challenges facing Catholics now and far into the future from those who work to not only influence the Church but to manipulate and mislead her under the guise of “Catholic” labels.

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