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## Islam and the Omaha Tri-Faith Initiative

Posted By [Dr. Stephen M. Kirby](#) On April 30, 2015 @ 12:40 am In [Daily Mailer,FrontPage](#) | [No Comments](#)



[1]Currently underway in the Heartland of America is an experiment in interfaith dialogue and coexistence: the Tri-Faith Initiative in Omaha, Nebraska. 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 original institutional members of the Tri-Faith Initiative were Temple Israel, the American Institute of Islamic Studies and Culture (AIISC), and the Episcopal Diocese of Nebraska. In 2014 the Episcopal Diocese asked Countryside Community Church to take its place as the Christian partner in the Tri-Faith. On April 12, 2015, Countryside

voted in favor of relocating its church to the Tri-Faith grounds and becoming the Christian partner.

The Tri-Faith's Memorandum of Understanding states, "In working together, our vision is to build bridges of respect, trust and acceptance..." Unfortunately, Islamic doctrine prohibits Muslims from respecting, trusting, or accepting Jews and Christians (unless of course the latter pay the *jizyah*).

So I decided to contact 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.

I sent each of them the following e-mail:

In light of your extensive involvement with the Tri-Faith Initiative, I am interested in your view on the following matter.

The Vision Statement of the Tri-Faith Initiative talks about building "bridges of Respect, Trust and Acceptance" between Jews, Christians, and Muslims. This is a commendable idea, but how can such bridges be built when Islamic doctrine prohibits it? Please consider:

The Koran says the following about Jews and Christians:

1. Allah is angry with the Jews, and the Christians are misguided because they believe that Jesus is the son of God (1:7).
2. Muslims are commanded not to make friends with Jews and Christians (e.g. 5:51), although Muslims can pretend to be friends if the situation so dictates (3:28).
3. Jews are among the worst enemies of Islam (5:82).
4. Muslims are commanded to fight Jews and Christians until the Jews and Christians pay

protection money with willing submission and feel themselves subdued (9:29).

5. Allah curses the Jews and the Christians (9:30).
6. Jews and Christians are among the worst of creatures and "will abide in the fire of Hell" (98:6).

Muhammad spoke for Allah (4:80), Muslims are commanded to obey Muhammad (59:7), and he is considered the timeless standard by which Muslims should conduct themselves (33:21). Consider that Muhammad said:

1. Jews and Christians are each worth only half of a Muslim (*Sunan Ibn Majah*, No. 2644).
2. *Do not greet the Jews and the Christians before they greet you and when you meet any one of them on the roads force him to go to the narrowest part of it*(*Sahih Muslim*, No. 2167).
3. *The Hour will not be established until you fight against the Jews, and the stone behind which a Jew will be hiding will say, 'O Muslim! There is a Jew hiding behind me, so kill him*(*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, No. 2926).
4. The Jews were grave robbers (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, No. 3452).
5. Jews and Christians will take the place of Muslims in Hell (*Sahih Muslim*, No. 2767R1).
6. *I will expel the Jews and Christians from the Arabian Peninsula and will not leave any but Muslims*(*Sahih Muslim*, No. 1767).

If the Koran truly consists of the commands of Allah, and if Muhammad truly spoke for Allah and is to be obeyed, how can Islam be a partner in building "bridges of Respect, Trust and Acceptance" with Jews and Christians?

Unfortunately, after sending the e-mail twice to each of the three, and after waiting a number of weeks, I have still not received replies from Azriel, Elnes, or Buffett.

### **Non-Muslims and Islamic Doctrine**

Why would the non-Muslim portion of the Tri-Faith Initiative appear to deny or simply ignore the Islamic doctrine that undermines the idea of this venture? Due to the silence of Azriel, Elnes and Buffett, we do not know.

However, we do know that there are many millions of dollars involved in the Tri-Faith Initiative.

In December 2011, the Episcopal Diocese 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 \$800,000.00.

