



**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

Forging Ahead with Religious Brotherhood

Forging Ahead with Religious Brotherhood

After reading the article that follows this essay....and scores of others that mirror its contents, I decided to borrow the reporter's article (Jim Michaels of *USA TODAY*) and transpose the story to Texas. I grant that the two stories about sectarian violence do not parallel each other...certainly in relation to the magnitude of the tragedy. One is made up and patently ridiculous, even to this writer. But I still hold that the two anecdotes point out (once again) the absurdity of humans' dealing with religion.

Time and again, I am told the Islamic religion is not that big a factor behind Islamic-based terrorism. I am becoming skeptical of this claim. But then, I also have come to believe religions form the basis for much of humans' aggression. Nonetheless, most of the major religions of the world have managed to evolve past their violent origins. Most religions have been able to "tame themselves" in relation to how they guide their flocks in dealing with other humans.

Below is a quote I make in my book, *2084and Beyond* from Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *Infidel* (New York: Free Press, imprint of Simon & Schuster, 2007), np.

"I think fortunately the majority of Muslims today will not commit acts of terrorism. But to argue that there is nothing in Islam that leads to violence—that would be a weak argument to a false argument, because if you define *Islam* as "submission to the will of Allah," then you find out what that submission means...you find out that...the sixth obligation is to convert others to Islam, first by peaceable means, then by violent means. So when Islam is violent—you can't argue...that it's not a violent religion. Then you will say, "What about Judaism? What about Christianity?" Now, adherents of these religions over the centuries have been pacified to understand and accept the separation of the divine and the worldly...Nowhere in the Muslim world has that profound pacification of Islam...taken place. And I think that is the difference."

This writer cannot accept a fundamental tenet of Islam: church and state are not separated. Try as I do (and I am far from being considered a fan of organized religion and the various church hierarchies that exist mostly to protect the members of the hierarchies), I cannot accept this way of living. America's *most basic foundation* is based on the separation of church and state.

Does this stand relegate me to the bigot's closet? According to some critics, I am already partially there because of my abhorrence of the manner in which Israel treats its Arab citizens. Yet, during my business times, I had both Jews and Muslims as my business partners. We broke bread together, partied together, and argued with one another. We never let bigotry taint our

friendship. But make no mistake, they knew I did not accept aspects of their cultures and religions that I believed (and continue to believe) if put into practice, would threaten the freedoms of my life and the cohesion of America's political, social, and religious infrastructure.

My friends and I never let our differences go to the point of bombing one another's churches, killing children, or raping wives. The depravity of the so-called religious people cited in this article is astounding---even to this seasoned observer.

As a person baptized into the Southern Baptist church I disagree with some of the tenets of so-called Northern Baptists. Would I kill my Northern Baptist neighbor for his stand of gay marriage? ...I am getting ahead of my story. Please read on.

Yemen heading for civil war

Attacks stem from 'nastier' sectarian struggle in Mideast

Jim Michaels

USA TODAY

WASHINGTON Yemen's descent into possible civil war this week-end highlights a growing and lethal sectarian struggle in the Middle East that pits Iran and its Shiite allies against rival Sunni regimes and militant groups.

Shiite rebels, known as Houthi is, seized Yemen's third-largest city, Taiz, and its airport Sunday, a day after American troops left the impoverished country that is crucial to the U.S. drone program. On Friday, Sunni extremists claimed responsibility for the horrific bombing of two mosques that killed 137 people during Friday prayers.

The conflict in Yemen, as in Syria and Iraq, is rooted in the centuries-long animosity between the two branches of Islam. The Houthi rebels are Shiites from northern Yemen. They seized the Yemeni capital of San-



YAHYA ARHAB, EUROPEAN PRESSPHOTO AGENCY
Members of the Houthi militia inspect the scene of a suicide attack at a mosque Friday in Sana'a, Yemen.

aa in September and now control large swaths of the country, which has a Sunni majority.

Sunni extremists, such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, are increasingly emerging as champions of beleaguered Sunnis in the Shiite-dominated countries.

"Regardless of who attacked the mosques, al-Qaeda's influence and support is expanding dramatically in Yemen" as sectarian tensions grow, said Abdulkad-

er Sinno, an Indiana University professor who has written about insurgent organizations.

Friday's attacks on the mosques appeared to have targeted Shiite worshipers to fan sectarian flames. A group claiming to be a Yemeni branch of the Islamic State claimed responsibility.

Similar violence exploded in Iraq in 2006, when al-Qaeda blew up a Shiite mosque in Samarra. The attack touched off waves of Sunni-Shiite violence and assassinations that verged on civil war.

Matthew Levitt, an analyst at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, said the sectarian conflicts in the Middle East are more intractable and complex than conventional wars between nations because of the religious passions and ancient hatreds.

The sectarian conflicts in Iraq, Yemen, Syria and other parts of the Middle East are part of a broader struggle between powerful Sunni regimes — such as Saudi Arabia — and Iran, the region's Shiite powerhouse.

"It makes things more complicated and nastier," Levitt said. "These are no longer self-contained conflicts."

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The facts cited in the *USA TODAY* article are so absurd, so pathetic, that even I---as a practiced and well-grounded skeptic---have difficulty equating them to reality. But ask the relatives of those 137 folks who were killed by their *fellow worshippers*. They are all too aware their loved ones were murdered because of disagreements about a religious leader who lived in the 6th century.

