

Christ in Hebrews: Cultic Irony

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How can the Letter to the Hebrews apply priestly, cultic language to Christ while the gospels always present him as a lay man? In them he is shown ignoring the rules of cultic purity, touching lepers and corpses, declaring all food clean and cleansing the Temple. The priests are primarily to blame for his death. I am not concerned here with what the historical Jesus actually thought about purity or the cult, but with a clash of theologies. Is Hebrews a retreat from the lay spirituality of the gospels? Having killed Jesus, do the clerics subvert his gospel? One can only answer that question by looking at the function of the cult in the Jewish tradition and at what Hebrews does with the language of liturgy. Why was the image of a celestial cult, shared with 'innumerable angels in festal gathering' (12:22) quite so attractive? Would not an eternal banquet be a more obviously appealing image of heavenly bliss than a never-ending service?

It is an intriguing fact that in the first century many Jewish and Christian groups could imagine nothing more exciting than sharing with the angels in the celestial liturgy. Perhaps the most remarkable parallel to the Letter to the Hebrews is 'The Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice', the Sabbath Shirot, found at Qumran. According to Carol Newsom this cycle of thirteen songs, describing the angelic liturgy, was supposed to give the singers a mystical experience of being transported to heaven to worship with the angels. Having withdrawn from the defiled Jerusalem cult, this priestly community had to find a substitute, a legitimation for their identity as priests:

The hypnotic quality of the language and the vividness of the description of the celestial temple cause even the modern reader of these fragments to feel the power of the language to create a sense of the presence of the heavenly temple. The carefully developed and sophisticated form of the cycle of the Shirot further reflects the intention to produce and guide a particular form of experience.... To the extent that the worshipper experienced himself as present in the heavenly temple through the recitation of the Sabbath Shirot, his status as a faithful and legitimate priest would have been convincingly confirmed in spite of the persistent contradiction of his claims in the world.¹

The Essenes were not the only people fascinated by ascent to the presence of God. Just before the Temple was destroyed in AD 70, Johanan ben Zakkai, the founder of rabbinic Judaism, had himself carried out of Jerusalem in a coffin so as to escape the siege. And he and his disciples sought to recapture Ezekiel's experiences after the destruction of the first Temple by meditating on the prophet's descriptions of the throne or chariot of God. This time one drew near to God and shared in the vision of the angels not by singing songs but by meditating on the Torah. When R. Eleazar b. Arak expounded Ezekiel to Johanan b. Zakkai, 'Fire came down from heaven and encompassed all the trees that were in the field. All of them began a song. What was the song that they sang? Praise the Lord from the earth, dragons and deeps, fruitful trees and cedars, praise the Lord. And an angel answered from the fire "This indeed is the story of the chariot".'² And the Christians were obviously fascinated by the search for an experience of the celestial liturgy. Think of the vision of the throne of God surrounded by the angels and the elders, in the Book of Revelation, once again deeply influenced by Ezekiel, or of Paul caught up into Paradise, hearing 'things that cannot be told, which man may not utter.' (2. Cor. 12:4) So then, three groups of people, Essene, rabbinic and Christian, all of whom were unable to take part in the Temple liturgy in Jerusalem, either because they had excluded themselves or because the Temple had been destroyed, all seek to compensate for this deprivation by some experience of the angelic liturgy, an ascent to the presence of God.

Faced with his discouraged Christians, with drooping hands and weak knees (12:12), Hebrews makes the bold move of refusing to offer any alternative experience of the celestial liturgy. Shut off from the daily drama of the Temple ritual, its author attempts to make sense of the absence of this cultic experience. It is an attempt to make theological sense of tedium. Instead of some experiential participation, we only have hope. 'We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.' (6:19). And the basis of that hope was a new theology of creation that transformed the meaning of cultic language. Let me explain. All these groups which could no longer take part in the liturgy of the Temple went on using cultic, priestly language. And this was not mere nostalgia, as a traditional Catholic might hanker for the Tridentine rite of the good old days. Cultic language went on being used because it was the given, traditional way of talking about God's relationship with his creation. It was the traditional metaphor for God's creativity. The liturgy was not just the specialised activity of a few hereditary families butchering sheep and goats, but a metaphor for God's making and sustaining of the cosmos. So even when the cult

finally ceased in Jerusalem, one still had to go on talking about God, the creator of heaven and earth. But what was now the ground of such a discourse? Some people took the route of an alternative access to the angelic liturgy; Hebrews transformed what it meant to talk of God as creator, and so subverted the meaning of cultic language. Hebrews is faithful to the proper reference of sacrificial and priestly language but it transforms its meaning by seeing God's creative act as being not, most typically, the great conquest of chaos in Genesis 1, but the death and resurrection of Christ.