In December 2011, Rabbi Azriel and 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 their new synagogue. It is 58,500 square feet in size (a third larger than the previous synagogue), and features stone from a Jerusalem quarry and artwork done by an international group of artists.

With the successful vote on April 12, 2015, Countryside Community Church can now move forward. Countryside's new church will be an estimated 71,100 square feet in size; the existing church is only 58,000 square feet. The cost, including the land, is estimated to be about \$25 million. Reverend Elnes stated that there was already \$16.1 million in financial commitments, mostly from among the 1,500 congregation members.

Susie Buffett's Sherwood Foundation is extensively involved. She was quoted as saying that she would provide an unspecified amount of financial support for the new Countryside church. In fact, according to available IRS records (Form 990's), in 2011-2013 the Sherwood Foundation had contributed \$191,000.00 to Countryside church. These records also showed that during that same time period the Sherwood Foundation had contributed \$1,305,000.00 to the Muslim

partner, the AIISC. This was almost 79% of the total amount of contributions received by AIISC during that time period. And during the years 2012-2013, the Sherwood Foundation contributed \$270,000.00 to the Tri-Faith Initiative itself.

Millions of dollars have been spent, and many more millions will be spent, by non-Muslims to see the Tri-Faith Initiative a success. With so much money involved, non-Muslims could tend to view the Islamic doctrine that undermines the very goals of the Tri-Faith Initiative as a minor annoyance to be denied or ignored.

### **Muslims and Islamic Doctrine**

We have commands of Allah in the Koran and teachings from Muhammad that prohibit the idea of the Tri-Faith Initiative. Non-Muslims can deny or ignore them. But what about the Muslims in AIISC (now known as the American Muslim Institute)? They are committed to the Tri-Faith Initiative. After all, in December 2011, AIISC spent a little over \$800,000 to buy 3.85 acres in the Sterling Ridge development. So let's consider some additional, relevant Islamic doctrine.

Muhammad said that anyone denying a verse of the Koran could be killed:

*It was narrated from Ibn 'Abbas that the Messenger of Allah said: "Whoever denies a Verse of the Qur'an, it is permissible to strike his neck (i.e. execute him)..."*

*Sunan Ibn Majah, No. 2539*

In Chapter 59, Verse 7, the Koran specifically commands Muslims to obey Muhammad:

*...And whatsoever the Messenger (Muhammad) gives you, take it; and whatsoever he forbids you, abstain (from it). And fear Allah; verily, Allah is Severe in punishment.*

And Muslims are not only expected to know the Koran, but they are also expected to act on its commands. In the following authoritative *hadith*, Muhammad talks about the penalty for knowing the Koran, but not acting on it. He tells us what he saw when the angels Gabriel and Michael had taken him to visit the "Sacred Land":

*...we went on till we came to a man lying in a prone position, and another man standing at his head carrying a stone or a piece of rock, and crushing the head of the lying man with that stone. Whenever he struck him, the stone rolled away. The man went to pick it up and by the time he returned to him, the crushed head returned to its normal state and the man came back and struck him again (and so on).*

When Muhammad asked about this man, the angels replied:

*The one whose head you saw being crushed is the one whom Allah had given the knowledge of the Qur'an (i.e. knowing it by heart), but he used to sleep at night (i.e., he did not recite it then) and did not use to act upon it (i.e., upon its orders etc.) by day; and so this punishment will go on till the Day of Resurrection.*

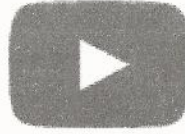
*Sahih Al-Bukhari, No. 1386*

It is blasphemy for a Muslim to deny a verse of the Koran or a teaching of Muhammad. But it is also blasphemy, and potentially head-crushing, for a Muslim not to act on a command from Allah or a teaching of Muhammad. With this in mind, it will be interesting to see if the larger Muslim community in Nebraska decides to support the Tri-Faith Initiative, or follow the commands of Allah and the teachings of Muhammad.

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