

# Episode 179 Hostile Environment

*This transcript has been edited for clarity and space.*

## **George Yancy**

I'm George Yancey, professor at Baylor University.

## **David Capes**

Dr. George Yancey. George, good to see you and welcome to The Stone Chapel Podcast.

## **George Yancey**

Good to see you, David. It's a pleasure. It's a pleasure.

## **David Capes**

We've only met in person a few times, once up in your neck of the woods, which is near Denton, and once down here at the Lanier Theological Library. But you're coming to do a lecture on April 20, 2024. But for those who don't know George Yancey, tell us who is George Yancey?

## **George Yancey**

Well, I just think of myself as an African American Christian sociologist, who is in different worlds at different times. And that seems to be my life. There was an article done where I was interviewed by Nicholas Kristof [a journalist and commentator]. And I said that, as an African American man, I do face racial prejudice. But in academia, I'm rejected a whole lot more because I'm a Christian than because I'm black, and so you just don't know what's going to happen.

## **David Capes**

Well, we're going to be talking in a minute about your book, *Hostile Environment: Understanding and Responding to Anti-Christian Bias*. You're the author of a number of books. Define sociology for those who don't know how to define it. Let's pretend it's our first day in class, Sociology 101, Intro to Sociology. What is sociology?

## **George Yancey**

Okay this is an elevator definition. I'll just say if a psychologist is for the individual, sociologists are for society as a whole. So, we try to figure out what's happening in society. Now, the academic sociologists aren't trying to fix society, although some of us may be. We try to understand what's happening in society and why it's happening in society. And that takes us to the individual level, but also social structures and institutions as well.

## **David Capes**

As a thinker then, you engage in scientific research that involves lots of people.

## **George Yancey**

Usually but not always. There is qualitative work, where you interview just a few people. And there's value in that if you know how to do it, and what it means.

### **David Capes**

We'll be talking a little bit more about your research coming up. Now, here's the book, *Hostile Environment: Understanding and Responding to Anti-Christian Bias* published a few years ago. But as I was reading it this past week it seemed to me like this is right on target for where we are these days. It is published by InterVarsity Press. George, what's the big idea of your book?

### **George Yancey**

I think the big idea of my book is that anti-Christian bias, like antisemitism, or anti-Muslim bias, is real in the United States. And the people who have it, per capita have more power than the average American. Because people that have it tend to be wealthier, more likely white male, more likely to be highly educated. Whereas when you see anti-Muslim bias or Islamophobia, those individuals tend to be white males, but tend to be lower educated. So, we have to reckon that there are some similarities between Christianophobia and Islamophobia and antisemitism. But there's also some differences. And I'm not trying to say woe is me, as a Christian, I have it so much worse than others. Because there are some ways where it's worse for Jews and Muslims. But in some ways, it can be worse for Christians. It's just something that we as Christians need to be aware of, and how we going to address it.

### **David Capes**

You used the term a minute ago, "Christianophobia," which a lot of people probably have not heard. Where did that term come from?

### **George Yancey**

Well, I didn't invent this term. There's actually a book called *Christianophobia*. It's more of a global perspective. But I chose this term. And I understand there's some pushback on it. I understand that. But I wanted a term that connected to the terms of use already out there and the common term uses Islamophobia. And I think I use it for the same reason. It's not a fear. Islamophobia is not a fear, although some people are fearful. It is more about an unwarranted hatred, a distaste for certain groups. And you find that with Islamophobia, and you find it with Christianophobia. We don't use that term for Jews because we already use the term antisemitism.

### **David Capes**

I had heard the term one time, Christaphobia, but this is particularly Christianophobia. It is not the object hatred or dislike for the person of Jesus or the Messiah, Christ. It's really more for the people who are His people, right? The believers in Christ.

### **George Yancy**

Yes. And in the United States, the way it manifests itself is really toward groups of Christians, and most likely Christians who are conservative theologically. Maybe conservative politically, I think that's a factor as well. And the way people talk about it, while I think it does apply to Christians across the spectrum, I think it applies a little bit more to white Christians than non-white Christians. And I'm not saying that it's never non-white Christians, because there's some famous cases of non-white Christians who face

Christianophobia. But I do think as we hear people talk about it, they talk about white, Christian nationalism and things of that nature. I do think that is more towards whites than other groups.

**David Capes**

I was listening to the radio this morning, and they were talking about the Iowa caucus where former President Trump came out very well. And one of the commentators that didn't like Trump was saying, well, we can blame white Christians for this. If we get Trump again, we can blame white Christians. So, I wonder how that connection started. Because it's not just white people who voted for Trump. It's not just Christians who voted for Trump and not necessarily evangelical Christians. And that's maybe more politics than we want to discuss. I'm just trying to understand this phenomenon. Is this an American phenomenon only? Or is it happening at other places?

