

November 28th 2013

Press contact: Professor Linda Woodhead (07764 566090)
l.woodhead@lancaster.ac.uk

As Pilling reports, polling reveals a revolution in Anglican attitudes to homosexuality and same-sex marriage not reflected in official teaching

Polling by YouGov for the Westminster Faith Debates this year gauged the opinion of 2,381 Anglicans, the largest such survey undertaken.

It finds that Anglican attitudes towards the family, sex, and same-sex relationships have undergone a revolution within living memory. There is now substantial disagreement with official church teaching that sex should be confined to heterosexual marriage and that same-sex marriage should not be allowed. Each age cohort is less likely than the one before to agree with official teaching. A growing proportion of the population believes that this teaching is discriminatory.

Anglican support for same-sex marriage

Forty four percent of Anglicans are now in favour of allowing same-sex marriage, and 43% against.

The proportion of Anglicans supporting same-sex marriage has grown significantly with every generation.

Even when we ask the more strenuous question whether people think same-sex marriage is “wrong”, just under half of all Anglicans think it is, and only a fifth of Anglicans under 30 agree.

<i>Anglicans</i>	<i>Under 30</i>	<i>Under 50</i>	<i>Under 60</i>	<i>Over 60</i>	<i>Total</i>
Right	64%	53%	46%	22%	36%
DK	16%	18%	19%	14%	17%
Wrong	20%	29%	35%	65%	47%
Total	206	889	1417	964	2381

Who are the opponents of same-sex marriage?

The factors which distinguish the people who are most likely to be opposed to same-sex marriage are:



- Age (older people more opposed, especially the over-60s)
- Gender (men more opposed than women)
- Believing in God with certainty
- Taking authority from religious sources rather than one's own judgment

Amongst Anglicans, 47% of active churchgoers are against allowing same-sex marriage and 40% are in favour. This is a reflection of other factors, above all the ageing profile of churchgoers, plus the fact that a small proportion takes authority from religious sources and believe in God with certainty.

Around 7% of Anglicans definitely believe in God with certainty and take their authority from religious sources, and 65% of them oppose same-sex marriage. Church leaders and official Anglican teaching supports this minority view.

General religious opinion

Anglican attitudes are not the only ones to have changed. Similar shifts are visible in nearly all the major religions in Britain. Overall, British people who identify with a religion, Christian or otherwise (excluding 'don't knows'), are now evenly split on allowing same-sex marriage 43% for and 43% against (Table 1 - appendix).

Anglicans who support same-sex marriage do so because they believe in equality and faithful love; Christians who oppose it do so because they believe in traditional marriage, family and gender-roles

The most common reasons given by Anglicans who say gay marriage is RIGHT are that:

- "People should be treated equally whatever their sexual orientation" (78%)

The next most common is:

- "Faithful love is the heart of marriage and it is not exclusive to heterosexual couples" (68%)

The most common reasons given by Anglicans who say gay marriage is WRONG are that:

- "Marriage should be between a man and a woman" (81%)

The next most common is:

- "It undermines the traditional family structure of a mother and father" (65%)

Christians on both side of the divide cite Biblical teaching to support their position.



Churches are widely perceived as unwelcoming to gay and lesbian people, and discriminatory

When asked if churches are welcoming to gay, lesbian and bisexual people only 21% of the public think they are, a proportion which falls to 17% amongst 18-24 olds.

Amongst 18-24 year olds who take a negative view of the Church of England, the most cited reason is that “The Church of England is too prejudiced, it discriminates against women and gay people” (46%).

Professor Linda Woodhead comments:

“Just like the moral revolution which changed attitudes towards race and slavery, there has been a moral revolution since the 1960s which has changed attitudes towards children, women, and gay and lesbian people. Whilst churches including the CofE led in the former revolution, they have resisted the latter one. However, many ordinary Anglicans actively support this shift in attitudes and values, and the proportion has grown steadily with every generation to the point where there is now a margin in favour of allowing same-sex marriage.

The fact that Church teaching on sexuality and the values of Anglicans and the wider population under 50 have come adrift creates many problems for the Church of England. Church leaders’ attempts to take a moral lead on issues of poverty and social justice may be undermined by their perceived failure to support such justice for women and gay and lesbian people.”

Ends

Notes to Editors

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. The survey was carried out online. Fieldwork was undertaken in January and June 2013. There were 2,381 Anglican respondents. The survey data is available at <http://faithdebates.org.uk/research/>

The Westminster Faith debates are organised by Charles Clarke and Linda Woodhead and supported by Lancaster University, the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Economic and Social Research Council. They are designed to bring high-quality academic research on religion into public debate. <http://faithdebates.org.uk/>

Linda Woodhead is Professor of Sociology of Religion at Lancaster University.



Table 1 Do you think same-sex marriage should be allowed? Adherents

Do you think same-sex couples should or should not be allowed to get married?	ALL	No religion	Anglican	Roman Catholic	Presbyterian	Methodist	Baptist	Jewish	Hindu	Islam / Muslim	Sikh	Religion TOTAL
Should	52	69	44	44	49	32	40	52	55	29	35	43
Should NOT	34	20	43	41	44	45	50	38	26	59	35	43
Don't know	14	11	14	15	7	23	11	10	19	12	30	14