According to the Priestly Writer, God's creativity was above all disclosed in the great cosmic separations of the beginning: of light and darkness, day and night, the waters above and the waters below. One acknowledged the holiness of God by recognising and celebrating these fundamental cosmic separations. Indeed, Israel had been separated from the other nations for just that purpose, to be a holy people whose law and cult articulated the basic structures of creation:

I am the Lord your God who have separated you from the peoples. You shall therefore make a distinction between the clean beast and the unclean, and between the unclean bird and the clean; and you shall not make yourself abominable by beast or bird or anything with which the ground teems, which I have set apart for you to hold unclean. You shall be holy to me; for I the Lord am holy and have separated you from the peoples that you should be mine. (Lev. 20:24—26)³

So the rules of purity are ordered towards a Temple liturgy that mirrors the order of the cosmos. Blenkinsopp has shown that when the Priestly Writer describes Moses constructing the tabernacle in the wilderness, he is deliberately echoing Genesis 1.⁴ This is the goal of creation, a tent in the wilderness. After hovering over the face of the water in the beginning, the Spirit of God makes its first reappearance when it is given to Bezazel to help him to make a sanctuary. And it is interesting that this tradition of a connection between the creating of the universe and the building of the sanctuary persists for almost a thousand years. It can be found in the Babylonian Talmud:

Rab. Judah said in the name of Rab.: Bezazel knew how to combine the letters by which the heavens and the earth were created. It is written here, 'And he hath filled him (Bezazel) with the spirit of God, in wisdom and understanding and in knowledge,' and it is written elsewhere, 'The Lord by wisdom created the earth, by understanding he established the heavens,' and it is also written, 'By his knowledge the depths were broken up'. (B. Berakoth 55a.).

Josephus, a near contemporary of Jesus, thought of the Temple as a microcosm, a sort of cosmic plan; the patterns of the courts and the

boundaries, the ornaments of the Holy Place, gave you a picture of the heavens and the earth. He called it 'an imitation of the nature of the totality'.⁵ Philo put it the other way round: the universe was a gigantic Temple: 'The Highest in the truest sense, the holy Temple of God, as we must believe, is the whole universe, having for its sanctuary the most sacred part of all existence, even heaven, for its votive ornaments the stars, for its priests the angels who are servitors to his powers.'⁶ So then, the yearning to take part in the angelic cult is not a mysterious desire for an eternal benediction; it is a longing to take part in the liturgy whereby the world is sustained, the cult that makes day and night alternate, the dew descend at the right time, the rivers flow in the right direction, and men and women obey the Torah, which was on the knees of God when He made the world.⁷ So the language of the liturgy is the language of creation. Sacrifice was given for the healing of the world, for the purity regulations, to quote Mary Douglas, 'set up the great inclusive categories in which the whole universe is hierarchised and structured.'⁸

So when Hebrews applies the language of priesthood and sacrifice to Christ, it is not the case that the author is using ordinary language metaphorically, as when he talks about being a Christian in terms of gardening or athletics. The language of the cult is always metaphorical, as anthropologists have long recognised. Luc de Heusch, in his recent book, *Sacrifice in Africa*, defines sacrifice as 'a symbolic labour on living matter'.⁹ When the Nuer offer a wild cucumber to the gods in place of a wild ox, it is not that they expect to fool the gods; they recognise that it will work metaphorically. It is through these sorts of symbolic acts that, for example, the Dogan people 'maintain the world in working order'.¹⁰ The novelty of Hebrews is in locating God's supreme creative act not in the setting up of the cosmic distinctions of Genesis 1, but the death and resurrection of Jesus.