**George Yancey**

I think it looks different in the United States than many other places. When that book on Christianophobia came out, they looked at global Christianophobia. And that really is more of if you're a Christian, then you face these hardships. In the United States, there's sort of a sense of, well, you can be a Christian, as long as you're not a certain type of Christian. I definitely think politics is a part of it. But I think also cultural issues play a role. And so even if you don't vote for Trump, if you are, say, pro-life, or if you are highly evangelistic, or some of these other characteristics, you could face Christianophobia too. Now, the political thing makes it worse in the minds of people with Christianophobia. So, politics does play a role in this. But I think it's a mistake to think this is just political.

**David Capes**

It's more than that. It seems like the weight of it is felt more, as you said, among the elite. Maybe among the educated classes, and particularly, it figures into college education, higher education.

**George Yancey**

Yes. I focused on cultural institutions. And education is definitely one of them. I know that we can focus a lot on that. But there's also the media, there's also arts and entertainment. There are other ways. People underestimate how important culture is in determining what's acceptable in society. Christianophobia has a much stronger hold on our cultural leaders than say, Islamophobia. That's why you get biased stories in the media, and we'll get to the education. When you look at the media, they are sympathetic to Muslims in ways that you probably won't see very often to Christians. And so that communicates that this group is acceptable, and this group is not. And a lot of people absorb those lessons very well.

**David Capes**

But in the area of education, where you work as a sociologist, is sociology one of those places where you find few Christians or a lot of Christians as a discipline.

**George Yancey**

That's an interesting question. If you look compared to the rest of society, you find fewer. If you compare the discipline to something like say, English, or Anthropology, you'll actually find a few more.

So yes, it's low. But if you look between social sciences and humanities. It's probably not as bad as some of the other areas.

### **David Capes**

Elaine Eklund at Rice University has done a lot of work looking at science, people in the sciences, and wondering how does faith and science accord and that would include social sciences like your discipline, but also “the hard sciences” like biology, chemistry and physics. And there's often more Christians in those places than we would imagine.

### **George Yancy**

In the hard sciences, you find a higher percentage of Christians. And something like engineering, I think, is pretty high. Agriculture is high. In the hard sciences you find more but even so, in most of our sciences, Christians are still underrepresented compared to the total population. They're still underrepresented, but they're not underrepresented as much.

### **David Capes**

Well, let's talk about your research, the research that you've done. And maybe add in some of the textures of research that you know is out there that other people are doing that is able to be replicated and seems to be true. What have you found yourself in the research that you've done?

### **George Yancey**

I've already mentioned one thing that I find is very important. People who have Christianophobia tend to have cultural power. You tend to find them more often in the cultural institutions. They will be highly educated and tend to be wealthier. So, they have power. We've also found evidence of discrimination in education in general. In the research that I did, I sent out a questionnaire and asked if you knew this person was \_\_\_\_\_ [blank], would you be less or more likely to hire them? And I thought that there would be more political bias than religious bias. I expected it to be some of both but more political than religious because there's actually fewer Republicans and Christians in academia. There was much more religious bias [than political].

About half of the respondents said, if we find out you're a Christian fundamentalist we are less likely to hire you. About 40% responded that way about evangelicals. If you've been in academia, you know, if you have one or two people on the committee who don't like you, that can be enough to doom you from getting a job. So that's something that we have to just deal with, that there is a bias. Now you can see the bias in other ways. But this is a documented bias. Also, research shows that in general, there's biases when it comes to getting a grant, getting published, or things of this nature. And so, if you try to publish something that doesn't fit in with the narrative, it will be harder to publish. Not impossible, but harder to publish, which is one reason why Christians have a harder time publishing things that may fit a narrative that's more sympathetic to them. So those are some of the things in academia that we're aware of. I think just overall, the way Christianophobia works in the United States is that the cultural institutions create a narrative that's anti-Christian in many ways. And then Christians themselves have little influence in the mainstream narrative. And that can lead to things such as being fired, or things of this nature. [Christianophobia] is less about physical harm as it may be elsewhere, but more about losing your stance in culture.

**David Capes**

A lot of times when people talk about Islamophobia, they talk about violent responses. But not so much with Christianophobia.

**George Yancey**

No. I'm not saying it never happens, but it's less likely to happen.

