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## The Omaha Tri-Faith Initiative: Nebraska's Potemkin Village?

Posted By [Dr. Stephen M. Kirby](#) On June 4, 2015 @ 12:07 am In [Daily Mailer,FrontPage](#) | [6 Comments](#)



[1]The phrase "Potemkin village" is based on a supposed incident in which Russian Prince [Grigory Potemkin](#) [2] erected fake settlements along the banks of the [Dnieper River](#) [3] in order to fool and impress Russian Empress [Catherine II](#) [4] and her entourage during a trip to "New Russia" (Crimea) in 1787 [5]. The supposed purpose of these fake settlements was to create an image of development and prosperity where there was none.\*

In the Heartland of the United States, along the banks of the Missouri River, lies the city of Omaha, Nebraska, where there is currently underway an experiment in interfaith dialogue and coexistence: the Tri-Faith Initiative. The goal of the Tri-Faith Initiative is to have a synagogue, a mosque, and a church located on a common piece of land, each with its own separate building; the Tri-Faith hopes to later add a fourth building as a shared Tri-Faith Center. The location for this venture is 35 acres in the Sterling Ridge development in Omaha. The religious partners are Temple Israel, the American Muslim Institute (formerly the American Institute of Islamic Studies and Culture), and Countryside Community Church, the new Christian partner.

The goal of the Tri-Faith "is to build bridges of respect, trust and acceptance" between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. But Islamic doctrine prohibits Muslims from respecting, trusting, or accepting Jews and Christians, so how can Muslims support it? Does Nebraska have its own Potemkin village along the banks of the Missouri River? Let's first review Islamic doctrine.

### Islamic Doctrine

**We do not believe in the same God:** A foundational belief of the Tri-Faith Initiative seems to be that Jews, Christians, and Muslims all believe in the same God, the God of Abraham. But the god of Islam hates and curses Jews and Christians, orders Muslims to fight them, and condemns Jews and Christians to Hell simply because they are not Muslims. I have addressed this topic in more detail in a [previous article](#) [6].

**Muslims cannot be friends with Jews and Christians:** Building bridges of respect, trust and acceptance among these three religions requires a certain element of friendship between the adherents of these religions. But 5:51 of the Koran, and the teachings of Muhammad, specifically command Muslims not to be friends with Jews and Christians. There is only one exception found, and that is in 3:28 of the Koran, which allows Muslims to pretend to be friends with non-Muslims. I have provided more detail about this issue [here](#) [7].

**Christianity is a false religion based on a fraud:** Islam teaches that Jesus was not crucified; instead, Allah took Jesus bodily into Heaven and made one of Jesus' followers look like Jesus, and that follower was crucified. Islam also teaches that Jesus' apostles were aware of the substitution, but, nevertheless, they then proceeded to spread the new religion, knowing it was based on a fraud. So a Muslim who knows his religion will look at a crucifix or a painting of the Crucifixion and

see an imposter hanging on the cross. Given this, how can Muslims respect Christianity? For more details about this, see my [previous article](#) [8].

There are three non-Muslims who are heavily involved in the Tri-Faith Initiative: Rabbi Aryeh Azriel of Temple Israel; Reverend Eric Elnes of Countryside Community Church; and Susie Buffett, daughter of multi-billionaire Warren Buffet, a member of Countryside Community Church, and Chairperson of the Sherwood Foundation. Many weeks ago I sent repeated e-mails to each of them asking how, considering what Islamic doctrine teaches, could Islam be a partner in building bridges of "respect, trust and acceptance" with Jews and Christians? I have yet to receive any reply.

So apparently non-Muslims have decided to ignore Islamic doctrine for the sake of the idea of the Tri-Faith Initiative.

### **Non-Muslim Money**

A factor in this could be the millions of dollars of non-Muslim money that has been, and will be spent for this venture.

In December 2011, the Episcopal Diocese of Nebraska, the original Christian partner, purchased 6.35 acres of land in the Sterling Ridge development for almost \$1.3 million. At that same time the Tri-Faith Initiative organization itself purchased 3.6 acres in an adjoining lot for almost \$800,000.

**Temple Israel:** In December 2011, the congregation of Temple Israel purchased 13.54 acres of land in that development for almost \$3 million; this was to be the site of their new synagogue. In August 2013, the congregation moved into that new synagogue, built at a cost of about \$20 million.

**Countryside Community Church:** The cost of Countryside's new church, including the land to be purchased from the Episcopal Diocese, is estimated to be about \$25 million. Countryside's Reverend Elnes stated that there was already \$16.1 million in financial commitments, mostly from among the 1,500 congregation members.

**The Sherwood Foundation:** The non-Muslim Sherwood Foundation is chaired by Susie Buffett. The Sherwood Foundation is extensively involved in the Tri-Faith Initiative. During the years 2009-2010 and 2012-2014, the Sherwood Foundation contributed \$288,500 to the Tri-Faith Initiative organization; this was about 59% of the total contributions received by the Tri-Faith during those years. What is interesting to note is that in 2011, the year the Tri-Faith organization spent almost \$800,000 to purchase its 3.6 acres in the Sterling Ridge development, the Sherwood Foundation made no contribution to the Tri-Faith organization. Nevertheless, the Tri-Faith organization received over \$1 million dollars in contributions that year. There is more about this in the following section.

