



# The Bridge Report

## ROBERT JURJEVICH FROM BOSNIA — ADDRESSING THE HOMOSEXUAL ISSUE FROM WITHIN THE CHURCH



Robert and Sandrina (left) with their children and one daughter-in-law — a truly GAY family by its original definition: happy and joyful!

By Robert Jurjevich

During our recent visit to **Bosnia**, we experienced many encounters of God's presence and saw His hand working in many lives. However, the most troubling experience was attending an evening meeting with guest speaker Philip Yancey, renown American Christian author, expounding on the theme of "Suffering". Many of the leaders of Bosnian churches and humanitarian organizations were in attendance, so it was considered a special occasion.

Although we knew of the name Yancey as a writer, we had never seen him nor heard him speak before. So before the meeting, we checked out his website to become acquainted with his ministry and background. We were shocked to read on the Q&A page of his site concerning his views and interaction with the gay agenda and community. **We were most troubled that someone with his viewpoints was being brought before the Bosnian church leaders, during a book-tour through Croatia and Bosnia, and promoted as one of the great Christian authors of our day.**

The purpose of our addressing the visit of Philip Yancey in the Balkans, and his viewpoints when questioned on homosexuality, is to **raise an awareness that the spiritual health of the Balkans is very fragile and discernment by spiritual leadership should be taken in protecting believers from pseudo-Christian influences. We are living in a generation, particularly in America, where the traditional identity of Christianity is being hijacked by "Chrislam" [blending of Christianity and Islam], "Christian Gays", "Christian Abortionists" and many other political, social and religious movements. The kingdom of darkness is seeking to parade itself as truth through these 'modern Christian' expressions, hoping to neutralize any traditional evangelical influence.**

Philip Yancey seems to be entertained by peering in from the outside, even embracing a foreign spiritual experience at the expense of his own credibility. The problem with not abstaining from the appearance of evil is like playing around with glue; it is a very sticky element and has a tendency of becoming the center of attention when mishandled.

Here is a portion off Philip Yancey's website concerning his bio:

"Ever since Yancey has explored the most basic questions and deepest mysteries of the Christian faith, taking millions of readers with him. Early on he crafted best-selling books such as Disappointment with God and Where is God When it Hurts? while also editing The Student Bible. He coauthored three books with the renowned surgeon Dr. Paul Brand. "No one has influenced me more," he says. "We had quite a trade: I gave words to his faith, and in the process he gave faith to my words." More recently, he has felt the freedom to explore central issues of the Christian faith, penning award-winning titles such as The Jesus I Never Knew, What's So Amazing About Grace? and Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference? His books have garnered 13 Gold Medallion Awards from Christian publishers and booksellers. He currently has more than 15 million books in print, published in 35 languages worldwide."

**R. J.: Sounds impressive and legit enough, right? Now let's look in detail to his Q&A page dealing with homosexuality, in which he is asked eight questions. The full text of each question and answer from his page is given, with highlights in red for discussion sake in our comment sections:**

**Q 1ST Q&A: In your book *What's so Amazing about Grace?* you tell about your friendship with Soulforce leader [1] Mel White. What is your position on gays and lesbians in the church?**

"You don't beat around the bush, do you? Mel—formerly a ghost writer for famous Christians and now a prominent gay activist—was one of my closest friends for years before he revealed to me his sexual orientation. (He still is a close friend, by the way.) He had repressed and hidden his homosexuality, and in fact was married and was making a fine career in Christian publishing and also in ministry as a pastor and professor at Fuller Seminary. Mel

became a window to me into a world I knew nothing about. He tells his own story in the book *Stranger at the Gate*. We all well know how explosive this issue can be. I get hate letters full of equal venom from both sides: from conservative Christians appalled that I would maintain a friendship with Mel and write compassionately about gays and lesbians, and from the other side wishing I would go further with a full endorsement of gay rights.

[2] In my relationship with Mel White, I have to remind myself that it's not my job to present the absolutely proper, balanced viewpoint of the church. No, he receives much judgment and condemnation from the church, and also much reasoned disapproval of his life and decisions. I simply try to balance that off a bit by being loving and nonjudgmental. I've become good friends with Mel's partner, too. I found it impossible to have a close friendship with Mel when I ignored the person who shares his life. I don't agree with some of Mel's choices, but they are Mel's choices, not mine, and thus between Mel and God.