I am an admirer of Voltaire's *Candide*. He wrote the book as a satirical polemicist, posing scenes that are so absurd they could have come from a demented mind. (They came from a brilliant one.)

After reading the *USA TODAY* article, *Candide* came to my mind: What could be more bizarre than one human killing another because of a disagreement about a subject that has absolutely nothing to do with humans' physical well-being? And how much ethical and moral sense does it make to kill a member of the *same religion*? Yet it happens frequently---just another day at the (bombed) marketplace.

Using Mr. Michael's article, I created even more surreal stories, yet ones that---when viewed from Mr. Michael's column---might be as plausible as the incidents he describes.

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There is another aspect to the story below. On October 30, 1938 Orson Wells presented *The War of the Worlds*, a radio show that dramatized a fictional alien invasion of earth. The presentation was presented as if the program were a series of news bulletins. It caused widespread panic and later outrage.

My article will not cause such furor, but I have learned over these past years of writing that some people take the printed word in newspapers as gospel. If the reporter chronicles a civil war among the Baptists in Texas, some readers believe every word of it. And for good reason. Many of the true stories coming from the press are so strange and outlandish, readers have grown accustomed to their bizarre themes. They believe them.

If Sunnis and Shias, both members of the Islamic faith, routinely engage in mutual slaughter, why is it beyond reality that someday Baptists might not do the same? While I do not believe the Baptists will engage in a civil war among themselves, (my Northern and Southern Baptist friends continue our friendship...and they consider me suspect regarding my faith), untold numbers of religions have not been so sanguine in their treatment of their fellow brethren.

Try this experiment. Show only the made-up article (below) to your friends or relatives. Observe their reaction. (I've formatted it to resemble Mr. Michael's article.) Humor? Disbelief? Ridicule? Or one of "This couldn't happen in America!" We can thank our lucky stars, because similar conflicts about names, way of dress, even the pronunciation of a word) often become civil wars in other parts of the world.

America heading for civil war!

Attacks stem from 'nastier' sectarian struggle in Texas

Your on the Street Reporter¹
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WASHINGTON America's descent into possible civil war last week-end highlights a growing struggle in the Southwest that pits Dallas and its Southern Baptist allies against rival Fort Worth Northern Baptist militant groups.

A Southern Baptist brigade, also known as the Houstonians, recaptured their home base and Texas largest city, Houston, and its airport Sunday. However, downtown Houston is now so damaged as to be uninhabitable. This brigade continues using the name Houstonians as a symbol for their cause. On Friday, Fort Worth Northern Baptists extremists claimed responsibility for the horrific bombing of two Southern Baptist churches in Dallas that killed 137 worshippers during Friday prayers.

The conflict, having spread from Texas to other states, is rooted in the centuries-long animosity between the two branches of the Baptist Church. The Northern Baptists are from the Fort Worth area. The Southern Baptists are from down south---thus, their name. For Northern Baptists, the mere utterance of the word *southern* brings forth rebuke, possibly death.

The factions have been killing members of their own congregations,



Members of Southern Baptist Church inspect the scene of the suicide attack at a church Friday.

even neighbors or relatives who take issue with their beliefs.

This deadly quarrel between the Southern Baptists and Northern Baptists goes back to Biblical times when a man named John was associated with Jesus. The conflict, which has resulted in millions of deaths since the arguments began between 0 BC/AD to 570 AD revolve around two deeply held beliefs. Regarding the first belief: One faction claims John baptized Jesus. The other religious group argues Jesus baptized John. The bombing of the churches Friday was another extension of this deadly debate as to who baptized whom, but it was mostly to fan sectarian flames.

Similar violence exploded in 2006 when three Southern Baptists from Mesquite, Texas, fire-bombed a wedding being held in Muleshoe, a known hotbed of Northern Baptists. The attack touched off waves of Southern Baptist and Northern Baptist violence and assassinations that verged on civil war in the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex, as well as Mesquite and Muleshoe.

The second belief is similar in tone to the Muslim's Shias and Sunnis killing one another because of their debate about the rightful heir to Muhammad. Was he Ali or another man named Abu Baker? This issue goes to the heart of which Muslim (Shia or Sunni) is or is not an apostate.

Likewise, some Baptist Church followers claim the correct name for their venerated religious hero is John **the** Baptist. Dissenters have staked their lives on the name being John **a** Baptist. This former group says there was *only* one John. Thus, John **the** Baptist is the correct name. The **a** contingent holds that the use of "the" is exclusionary and therefore against the teachings of Jesus. The results?

The two Baptist sects worship the same deity: Jesus. The two Muslim sects worship the same deity: Muhammad. Both sects continue to slaughter their fellow worshippers in the names of their religions.

Thus far, the Texas National Guard has been able to contain the conflicts around the metroplex and Houston, but terrorists have succeeded in destroying Baylor University's library which housed its world-renown collection of Southern Baptist archeological treasures.

¹ My thanks and appreciation to Jim Michaels of *USA TODAY*, and *USA TODAY*. Mr. Michaels created the article from which I wrote this essay. Mr. Michaels, I likely have over-stepped the Fair Use laws with my extensive use of your text and ideas. Any unlikely royalties that come forth to me will be split 50/50 between us. (Photo from goggle; search on <damaged churches>.)