This interpretation of the purpose of the Hebrews is confirmed by a glance at the opening verses of the Letter. Here they are in the RSV translation:

In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

This is usually read as showing that Hebrews has not only a rich sense of the humanity of Christ, but also a clear theology of his pre-existence. As well as suffering for us on the cross he also created everything in the beginning. This is to fail to sense the author's dynamic understanding of creation. The letter starts, like Genesis, with God speaking in creative words; these only come to full articulation in Christ. He is the heir, the one whom God had in mind from the beginning. The Greek says that he created *tous aiōnas*, 'the ages'. Through the Son God created a whole

sequence of ages through which he brings the world to completion. This is suggested by 11:3; the Anchor Bible translation is best: 'By faith we consider the ages to have been put in order by the word of God so that what is seen has not come into existence from things that are visible.' This has nothing to do with an instantaneous *creatio ex nihilo* at the beginning. The whole history of Israel is the matrix of God's creative act; it shapes the world that he intends. This is the perspective that lies behind the next couple of verses of the opening chapter:

He reflects the glory and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power. When he had made purification for sins, he sat at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to the angels as the name he has obtained is more excellent than theirs.

At first glance one might make the mistake of thinking that the author is changing from talking about Jesus in terms of his divinity and sharing in the Father's creative act, to Jesus as high priest. This is not the case. He is upholding (*pherōn*) the universe by his power. This does not simply mean that he is keeping things in existence. It is, once again, a dynamic word; he is carrying the universe, bearing it along, towards completion. And he does that precisely by 'making purification for sins', because it is sacrifice that puts the world to rights and repairs the cosmos. It is through the sacrificial system that we share in God's making and remaking of the world. And the final goal of this dynamic is to sit at God's right hand, to enter His rest in the final Sabbath. A similar conjunction of themes can be found in the contemporary apocalyptic document, 2 Baruch: 'And it shall come to pass when he (The Messiah) has brought low everything that is in the world, and has sat down in peace for the age on the throne of his kingdom, that joy shall be revealed, and rest shall appear.' (73:1)

Unfortunately we do not have the space here to follow through the successive transformations of the doctrine of creation, but one might say that it evolved through attempts to make sense of ever more radical experiences of failure. It was the failure of the Exile, the collapse of the State, that pushed Israel beyond a perception of the cosmic order as disclosed in the annual cycle of the seasons to the great creative event of the beginning which we find in P. Similarly it was the doctrine of the resurrection, born of the suffering of martyrs, that brought both Judaism and Christianity to a doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*.¹¹ And both the rabbis and the Christian theologians noticed that that seventh day of creation was never said to end. It became a symbol of a completion, the entering of God's rest, to which we are all travelling, symbolised by the entry into God's presence on the Day of Atonement. That was when the ram's horn was blown and sabbatical years began. All this lies behind the

image of Jesus making sacrifice for the purification of sins and taking his seat at the right hand of God.

Hebrews takes a more radical step than this. It subverts the OT conception of what it means for God to be creative. In Genesis 1, as I have suggested, the cosmic separations ground the social separations of Jew/Gentile, male/female, lay/priestly. As is said in a prayer from the time of Jesus: 'Blessed is he who distinguishes between holy and profane, between light and darkness, between Israel and Gentiles, between the seventh day and the six working days, between water above and water below, between priest and levite and Israelite'. But the author of Hebrews turns this principle on its head and bases the priesthood of Christ on his solidarity, closeness, to others. The OT priest was such by virtue of his separation from others; Jesus is the great high priest by virtue of his solidarity with us:

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people (2:14f, 17).

And what underpins this new theology of solidarity is a more fundamental innovation, which is a transformation of God's relationship to suffering and death. God had been perceived as the source of all life and holiness precisely in his separation from death. The purity regulations aim at creating the maximum distance between the corpse and the Holy of Holies. The corpse was the ultimately impure object, 'the father of the fathers of impurity'.¹² It radiates impurity as God radiates holiness. The High Priest was not allowed to mourn even his closest relatives, follow behind their coffins or touch their corpses, lest he be unable to enter into the Holy of Holies on the day of Atonement.¹³ He must be physically perfect, free from deformity, hence the cunning move of Antigonus in biting off the ears of his predecessor, Hyrcanus, so as to disqualify him for ever from the high priesthood. But in Christ God's creative act happened in a grasping of the ultimate impurity and its transformation so that 'through death he might destroy him who has the power of death.' So his use of cultic language is ultimately ironic. For us the most holy object is the 'father of the fathers of impurity', a corpse. The focal point of our cultic space, that around which the community gathers, is not, as in the Temple, that which is farthest from death, but that which is closest, the cross. So our use of cultic language is a subversion, made possible by a new theology of creation; God the creator is the one raises from the dead.