**David Capes**

One of the chapters that you write is entitled, "Are Christians Responsible for Christianophobia?" Which is an interesting chapter. It sounds like you're blaming the victim. Saying you deserve this. You deserve what's happening to you. What were you hoping to say in that chapter?

**George Yancey**

Well, what I want to say is that there are some people who do not like Christians, and they have their reason for not liking Christians. Christians, we are foreign creatures to them. And we don't always attend to the issues as we should. And there are some people who've been mistreated by people who call themselves Christians or people who are Christians. Now, I want to be very clear about this. I don't think that Christians are responsible for people who hate them. Any more so than I think a person is entitled to be racist against blacks, because a black person mistreated them in their life. But we need to try to minimize the risk of why they hate them as much as possible.

There are African Americans out there who are criminals, who do things that are untoward to other people. And that may happen to a person who's white, and that black person who does that should be held accountable. That doesn't mean you're free then to hate blacks in general. And because some Christians treat some people badly, doesn't mean that we should be free to engage in Christianophobia, and treat a whole group of people as if they don't deserve jobs, or they don't deserve their place in culture.

**David Capes**

One of the things you talk about in the book is friendship. Talk a little bit about the role you think friendship can play in trying to repair some of the damage that has been done maybe by other Christians, but still, it could be directed toward me. But what does friendship do for us at that point?

**George Yancey**

One thing we know about contact is when you're in contact with someone, we develop friends. It makes it harder for you to hate people as a group, or to stereotype them as a group. And one of the problems is that in our society, we've segmented ourselves so much on social media, and even where we live. And part of what was happening for some people with Christianophobia, is that they don't know any Christians or the Christians they know, they know as acquaintances. Or they know them as workers or things of this nature. And so somehow, we have to pray through some of that. That's not going to be the only solution but there are multiple solutions we have to look at. Yes, as Christians, we want to witness and evangelize. But sometimes we need to just be a friend. Sometimes we just need to let people know that we're human. And that we're not this weird creature that they see on TV. I mean, when's the last

time you saw a character on TV that was a Christian and was sympathetic? And maybe the only sympathetic Christian they are going to know is a friend.

### **David Capes**

A number of people that I know, say that they think that the real bias is more of an anti-Catholic bias than it is an anti-Protestant bias or just anti-Christian. Does the research show more bias against Catholicism and Catholics than those who are Protestant Christians?

### **George Yancy**

That probably was true 100, 150 years ago, with groups like the Know Nothing's that the anti-Catholic bigotry was out there. And there still is anti-Catholic bigotry. I'm not saying there isn't. But everything I've seen shows that it's more against conservative Protestants than Catholics at this point in time.

### **David Capes**

So, what can we do Dr. Yancey? What is it we can do as Christians? You mentioned friendship as a way of stemming the tide. Are there other things? Now, you detail some of that in your book, so I don't want to take everything out of your book and talk about it here, because I want people to go out and buy it. But are there other things that we can do?

### **George Yancey**

Yes, I guess you can think of this as going on the defense and going on the offense. I think on the defense, we have to build our Christian communities. Because you know, I can tell you, as an African American, one of the things that saved us is that we had a black community, I'm not saying that being Christian is like being black. But I'm saying that there's a lesson to be learned to build your communities, your church and other churches. Knowing that we are in this together, learning, building these economic structures for ourselves, to protect us against intrusions into our economic rights. Communities help raise our kids, to socialize them. I think that's very important to think about.

As far as the offensive, we're not taking the nation back for God anytime soon. Unless Jesus really comes back soon. I think we have to be realistic about that, we're not going back to the way it was. But what we can do is get a seat at the table. And the way we can do this is that we're going to have to go into the mainstream cultural institutions in the arts and media. And yes, in academia, where we need to find ways to support people to delve into the mainstream of these cultural institutions and have an influence. To be those friends, be there to review that paper that is an attack on Christians and to help to redirect it, to be a voice. We're going to have to do that. That's a long-term project. I know. But this is a long-term issue. So those are two things I would say, off the top of my head, that we're going to have to think about. Protecting ourselves by building our communities, but also going into the institutions that right now, don't welcome us. But we have to make our own welcome.

### **David Capes**

We've got to find a way and I liked the way you said it. We're not going to win back this nation. We are going to be able with some hard work and intentionality to get a place at the table. And having that seat at the table, both in the arts as well as in academia, and in the media. All that we think, will be a way of helping to stem the tide of this Christianophobia. Dr. George Yancey, thank you for being with us today

to talk about your book *Hostile Environment: Understanding and Responding to Anti-Christian Bias*. We appreciate you being with us.

**George Yancey**

Thank you for having me.