

Most Catholics back right to abortion

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For the first time, most British Catholics support a woman's right to have an abortion, as Christians move closer to secular opinion on social issues.

The 2016 British Social Attitudes survey found that 61 per cent of Catholics in Britain agreed that "the law should allow an abortion if the woman decides ... she does not wish to have a child".

The Conservative MP Jacob Rees-Mogg said last week that as a Catholic he opposed abortion, even after rape or incest. These figures show that he is in a minority. Among the general population 70 per cent support the right to abortion.

Support among British Catholics has increased from 39 per cent when the question was last asked in the annual survey in 2012. Support among those with no religion was at 78 per cent.

In 1985 only 33 per cent of British Catholics said that a woman should be able to have an abortion. The figure was 57 per cent among those with no religion.

The survey also asked about same-sex relationships; 55 per cent of Anglicans said that gay relationships were "not wrong at all". It is the first majority recorded by the survey, which found a 50-50 split in 2015. Support among those with no religion is at 76 per cent. The survey found that a majority of Catholics supported same-sex rela-

tionships for the first time in 2013, with support now at 62 per cent. In 1985 only 9 per cent of Anglicans were in favour of same-sex relationships. Support among non-believers was at 19 per cent.

Roger Harding, head of public attitudes at the National Centre for Social Research, said: "The gap between the religious and the non-religious is narrowing, particularly among Anglicans and Catholics."

The Catholic Church remains firm in its opposition to abortion. The Church of England has vowed to provide a warmer welcome to gay worshippers, but has not softened its opposition to same-sex marriage or gay sex. The Scottish Episcopal Church, the Anglican church in Scotland, has moved to allow same-sex marriages.

A majority of Anglicans and Catholics, 73 and 76 per cent, now think there is nothing wrong with pre-marital sex, up from 37 and 38 per cent in 1985.

Stephen Bullivant, professor of theology and sociology of religion at St Mary's University in Twickenham, said there were a number of Catholic public figures, but "when was the last time any of them said anything even remotely as bluntly supportive of the church's teaching in these areas as Jacob Rees-Mogg's comments?"

The survey had 3,000 respondents, with 15 per cent identifying as Anglican, 9 per cent as Catholic and 53 per cent as having no religion.

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