

# Survey yields surprising data

A SURVEY of religious and secular attitudes to sex has found that the common perception that Roman Catholics feel more guilt about sexual sin than other religious people is unfounded – though religious people do feel more guilt than the non-religious.

The survey was commissioned for the Westminster Faith Debate “Too much sex these days – the sexualisation of society?” supported by Lancaster University, the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Economic and Social Research Council.

Respondents were asked whether they would feel guilty about difficult sexual issues.

Fewer than 60 per cent of Roman Catholics would feel guilty about extra-marital sex, the same proportion as Anglicans and the general population.

The guiltiest are Baptists and Pentecostals: almost 90 per cent of those surveyed say they would feel guilty about extra-marital sex, while 63 per cent of Methodists would.

Four times as many religious people (20 per cent) say they would feel guilty about pre-marital sex as non-religious people (five per cent). Only 24 per cent of Methodists would feel guilty.

More than twice as many religious people (33 per cent) say they would feel guilty about using pornography for

sexual stimulation as non-religious people (15 per cent); 27 per cent of Methodists say they would feel guilty.

Even though 68 per cent of people think sex is important, a similar proportion also say that the profile of sex is too high in society, with religious people agreeing even more strongly, and little difference between men and women.

Survey organiser Prof Linda Woodhead said that the findings show that some denominations had “lost their grip over the moral framework of their adherents”.

However, she added: “This does not mean that most Christians have simply secularised or accommodated to a secular ethic. Many still believe, participate and take their religion seriously.”

## Authority

“However, they do not take their authority from their religious leaders or official teachings – in fact our poll shows that 54 per cent of Methodists rely most on their own reason, judgment and intuition in making decisions, with only six per cent saying they rely most on the teachings of their religion.

“Obviously, this does not mean they are not morally reflective, but that official church teaching and preaching is just one factor they consider, a factor with fairly low impact in some areas.”