Ms. Buffet was quoted as saying that she would provide an unspecified amount of financial support for the new Countryside church. And according to available IRS records (Form 990's), during 2009-2014 the Sherwood Foundation contributed \$504,000 to Countryside church. Of the money the Foundation contributed to the church in 2014, \$30,000 was specifically designated for "Tri-Faith Expenses."

Form 990's also showed that during 2011-2013, the Sherwood Foundation had contributed about \$1.3 million to the American Muslim Institute (AMI). This was almost 79% of the total amount of contributions received by AMI during that three year period; it was also almost 70% of the total contributions received by AMI during 2007-2014. It is interesting to note that of the \$650,000 contributed by the Foundation to AMI in 2011, \$600,000 was specifically designated for "Purchase of Land." 2011 was the year that AMI purchased its 3.85 acres in the Sterling Ridge development for \$827,640.

### **Undisclosed Contributors**

The Tri-Faith Initiative organization and the American Muslim Institute are not legally required to identify contributors. But there are some strategically timed contributions of interest:

**Tri-Faith Initiative organization:** 2011 was a significant year financially for the Tri-Faith organization, because it received \$1,004,019 in contributions that year, and purchased land in the Sterling Ridge development. Had these contributions not been received, the Tri-Faith organization would not have been able to purchase that land. None of these contributions came from the Sherwood Foundation.

I contacted the Tri-Faith organization and asked for the names and contribution amounts of the contributors for 2011. I was advised that these contributors had requested anonymity, but that they were "all local Omaha donors."

**American Muslim Institute (AMI):** In a May 22, 2015, article in the *Omaha World-Herald*, Dr. Syed Mohiuddin, President of AMI, said that nearly all of the money had been raised for the construction of the mosque, estimated to cost around \$5.5 million. But according to the Form 990 filed for 2014, excluding their land, AMI only had assets of a little over \$400,000 at the end of 2014. If Dr. Mohiuddin's statement was accurate, this means that AMI had raised around \$5 million in the first five months of 2015; in contrast, during the previous eight years AMI had raised a total of only about \$1.8 million.

So I e-mailed Leigh Sittenauer, AMI Executive Director, asking for a list of the 2015 contributors and the amounts of their contributions. Ms. Sittenauer replied:

*We are not obligated to share that information and have no plans to provide it to you or any other inquisitors.*

As pointed out above, during 2007-2014 almost 70% of the contributions to AMI came from a non-Muslim organization. If this pattern of contributions holds for 2015, then the vast majority of the \$5.5 million needed for mosque construction will have come from non-Muslims.

### **Conclusion**

This leaves us with some fundamental questions:

1. If the major source of funding, even for mosque construction, comes from non-Muslims, is the venture really Tri-Faith?
2. Given that the Tri-Faith Initiative appears to be publicly touted as a model for interfaith relations, why the opaqueness about the sources of millions of dollars necessary to support this venture?
3. Given that the Tri-Faith Initiative appears to be publicly touted as a model for interfaith relations, why were contributions allowed to be made anonymously?
4. Given that the Tri-Faith Initiative appears to be publicly touted as a model for interfaith relations, why don't contributors want to be publicly recognized?
5. Are the new Christian partners at Countryside Community Church even aware of the sources for these millions of dollars given to the venture they have recently joined?
6. If all the partners, Muslims included, are required to ignore core doctrines of Islam to create the appearance of respect, trust and acceptance, can the venture really be Tri-Faith?

Instead of answers, at this point all we have is Tri-Faith Silence.

*\*Potemkin village: An impressive façade or show designed to hide an undesirable fact or condition. — Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11<sup>th</sup> Edition.*

\*

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[1] Image: <http://www.frontpagemag.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/JudaismChristianityIslam.jpg>

[2] Grigory Potemkin: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grigory\\_Potemkin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grigory_Potemkin)

[3] Dnieper River: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dnieper\\_River](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dnieper_River)

[4] Catherine II: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catherine\\_the\\_Great](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catherine_the_Great)

[5] a trip to "New Russia" (Crimea) in 1787:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crimean\\_journey\\_of\\_Catherine\\_the\\_Great](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crimean_journey_of_Catherine_the_Great)

[6] previous article: <http://www.frontpagemag.com/2014/dr-stephen-m-kirby/do-we-all-believe-in-the-same-god/>

[7] here: <http://www.frontpagemag.com/2015/dr-stephen-m-kirby/dont-take-jews-and-christians-as-friends/>.

[8] previous article: <http://www.frontpagemag.com/2015/dr-stephen-kirby/the-fraud-of-omahas-tri-faith-initiative/>

[9] [Click here](#): [http://www.amazon.com/s/ref%3Ddnb\\_sb\\_noss?url=search-alias%3Ddigital-text&field-keywords=david+horowitz&rh=n:133140011%2ck:david+horowitz&ajr=0#/ref=sr\\_st?keywords=david+horowitz&qid=1316459840&rh=n:133140011%2ck:david+horowitz&ort=daterank](http://www.amazon.com/s/ref%3Ddnb_sb_noss?url=search-alias%3Ddigital-text&field-keywords=david+horowitz&rh=n:133140011%2ck:david+horowitz&ajr=0#/ref=sr_st?keywords=david+horowitz&qid=1316459840&rh=n:133140011%2ck:david+horowitz&ort=daterank)

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