[3] I think back to Jesus and how offensive he must have found the people he dealt with; yet he treated them with respect, compassion, and love.

[4] On an issue like this, I try to start with what I'm absolutely sure of, and work outwards. I'm sure of what my own attitude should be toward gays and lesbians: I should show love and grace. As one person told me, "Christians get very angry toward other Christians who sin differently than they do." When people ask me how I can possibly stay friends with a sinner like Mel, I respond by asking how Mel can possibly stay friends with a sinner like me. [5] After all, Jesus had much to say about greed, hypocrisy, pride and lust—sins I struggle with—but did not mention homosexuality. [6] Even if I conclude that all homosexual behavior is wrong, as many conservative Christians do, I'm still compelled to respond with love.

[7] Do I believe that gay people can be committed Christians? Absolutely. I know far too many of them to doubt that. I also believe that alcoholics and prideful hypocrites can be committed Christians. In short, sinners can, and I've stepped back from ranking other people's sins.

It may be helpful for us to think through our relationships with divorced people. Do I feel awkward? Do I avoid talking about their current partner, or former life? Or I think of my greedy friends, or gluttonous friends. How do I handle their weaknesses?"

### R.J. COMMENTS:

[1] Mel White [www.MelWhite.org](http://www.MelWhite.org), [www.mccchurch.org](http://www.mccchurch.org)

The first Q is split between two questions. The first deals with Philip Yancey's ongoing friendship with Mel White, who is a gay activist that promotes the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) agenda, and an advocate for the LGBT religious organization *United Federation of Metropolitan Community Churches* (UFMCC). Mel White calls evangelical Christians 'terrorists' and is leading an aggressive, militant movement against the traditional Christian conservative churches.

Although he calls himself a Christian, his true religious identity is founded on *gay liberation theology*, in which the gay agenda is superimposed upon the text of the Bible, church history and world history. Everything is then interpreted, not in light of God's standard of holiness and righteousness, but in line with the gay worldview and agenda.

"[2] In my relationship with Mel White, I have to remind myself that it's not my job to present the absolutely proper, balanced viewpoint of the church." And rightly so. No one should expect Yancey to play God by attempting to present the Church's ABSOLUTE definitive statement of faith in dealing with the sin of homosexuality. After all, he's

not the pope. Nor the chief rabbi. Although his friend Mel White has been Billy Graham, as a ghost writer.

However, he does present a viewpoint. Though it may not be 'absolute', it should at least be proper [factual] and balanced [apologetically], not purposely vague and intentionally misleading. Let his friendship with Mel White be what it is between the two of them, but the threat of homosexuality to the social and religious structures cannot be confined to his personal opinion and experience. God's holiness is absolute, and the Bible is the final authority on morality, with which the gay agenda stands in contradiction.

The second deals with his position on gays and lesbians in the church.

"[3] I think back to Jesus and how offensive he must have found the people he dealt with; yet he treated them with respect, compassion, and love." Jesus found sin offensive, not the lost sinner. Yet, He spared few words in dealing with the hypocrisy of the religious crowd who corrupted God's Word for their own selfish lusts and self-righteous goals. Mel White is a religious reprobate who is promoting apostasy. Yancey's challenge is seeing how far he can go in friendship with such an individual without compromising his evangelical belief system (presuming he truly is an evangelical, or another wolf in sheep's clothing).

"[4] On an issue like this, I try to start with what I'm absolutely sure of, and work outwards." Yancey's core value that he works from is 'love and grace'. His core embraces only partially the nature and actions of God, therefore, his relationship with the gay community is built on an incomplete foundation. Does righteousness, holiness, truthfulness, conviction, judgment, discernment or numerous other attributes to God play any role whatsoever in directing our lives?

"[5] After all, Jesus had much to say about greed, hypocrisy, pride and lust—sins I struggle with—but did not mention homosexuality." Here Yancey begins his argument that it is doubtful that homosexuality should even be considered a sin: Jesus didn't mention it, so it's probably not an issue, right? Jesus didn't mention abortion either. But that's another issue for another blog entry.

"[6] Even if I conclude that all homosexual behavior is wrong, as many conservative Christians do, I'm still compelled to respond with love." "Even if". Obviously, Yancey has difficulty giving a clear stance of the right/wrong status of homosexuality. The issue is not if one should show God's love to everyone, regardless if they are a homosexual or not. The issue is the nature of homosexuality: is it a sin or not. Showing God's love to the homosexual while condemning the sin of homosexuality is not a contradiction to the true Christian; yet Yancey struggles to do this. His wording is meant to sow doubtfulness concerning the sinfulness of homosexuality, which continues throughout the interview.