One can spot this irony in, for example, Hebrews' use of the word *teleioun*, which primarily means 'to perfect'. Christ is perfected through suffering, as in 2:10. 'For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering.' The obvious context is that of God as creator; He is described as the one 'for whom and by whom all things exist', and He brings Jesus to perfection, fullness of being. It is, of course, a paradox that God is creative through suffering and death, and it is that which grounds the irony that *teleioun* is a word with cultic resonances. Albert Vanhoye has shown that in the LXX it is frequently used for the consecration of a priest. The Hebrew expression for consecration, 'to fill the hands', becomes in the LXX 'to perfect the hands', and so priestly ordination is described as *teleiōsis*, 'the act of making perfect'.¹⁴ So for Hebrews that which consecrates Christ is his entry into the realm of death; he is ordained by immersion in the impure.

Several important consequences follow for our use of cultic language. It will have to acquire a new grammar.¹⁵ The OT language of creation and cult was essentially binary; it was founded on oppositions such as day/night; male/female; priest/lay. But if God's holiness is disclosed in laying hold of its opposite, then our use of this language will be transformed. This is what lies behind 13:11–13:

For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest as a sacrifice for sins are burned outside the camp. So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore let us go forth to him outside the camp, and bear the abuse he endured.

Exegetes have been puzzled by how the death of Jesus could be compared with the dumping of these corpses outside the camp. His death was sacrificial, but in their case it was just a matter of disposing of impure objects. Clearly the author of Hebrews had not read his rubrics! But I would propose that this suggests the new grammar of the word 'holy'. That which makes holy, our *sacra-ficium*, is precisely this corpse outside the city gates, and so we too sanctify the world by going out. The impure is that which is to be grasped and transformed. There is a similar paradox in Rev. 5:6, in which the seer sees before the throne of God 'a lamb standing as though slain'. Vanhoye has shown that although the context is cultic, sacrificial, the words used are not. Neither the Greek words for 'lamb' or 'slain' come from the priestly vocabulary. It is as though one were to say 'I saw this woolly ruminant butchered upon the altar'. Or, as Vanhoye puts it, more elegantly, 'John has inserted a non-ritualistic expression (*arnion esphagmenon*) into a sacrificial structure. In this way he has described the Christian paradox: a death which had nothing to do with ritual—the death of Jesus, a penal execution of an unjust

sentence—has been transformed into a perfect sacrifice and so has become the decisive event of human history.¹⁶ This means that there can be no ultimate contradiction between the gospels' presentation of Jesus as a lay man, ignoring the rules of purity, in conflict with the priesthood, and Hebrews' theology of Christ as high priest, for the latter is a theology that seeks to transcend the binary opposition of lay and priestly. Is it a coincidence that the typical New Testament for 'community' is *koinonia*? In the LXX words from this family are usually used in a negative sense, the community of sinners.¹⁷ *Koinos* means 'common', and by the time of Jesus had come to mean 'impure', as when the Pharisees accuse Jesus of eating with 'common' hands, in Mark 7. The holy is that which is withdrawn from the common. But our *koinonia* is founded on the consecration of the common.

It also follows that it would make no sense to speak of Christ as if he was the sole priest, in some exclusive sense. The Old Testament priest or levite was such in virtue of the fact that some other people were not. But Christ's priesthood, being derived from his solidarity with us, communicates itself. It is no longer the case, as on the day of Atonement, that the high priest detaches himself from the Gentiles, from the women, from the male Israelites and finally from the priests when he enters the Holy of Holies alone. It is his solitude which defines his role. Christ's high-priesthood means that we all flock in: 'Therefore, brethren, since we have the confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which has opened for us through the curtain, that is his flesh...' (10:19f). And that is why *teleioun*, to perfect or consecrate, is eventually applied to all of us. His consecration is ours too. So the priesthood of Christ and of the people is, in a sense, one and the same thing.

