# The Priests (Ordination of Women) Measure 1992 A Lay Response: the Third Province Movement

TREVOR STEVENSON

The General Synod's decision on 11 November, 1992, to admit women to the Presbyterate, subject to the approval of Parliament, gave rise to discussions on the future of those who cannot accept their ministry or recognize their orders.

A group of laity, determined to remain Anglicans, but convinced that a Church divided at the diocesan and deanery level (since women priests would serve alongside members who doubted the validity of their orders) cannot be viable, concluded that the best solution would be the formation of an autonomous Third Province for all those in England who cannot accept women priests. However, as this solution was not being discussed and was in danger of being lost by default, we therefore set out to bring it to the notice of the bishops, the media and the Church at large, and to promote it in every possible way. The Editor of *Churchman* in the previous issue (Vol. 107 No. 2) referred briefly to this group of laity and we are grateful for that mention and for this opportunity to enlarge on our aims at this critical time.

We began our campaign in November 1992 by writing to the Bishop of London (Dr. David Hope) who promised that the proposal would be put before the House of Bishops. A copy of the letter was sent to many other prominent people in the Church of England. In January 1993 a committee was formed which launched the Third Province Movement in time to obtain media coverage just before the House of Bishops met in Manchester.

The objective of the Movement was to draw attention, as widely as possible, to the advantages for the Church of England of establishing a Third Province as the way forward to solve the enormous pastoral and financial

problems arising from the legislation for the Ordination of women to the Presbyterate, in preference to other proposals including those made by the House of Bishops at their meeting in Manchester in January 1993 (the 'Manchester Statement').

The Third Province would be an autonomous province within the Anglican Communion in the same way as is the Church in Wales, for instance, for those Anglicans throughout England who hold to the traditional faith and teaching of the Church and who are unable, in conscience, to accept the ordination of women to the presbyterate. It would either be separate from the Church of England or be kept within it, though that would require more complex legislation to modify the established relationship between Church and State.

If the Third Province was separate from the Church of England, a procedure for the selection of bishops would be devised on lines already in use in other parts of the Anglican Communion. If it remained part of the Established Church it was envisaged that the procedure of the Crown Appointments Commission could be suitably adapted.

The Third Province would have power to make and alter Canons independently of the Provinces of Canterbury and York. The new Canons of the Church of England admitting women to the Presbyterate would not apply to the Third Province nor would others where traditionalists disagree with liberal changes that have been made or are proposed. It would have a governing body, but not necessarily on the same lines as the General Synod of the Church of England.

The Third Province would comprise those parishes in which more than half the Parochial Church Council voted to join it. Each of these parishes would keep its existing church, other buildings, and endowments, and would be entitled to a fair share of other assets as required to maintain the ministry there. Church funds would be equitably shared so that the clergy could continue to receive their stipends and pensions as at present. A great advantage for the Church would be that it would not have to pay large amounts of compensation which could threaten its financial viability.

**TREVOR STEVENSON** has been a lay member of General Synod representing Chichester diocese since 1985 and is a founder member of the Third Province Movement.