"[7] Do I believe that gay people can be committed Christians? Absolutely." Is 'committed' knowing the truth, but permitted to live the opposite? People living the homosexual lifestyle certainly can become Christians; however, when they do, the lifestyle must change. Christ in, homosexuality out. As simple as that. One cannot continue in a gay lifestyle/relationship, and be 'committed' to Christ.

**Q** 2ND Q&A: Would it be accurate to say that you do not believe God judges homosexual feelings, as heterosexuals experience these temptations too, but that you would consider acting on them and engaging in homosexual activity, either in the mind or in the flesh, to be sin according to the Bible?

"It would be more accurate to say

that I intentionally don't take sides on this issue. I've observed that as soon as a person does take sides, communication ends. I hear from gay Christians who are very disappointed that I don't condone their point of view, and I hear from traditional Christians who are very disappointed that I don't condemn homosexual behavior. As long as I get angry letters from both sides, I feel better.

Do I agree with gay Christians' interpretations of the six passages in the Bible that may or may not relate to their behavior? No. They may be right, but so far I'm unconvinced. I also disapprove of sexual promiscuity, whether of the hetero- or homo- variety.

Nevertheless, I start with what I'm sure of: my attitude toward homosexuals. It seems to me that's the clearest message we have. And the atmosphere of judgment and condemnation is so strong that I feel no need to represent a balanced viewpoint myself. So I don't take an official position. I simply try to love the gay individuals I know, and bring a little grace and mercy to a church that puts this particular sin — [1] if indeed it is that — in a special category. I'd rather maintain contact with "gay Christians," who are so isolated, and also conservative Christians, who often have little understanding of the issue.

Dag Hammarskjöld used to say he started by finding the smallest point of common ground between two opposing sides and then work outward from there. Likewise, I prefer to claim the solid ground that pleads for mercy and understanding for both sides. I'm certain about what our attitude should be toward homosexuals, [2] even if we conclude that their practice is sin, and I plant my flag there. It takes no grace to show love to someone just like me; it takes a lot of grace to show love toward someone of whom I disapprove. [3] I've learned to leave the judgment aspect to God.

Remember, it wasn't so long ago that the church judged divorced people as harshly as they judge homosexuals today. [4] I agree



that the temptation and the homosexual orientation are not sin. Beyond that, I stubbornly refuse to answer. [5] I'll let others debate the morality and the biblical exegesis, and plenty of people seem willing to do so."

### R. J. COMMENTS:

"[1] if indeed it is that", "[2] even if" - again, "if", bringing into question the spiritual nature of homosexuality, and Yancey's desire to find a mutual common ground of acceptance between the gay community and the traditional Christian community.

"[3] I've learned to leave the judgment aspect to God.", "[5] I'll let others debate the morality and the biblical exegesis, and plenty of people seem willing to do so." - Yancey casts off any responsibility for bringing judgment (spiritual discernment), morality or Biblical exegesis into the equation so that his 'love and grace' approach toward the gay community will remain undisturbed.

[4] I agree that the temptation and the homosexual orientation are not sin. Yancey promotes the gay community's basic belief that they were born with a same-sex orientation that can not be changed; that it is therefore God-given, God-approved.

### Q 3RD Q&A: Is it ever possible to "love the sinner and hate the sin"?

"Actually, we do that all the time, don't we? The Bible uses the word abomination about those who lie, dishonor parents, and commit adultery—yet we find ways to love such people while not approving of their behavior. Again, the Bible also has very clear and strong words against divorce, yet most Christians have found ways to love divorced friends and relatives. We need not approve of a behavior to show love toward a person—if we did, we'd all be in trouble. As a friend of mine who works with AIDS victims said, "I learned that Christians get very angry toward other Christians who sin differently than

they do." Some people put homosexuality in a special and unique category of sin. I guess my view of sin is broader than that.

Our main attitudes, I think, should be humility and service. I have mentioned Ed Dobson's church in Grand Rapids, that refuses to take any political stances, and mobilizes its members in helping with AIDS sufferers. They disapprove of homosexual behavior, but prefer to put their energy into practical helps, and find that later those whom they are serving are far more open to their message.

