

FOAG also felt that the proposal, relating as it does to the wider cultural, political and social situation, raises important ecclesiological questions about the relationship of Church and society and the essential freedom that the Church possesses to order its life according to the Gospel. From a Church of England perspective it is vital for the Church to maintain a critical distance from the state and to resist what the state is doing if this is at odds with Scripture and the Catholic tradition. We recognise of course that it is easier to state this principle than to be clear how in any given situation particular churches make decisions in communion with the Church down the ages and across the world after prayer, under the guidance of the Spirit and on the basis of the study of Scripture.

This is one of the reasons why we had hoped that the Porvoo agreement would enable participating churches to assist each other in living the Catholic spirit as they face the pressures of changing social values in their own societies. In other words, international and inter-confessional church fellowship could be a means of helping us all to be both universal and local. We fear that the present developments may indicate a real weakness in the Porvoo agreement as it did not involve binding mutual consultation and joint-decision making.

FOAG is acutely conscious of the immediate and negative ecumenical consequences of moves within any of the Porvoo churches to revise traditional Christian teaching and practice in matters of human sexuality. As is well known, such developments within the Anglican Communion have not only led to severe tensions within the Communion, but have also seriously damaged existing ecumenical relations and dialogues. Changes in the understanding of human sexuality and marriage in one member church of the Porvoo fellowship would lead to an impairment of the relationships between the churches, with particular implications for the limitation of the inter-changeability of ordained ministry. Because of the role of the Archbishop of Canterbury within the Anglican Communion they could also further undermine the fragile unity of the Anglican Communion.

FOAG was interested to learn of a suggestion that possibly a majority of the Swedish bishops were in favour of ceasing to solemnise marriages in church, with blessings after civil marriage taking place instead. While attractive to some, this solution would still indicate a significant difference between the teaching and practice of the Church of Sweden and that of the Church of England in a matter where many consider the unity of the Church requires a common mind.

As we have already said, FOAG is very conscious that all churches are faced with similar issues about changes in Western culture. The issues facing you are our issues too and we hope that the difficulties of the present situation will enable us to be much more purposeful in our standing alongside each other. So both for this reason and because there is so much we do not understand about your situation, we hope for continuing and deepening contact and dialogue on the issues raised by recent developments.

With all best wishes



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