The people to whom this document is addressed are discouraged. They have weak knees and drooping hands. Although they have been baptised they find themselves suffering, members of an impure and imperfect world. There is not even the consolation of that dramatic metaphor of recreation, the cult of the Temple. The author resists the temptation to offer an alternative experience, a moment of mystical ascent, through liturgy or meditation on the scriptures. Rather he claims the experience of tedium, the discouragement and the suffering, as the place in which God's act of recreation now takes place. That is why we may have hope. So it is not the case that Christ is merely metaphorically a priest; we all know that he was *really* a layman. It is rather the case that the old cult was merely metaphorically recreative. In the old cult 'gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot perfect the *suneidesin* (not "conscience" so much as "deepest being") of the worshipper'. It is as if this cultic language had been awaiting its proper application, the act of real transformation to which it pointed but was unable to achieve.

Hebrews twice uses the cultic word for 'to dedicate', *engkainidzō*, literally 'to make new'. The Feast of the Dedication was *Ta Engkainia*, The Making New. One might suggest that Christ's death and resurrection disclosed a novelty, a newness, that the old cult merely hinted at. Cultic, priestly language comes into its own for the first time. Luke's gospel begins with Zechariah struck dumb in the Temple, the people awaiting a blessing that is not given. It concludes with Jesus being taken up into heaven and performing the priestly gesture of blessing the disciples, who return to the Temple, praising God. The Resurrection allows the Temple liturgy to find completion, to attain its goal.

What are the consequences for our own theology of the ministry? What place can we offer to cultic figures? Wittgenstein said that 'man is a ceremonious animal'.¹⁸ And Fergus Kerr has commented that we need 'a theology for ceremonious animals, so as to speak, rather than for celebrating solipsists; a theology that starts from the deep sinister thing in human nature, rather than from a hypothesis about a deity.'¹⁹ Whatever our theology of the priesthood may be, we will need to find ceremonious ways of articulating our faith, of expressing it by ritual, gesture and cult. It is a theology that will have to be enacted. The question we must ask is this: what theology of creation is implicit in our rituals? Is it a levitical theology of creation as separation, of sustaining and articulating binary oppositions, of holding chaos at bay and removing oneself from infection by the impure? Or do our rituals embody the theology of recreation which we find in Hebrews, in which 'the deep and sinister thing in human nature', the impure, the blemished the chaotic, is grasped and transformed? Our rituals should enact the paradox of gathering a holy assembly around the image of a corpse. The central actions and words of the Eucharist do just that, the remembrance of a man who takes upon himself his death in the hope that the Father will make something new out of it. The gestures of the Last Supper express belief in God's power to create out of nothing. Here are the roots of a doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. But maybe this gesture, which is 'holy' in a paradoxical, ironic sense, is often contradicted by rituals which suggest a more levitical theology of the priesthood.

Hebrews does not say anything about a special group of ordained priests within the community. This does not mean that there should not be such a group; just that we must test its constitution and function against Hebrews' theology of holiness. Christ is, of course, *the* high priest, but we have seen that his priesthood is, like the Good, *diffusivum sui*; it communicates itself. It follows that any particular ministry in the Church can only be justified in so far as it nourishes and realises the priesthood of the whole community. Something has gone wrong if, for example, the presbyterate has the effect of concealing or qualifying the priesthood of the whole body of Christ. What is theologically primary is the priesthood

of the people; because of the complex, social nature of human beings, this needs a body like the presbyterate to be effective. Certainly Hebrews offers no support for the idea of an exclusively male presbyterate. This may be justified on other grounds, but the male/female polarity appears to be one of those binary oppositions so beloved of levitical theology. It is one of those fundamental polarities which were articulated by the ritual of the Temple, whereas in Hebrews the holiness of God is disclosed in God's grasping and transforming the other. Hebrews is certainly antipatriarchal. Melchizedek is the man without genealogy, without father or mother, who belongs to no lineage of male descent. His priesthood is placed in opposition to that of 'dying men' (7:8), who are priests in virtue of being sons and grandsons. It is Abraham, explicitly identified as 'patriarch', the source of fatherhood, who offers tithes to the one without children. (Now, if one were really desperate, one might use this as a rather feeble argument for an unmarried priesthood, but not for an exclusively male one!)