I should point out that there are articulate gay Christians who do not see homosexuality as a sin, particularly when it is exercised in a committed relationship. With some scholarly support, they interpret the few verses in the Bible differently than the church has historically. Although I disagree with their interpretations, some of them are quite sincere Bible-believers, and have concluded that the authors were writing about specific practices of temple prostitution, not contemporary gay behavior. Other gay Christians, of course, valiantly struggle to overcome their temptations.

After I wrote about my friendship with Mel White, I received a number of letters condemning me for continuing the friendship. "How can you possibly remain friends with such a sinner!" the letter-writers demanded. I've thought long and hard about that question, and come up with several answers which I believe to be biblical. The most succinct answer, though, is another question: "How can Mel White possibly remain friends with a sinner like me?" The only hope for any of us, regardless of our particular sins, lies in a ruthless trust in a God who inexplicably loves sinners, including those who sin differently than we do."

### R.J. COMMENTS:

Great Q&A section; do not want to pick it apart in risk of losing its redemptive qualities. Really wished the interview would have ended here. However, ...

### Q 4TH Q&A: What do you think about gay churches?

"I've attended a few gay and lesbian churches, and it saddens me that the evangelical church by and large finds no place for homosexuals. I've met wonderful, committed Christians who attend Metropolitan Community Churches, and I wish that the larger church had the benefit of their faith. At the same time, I think it's unhealthy to have an entire denomination formed around this one particular issue—those people need exposure to and inclusion in the wider Body of Christ.

When it gets to particular matters of policy, like ordaining gay and lesbian ministers, I'm confused, like a lot of people. There are a few—not many, but a few—passages of Scripture that bring me up short. Frankly, I don't know the answer to those questions. I'm a freelancer, not an official church representative, and I have the luxury of saying simply, "Here's what I think, but I really don't know," rather than trying to set church policy."

### R.J. COMMENTS:

I have to restrain myself on this one. Everything is wrong with it.

- Promotes gay and lesbian religious meetings as 'churches' on an equal basis as evangelical churches;
- 'Saddened' by the evangelical churches, but not by the gay/lesbian theology that supports what the Bible describes as an abomination in the sight of God;
- Promotes the gay and lesbian MCC as being 'Christian';
- Promotes the idea that the gay and lesbian MCC faith and lifestyle somehow would benefit the evangelical churches;
- His only negative thought on the gay and lesbian MCC is that it shouldn't be built around the sole identity of homosexuality, but should expand itself so that the Body of

Christ can better move toward unity with them. Yancey is 'confused' about ordaining gays and lesbians – does this not reveal depth of deception he is operating under?

### Q 5TH Q&A: Do you see any hope for compromise?

"Of course, mainline denominations have come to terms with the homosexuality issue, opening welcoming gay and lesbians into leadership and in some case blessing ordinations and gay marriages.

Evangelicals have not moved in that direction, and still struggle mightily with the issue. My church in Chicago spent a couple of years studying homosexuality. The church had openly gay members, but did not allow practicing homosexuals in leadership positions (as they did not allow unmarried "practicing heterosexuals," whatever that means). The committee studying the issue looked at the biblical, theological and social aspects and came down in the same place: welcoming homosexuals in the congregation but not affirming them in leadership roles.

Conservatives got mad and left by the welcoming posture. Many gays and lesbians also left, hurt that the church reinforced their "second-class citizen" status.

I have no magic solution. I do believe the church should primarily police itself, not the world at large (see 1 Corinthians 5). We must humbly follow what Scripture teaches, but we must not single out one sin above others, and we must always show a spirit of love and humility. That's no answer, but may be the beginning of dialogue, at least."

### R. J. COMMENTS:

"...welcoming homosexuals in the congregation but not affirming them in leadership roles." – Perfect example on the recklessness of compromise, by his own church which benefits no one; not the homosexual community nor the evangelical community in understanding the issues.

"That's no answer, but may be the beginning of dialogue, at least." - A common escape for Yancey is that there is no conclusive decision in the matters of homosexuality and the church, because a spirit of compromise would not allow for it. For him nothing is definable; except let's just love one another.

**Q** 6TH Q&A: *How can evangelical Christians develop an attitude of grace (if not acceptance) toward gay and lesbian Christians?*

"The only way is through personal exposure. It's amazing how feelings change when suddenly it's your daughter or your brother who comes out of the closet. In my case, it was my friend Mel. The issues I had read about suddenly had a face, a person with a story. When that happened, everything changed. That's one reason why I think it's sad that the churches have so little contact. I have attended gay and lesbian churches whose fervency and commitment would put most evangelical churches to shame. Disapproving conservatives should have contact with those people, and vice versa."

