As the Diocese of Sydney in Australia pushes for lay presidency at the eucharist, and the laity are rightly reclaiming proper responsibilities in the life of the Anglican church, the research of Littler, Francis and Martineau provides a powerful ingredient to the debate about appropriate patterns of authority, accountability and involvement for clergy and laity.

The survey demonstrates that key areas of lay involvement in liturgical ministry are greeted with caution by the majority of rural Anglican churchgoers, particularly those aged 65 years and over.

Moreover occasional churchgoers are less favourably disposed to lay liturgical ministry than those who attend every week. The least acceptable area for liturgical lay ministry is baptism: the moment where life is recognised as particularly precious.

Is the message to be interpreted along the lines that older people are conservative and opposed to change, while the romantic notions of outsiders must be resisted as similarly outdated projections likely to hinder a go-ahead, relevant church membership seeking to find appropriate forms of worship for a post-modern age? Or do the elderly and the outsiders point to more profound insights easily overlooked by the enthusiasm of those concerned to be contemporary and in charge: rather like God's way of working through pregnant pensioners such as Sarah (Genesis 13) and Elizabeth (Luke 1), or rank outsiders such as the poor, women, the sick, and those who know their need of medicine not available through a simple worldly prescription?

The case for lay liturgical involvement is summarised in the quotation from Hoge (1987, 182)

'if the function is really needed, someone must be found'

Greenwood (1994) puts this notion in more overtly theological language: the ordained can no longer be 'an omnicompetent icon of Christ', but must become 'a facilitator more primus inter pares than authoritarian and working with a trained and responsible laity'.
Yet the caution and resistance of the rural laity seem strangely uneasy with such politically correct inclusivism, particularly with regard to baptism where the uniqueness of being is acknowledged, and eucharist, where God is most especially present through bread and wine. Their resistance is not good news for a liberal, democratic culture which defines goodness by the amount of participation that can be achieved (from share owning to regionalism).

At the root of this debate is a profound theological question about God, the nature of worship and the place of religion in human culture.

For Christians God is made manifest in Jesus Christ — Son of God: Son of Man. In Christ human being is called into deity: mortality into immortality, imperfection into perfection: falleness into salvation. We are called to be something contiguous with, but radically other than we are in this world. People coming for baptism sense something of this possibility and its desirability. Until relatively recently the eucharist has been about new life in Christ rather than a model of human community.

Worship is where this call and this process is given particular focus and distinctiveness. This works by the process of liminality (from the Latin limen, threshold) as developed in Van Gennep's (1960) ideas about rites of passage. His work applies to rituals of initiation and any change of social status. In terms of worship, we are invited to prepare for an act of separation from everyday human living: then to participate in a separate, distinctive ritual activity which connects us more deeply with the otherness of God, our greater reality (entrance into a new status) and finally we must return to human everydayness and be reincorporated into normal living, though with renewed confidence in our ultimate possibility and destination. (See Turner, 1969, 1978).

We can see this process in the story of the Burning Bush (Exodus 3) — where Moses is called to remove his shoes and stand on holy ground; — he sees the bush burned but not consumed; then he re-engages with normal life inspired by this taste of God's otherness which invites and includes him. The same process can be seen to characterise the Exodus, Baptism, the Eucharist, each church service: For example, in Baptism people come into a special space (preparing for separation), join in a ritual which uses an ordinary substance (water) in an extraordinary way (blessing) to associate the baptised with the greaterness of God, goodness and immortality, and then there are photos and a party to re-engage with everyday life. This profound process enables worship — engagement with the otherness of God which touches and transforms ordinary human being through the ritual of life (as mortal, incomplete), resurrection (new life offered and tasted) and