

Same-sex Marriage

A series of debates has been held in central London over the first few months of 2013 called the "Westminster Faith Debates", organised by Prof Linda Woodhead and Charles Clarke of Lancaster University, and designed to bring high-quality academic research on religion into public debate. Linda is Director of the £12m national "Religion and Society Programme." In preparation for this, YouGov undertook online polls in January 2013 among 4,400 people, weighted to be representative of all adults in Britain. One of these studies was on the issue of Same-sex Marriage.

Overall the survey found that people who identified with a religion were evenly divided on whether same-sex couples should be allowed to get married – 43% were in favour and 43% were against with 16% who didn't know. Those who had no religion were 69% in favour and only 20% were against.

Did people with a religion think same-sex marriage was right or wrong? 37% felt it was right, 43% felt it was wrong, with 20% not knowing. For those with no religion, 63% said it was right, and 20% that it was wrong, with 17% not knowing.

These various percentages varied by denomination or religion, as shown in the Table, where the answers are for those answering YES to the first question and RIGHT to the second:

Question	Anglicans %	Catholics %	Other Christian %	Other religions %	All religious %	Non-religious %	Overall %
Same-sex marriage should be allowed	44	44	40	42	43	69	52
Same-sex marriage is right	38	36	30	35	37	63	46

The Table shows that Anglicans and Catholics are more permissive in this area than those of other denominations (Presbyterians, Methodists and Baptists), and that Christian adherents overall are more permissive than those of non-Christian religions. The non-religious are far more in favour.

Post-modernity allows one to attach what meaning one likes to the words used, so "same-sex marriage" becomes a convenient way of handling or talking about one aspect of gay-ness if someone is not religious. Those who do believe in God are unlikely to change their definitions, so "marriage" for them remains a heterosexual business even if everyone else wants to call "marriage" a mix of heterosexuality and homosexuality. "Marriage" then becomes yet another in-word for Christian or God-fearing people. This kind of re-definition is seen elsewhere, such as in the 2011 Population Census where 177,000 people described their religion as a Jedi Knight!

Much energy is being taken up by those saying defining same-sex partnerships as "marriage" in this way "changes the concept of marriage for ever." While recognising differing sexual orientations, personal views are generally based on one's source of authority, whether religious or non-religious. This may well be true for Bible-believing Christians for whom marriage is a lifelong God-ordained union between one man and one woman. For those of other persuasions, however, marriage is legally whatever the law dictates it should be. The "Same-Sex Marriage" study merely confirms the level of disagreement over this issue and highlights the differences between denominations, the religious and non-religious.

If the UK passes same-sex marriage as a law in 2013, it will become the 15th country in the world to do so. The following nations have already passed it: The Netherlands in 2000, Belgium 2003, Spain 2005, Canada 2005, South Africa 2006, Norway 2008, Sweden 2009, Portugal 2010, Iceland 2010, Argentina 2010, Denmark 2012, France 2013, New Zealand 2013 and Uruguay 2013 (9 of these 14 are in Europe). Some states in the United States have been passing it since 2003, Mexico City did so in 2009, and some jurisdictions in Brazil in 2011.

SOURCES: Press Release, Prof. Linda Woodhead, University of Lancaster; YouGov poll, April 2013; list in *Prophetic Vision*; David Hathaway, No 68, Summer 2013, Page 6.

Questions

"What's the difference between God and the Bill Gates Foundation?"

"I don't know; tell me."

"God doesn't think He's Bill Gates!"

Attorney: Now doctor, isn't it true that when a person dies in his sleep, he doesn't know about it until the next morning?

Witness: Did you actually pass the bar exam?

Attorney: This *myasthenia gravis*, does it affect your memory at all?

Witness: Yes.

Attorney: And in what ways does it affect your memory?

Witness: I forget...

Attorney: You forget? Can you give us an example of something you forgot?

Attorney: Were you present when your picture was taken?

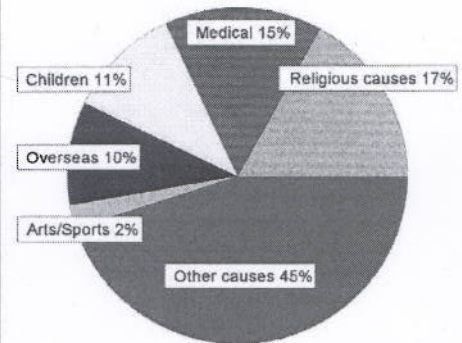
SOURCE: *Groive Jokes* email 30th April 2013.



Charitable Donations

Every 3 years the Office for National Statistics conducts a household survey on giving to charity, the most recent being for 2012. Some £9,300 million was given that year to charity by the 55% of the British population who give something each month. This amount was 20% down on charitable giving in 2011.

Charitable donations by money given, 2012



Medical causes received the most donations (33% of the total), while religious causes had 14% of all donations. However, religious causes received the most money, with the average donation in 2012 of £20, up from £15 in 2011. The average amount donated by religious people across the whole year, however, was £580, compared with £240 by non-religious people...

SOURCE: UK Giving, CAF and NCVO, as reported in the *Church Times* 19th April, 2013.

Insight and Foresight

Mr David Smith, the CEO of Global Futures and Foresight research agency has given an interesting definition of these two words: "In the commercial world, insight is the raw material you gather about today, and foresight is what you make of those insights."

An article in the new magazine *Impact* went on to give some dos and don'ts about foresight:

- 1) **Don't** claim to predict the future precisely – too much can go wrong!
- 2) **Do** offer a range in a forecast as this helps decision-makers accept uncertainty.
- 3) **Do** offer evidence that will help understanding of the decision-making context.
- 4) **Don't** get carried away by Black Swans and chaos theory. You can't see the unknown coming!
- 5) **Do** construct credible scenarios as decision-makers are more likely to think about believable futures.
- 6) **Don't** allow foresight to take precedence over agility. It's better to react fast than see problems early.
- 7) **Don't** get swept away by high-level analysis, which is useful but we still need human interpreters.

Some of this wisdom might be appropriate for church leaders also.

SOURCE: *Impact, Using Evidence & Insight to make a Difference*, Issue 1, 2013, Market Research Society, Pages 19, 20.