### R.J. COMMENTS:

"I have attended gay and lesbian churches whose fervency and commitment would put most evangelical churches to shame." - Again, Yancey bashes the evangelical churches, and heaps praise onto 'gay and lesbian churches'. Since when is the criteria for authentic Christianity a certain competitive level of 'fervency and commitment'? I have witnessed communists with greater 'fervency and commitment' than many Christians; Muslims with a greater show of 'fervency and commitment' than many Christians. Does that make their belief system right, their cause valid, their direction acceptable?

**Q** 7TH Q&A: *Most Christian churches say gays and lesbians must give up their sexual orientation to be accepted. What do you say to churches like this?*

"If a church is saying you need to give up sexual orientation, that church needs some education. I know of some ministries who try to change sexual behavior, but none that try to change sexual orientation—all admit that any change involves a lifelong struggle. I would hope a minister or rector is open to dialogue, and I would hope that a gay or lesbian would have the strength and confidence to sit down with that minister discuss the psychology of sexual orientation as well as the biblical objections he has.

I'm not gay or lesbian, so I would probably approach that minister differently. I would point to how Jesus dealt with people who were moral failures—I'm starting where the minister is, who sees gays as a moral failure. Jesus chose one such woman, a woman who had five failed marriages in her resume, as his first missionary. I would also ask the minister if he requires all who attend his church to leave their "sins" at the door. Does he interview each person about their sexual activity? Does he exclude people who show pride, hypocrisy, or legalism, which are the sins that seemed to upset Jesus? Does he see the church as a place only for people who see things alike, and for people who have arrived rather than people who are on the way? I'd ask questions like that."

### R. J. COMMENTS:

"If a church is saying you need to give up sexual orientation, that church needs some education."

- Being a supporter of the gay movement's belief that homosexuality is a God-given sexual orientation formed in their DNA that is not sinful, Yancey makes it clear that the evangelical church is at fault for questioning that belief and that gays need to find a way to counsel 'truth' to evangelical pastors.



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**INKING GOD'S PEOPLE TO  
REACH THE UNREACHED**

Bosnia, as a reminder to us all to stand up for righteousness in defending the truth!



**8TH Q&A: Many gays and lesbians have been harmed by the church's attitude toward them, so much so that they will never set foot in one again. What do you say to these people who have been ostracized from the church and who have perhaps lost their faith?**

"They may need some time away from the church. I am convinced, however, that the Christian life is not meant to be lived alone, in isolation. If a person can't see fit to enter into an institutional church, at least they should look for a small group or Bible study or some gathering of live human beings struggling along on the same pilgrimage. I also find it helpful for a wounded person to look for a radically different kind of worship experience than the one that wounded them. I could tell you stories about the church I grew up in. For sheer meanness and closed-mindedness, it rivals any church I've seen. And yet if I simply gave up on all faith because of my past church experience, I would be the one who loses most."

### R.J. COMMENTS:

"They may need some time away from the church." - I understand Yancey's point, and the reasoning behind his advice to the wounded of heart and spirit. However, the empty void unfilled throughout the interview will not be filled by the Church. Healing and restoration can only come through the CROSS of Jesus the Messiah, not by trying to find accommodation within a local church or religious activity. His presentation that night in Sarajevo, his books and his website all carry the unpleasant fragrance of an unhealed wound from his early church experience that defines all he does. He spoils his legacy and hinders his fruitfulness.

The American—Dutch couple **Robert and Sandrina Jurjevich** are our long-standing friends, and partners in the mission field. In 1987, they left with their four children for **Bosnia** and planted a church among the Muslims in **Sarajevo**. When war erupted in Sarajevo in 1991, a bomb hit their apartment building and destroyed all their possessions, so they were forced to leave. In the last twenty years they have done pastoral care in Holland and the States while raising and educating their children — **now the time has come for them to permanently return to their beloved Bosnia and continue their mission work.**

I share Robert and Sandrina's deep concern over the liberal gay agenda being imposed on the Church at large, thus invalidating the authority of the Word of God - an issue Robert encountered on his last trip to Bosnia. Here, I am making available Robert's courageous, direct, clear, and to the point apologetic responses to the assertions made by the renown evangelical Christian author visiting