



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

“Mixed marriages” are more acceptable.



Opposition to Protestant-Roman Catholic marriages in Northern Ireland is softening, according to new research by the University of Ulster.

The findings show that marriages between members of different churches are becoming more popular and more acceptable. The greatest change in opinion is among Protestants. They are still more hostile to the idea, but the differential between them and their Catholic equivalents is narrowing.

The research suggests that more respondents are now likely to find inter-church or “mixed” marriages acceptable, than was the case a decade ago. In 1998, when the field research was carried out, 16 per cent of Protestants said they would “mind a lot” if one of their close relatives chose to marry someone from a different church. In 1989 the figure was 25 per cent. Some 60 per cent of Protestants now say they would not mind such a marriage.

One of the report's authors, Miss Gillian Robinson, a senior lecturer in policy studies at the University of Ulster, said hostility to mixed marriages was easing. “16% of those we interviewed for the survey in 1998 thought most people in Northern Ireland would ‘mind a lot’ if one of their close relatives were to marry someone of a different religion. Nine years previously, more than 33 per cent of those interviewed thought that people in general would mind a lot.”

Dr Marie Smyth, said: “There has been a modest, but not particularly marked, shift over the decade. Catholic attitudes have changed little over the decade and it is still the case that Catholics are more likely than Protestants to say that they would not mind a mixed marriage in the family. But the gap in attitudes between Catholics and Protestants has narrowed.”

She added: “Catholic church practices have been relaxed, especially regarding the required dispensation from Canon Law.” She also said the verbal, rather than written, decree to raise any children as Catholics had also helped. The most recent research was carried out among a random sample of 1,800, reflecting the religious breakdown in Northern Ireland.