Hebrews does suggest one fruitful line for a theology of priesthood. Its author writes, 'Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God.' (13:7) There are some people within the community, leaders, who have the task of speaking the word, and this speaking of the word of God is clearly, for him, a priestly work. The letter starts with God speaking the word: 'In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son ...' (1:1). It is through the speaking of a word that God brings the world into existence, and the final form of that creative word is Jesus' priestly act of dying and rising, of making the sacrifice that completes creation. If the cult is seen as symbolic of God's creative activity, then our cult must involve speaking a creative word that makes and remakes our world. And this is precisely what Hebrews itself does. It is a recreative word that lifts the drooping arms and strengthens the weak knees. It is a word of exhortation (13:22), that mediates the word that is Christ. It communicates Christ's solidarity with us in our weakness. It is a consecrating, perfecting word, that grasps these discouraged people in their alienation, and claims their experience for the sacred. So the letter itself is a sort of reaching out, an extension of Christ's drawing close. In fact the author even seems to identify his words with those of Christ at one point: 'See that you do not refuse him who is speaking.' (One assumes this to be the author). 'For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them from earth, much less shall we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven.' (12:25) To conclude, any form of ministry that looks to Hebrews for justification must be seen to speak a word that gathers people into God's sabbath rest, that brings in those who feel themselves to be unclean, impure, weak and suffering, overthrowing the distinction between lay and priest.

- 1 Carol Newsom, *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice: A Critical edition*. Harvard Semitic Studies 27, Atlanta, 1985, p. 72.
- 2 On the chariot mysticism of these early rabbis, see Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven, a Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity*, London, 1982, esp pp. 269—348.
- 3 Cf. eg., Bruce Malina, *The New Testament World*, London, 1981, pp. 122—152.
- 4 Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Prophecy and Canon, A Contribution to the Study of Jewish Origins*, Notre Dame and London, 1977, pp. 54—79.
- 5 *Jewish Ant.* III, 123.
- 6 *De Spec. Leg.* 1.66.
- 7 cf *Bereshith R.* 1:1, and *The Testament of Adam*.
- 8 J. Neusner, *The Idea of Purity in Ancient Judaism*, Brill, 1973. The reply to Neusner by Mary Douglas, p. 139.
- 9 Luc de Heusch, *Sacrifice in Africa, a Structuralist Approach*, Manchester, 1985, p.50.
- 10 *ibid.*, p. 200.
- 11 cf. Jonathan Goldstein, 'The Origins of the Doctrine of *Creatio ex Nihilo*', *The Journal of Jewish Studies*, Vol 35, 1984, pp. 127—135.
- 12 cf Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: an analysis of the concepts of pollution and taboo*, London, 1966.
- 13 J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, London, 1967, pp 147—159.
- 14 Albert Vanhoye, *Old Testament Priests and The New Priest*, Leominster, 1986, pp 130—133.
- 15 L. Wittgenstein, 'Grammar tells us what kind of object anything is (Theology as Grammar)', *Philosophical Investigations*, 373, ed. G.E.M. Anscombe and R. Rhees, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, Oxford, 1953.
- 16 *op. cit.*, p. 282.
- 17 cf 'koinos', F. Hauck, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Kittel; Michigan, 1965, Vol. 3, pp 800—803.
- 18 *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*, ed. Rush Rhees, trans. A.C. Miles and R. Rhees, Retford, 1979, p. 7.
- 19 Fergus Kerr OP, *Theology after Wittgenstein*, Oxford, 1986, p. 163.

Questioning the Idea of 'Lay' Ministries

Kathleen Walsh

Where are we in terms of lay ministries?

Two words sum up the present situation of the Church, 'ambivalence' and 'confusion'. On the one hand, we have hierarchical structures and inevitably, we are steeped in hierarchical language and assumptions. Beside this we have an increasing vocabulary acknowledging and inviting 'participation' and 'equality', issuing from the senior hierarchy and directed especially to the 'laity'.

Take the New Code of Canon Law, for instance. Can 208 reads:
 Flowing from their rebirth in Christ, there is a genuine equality of dignity and action among all of Christ's faithful.