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ECCLESIOLOGY 18 (2022) 99–117



# Diaconates in Transition: Enriching the Roman Catholic Permanent Diaconate from the Experience of the Church of England and British Methodism

*A Receptive Ecumenical Approach*

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## Abstract

The Roman Catholic Church, the Church of England and the British Methodist Church have retained or restored the diaconate. These diaconates remain distinctive and capable of further change. This article uses a receptive ecumenical approach to ask what the Roman Catholic Church can learn or receive with integrity from the diaconate in the Church of England and British Methodism. The first section examines the reassessment of the diaconate of service by John N. Collins. The next two sections explore specific learning opportunities from the Church of England Distinctive Diaconate and the British Methodist Diaconal Order. The fourth section examines the way that British Methodism has become alert to the possibilities of unhealthy notions of diaconal service. The final section explores work towards the interchangeability of deacons, concluding that, in the development of the diaconate, the current historical moment provides opportunities for ecclesial learning and perhaps a step towards visible unity.

## Keywords

receptive ecumenism – permanent diaconate – distinctive diaconate – Methodist Diaconal Order – Roman Catholic Church – Church of England – British Methodist Church – John N. Collins

The Roman Catholic Church, the Church of England and the Methodist Church of Great Britain have restored or established the diaconate as a permanent or distinctive order of ministry. Although sharing many similarities, the diaconates of these churches have distinctive theologies, histories and current expressions; moreover, in each communion the modern diaconate has evolved relatively quickly and remains capable of further change. This situation presents real opportunities for each church to learn from the experience of the others. In what follows, I will use the approach of receptive ecumenism as developed by Paul D. Murray at Durham University's Centre for Catholic Studies to explore what the Roman Catholic Church can learn or receive with integrity from the diaconate in the Church of England and British Methodism.<sup>1</sup> Receptive ecumenism takes seriously both the current ecumenical reality and the imperative to work towards 'visible structural and sacramental unity'.<sup>2</sup> The three following sections will explore the *current ecumenical reality*. The first will examine the research of John N. Collins into the Greek word *diakonia* and its cognates.<sup>3</sup> Section two will look at the learning from of a plurality of ministries in the Church of England. Section three will discuss what can be received from the Methodist Diaconal Order (MDO). The fourth section will then examine the potential learning for the Roman Catholic Church from the way in which British Methodism has become alert to the possibilities of unhealthy notions of servanthood associated with the diaconate. The final section will explore work towards *visible unity*, asking what can be learned from the way that the Church of England and British Methodists are exploring the interchangeability of deacons. It will conclude that in the development of the modern diaconate the current historical moment provides fruitful opportunities for ecclesial learning; moreover, it is perhaps a uniquely opportune moment for taking a further step towards the visible unity for which Christians long.

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- 1 See Paul D. Murray, 'Introducing Receptive Ecumenism', *The Ecumenist* 2 (2014), pp. 1–9. Paul D. Murray, 'Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning: Receiving Gifts for Our Needs', *Louvain Studies*, 33 (2008), pp. 30–45. Paul D. Murray, 'Discerning the Call of the Spirit to Theological-Ecclesial Renewal: Notes on Being Reasonable and Responsible in Receptive Ecumenical Learning' in *Leaning into the Spirit: Ecumenical Perspectives on Discernment and Decision-making in the Church*, ed. Virginia Miller, David Moxon, & Stephen Pickard (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 217–234.
  - 2 Paul D. Murray, 'In Search of a Way', in Geoffrey Wainwright and Paul McPartlan (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Ecumenism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199600847.013.45, p. 9.
  - 3 John N. Collins, *Diakonia: Re-Interpreting the Ancient Sources* (Oxford: Oxford Scholarship Online, 2011), DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195396027.001.0001.

## The Reception of *Diakonia*

The publication in 1990 of *Diakonia: Re-Interpreting the Ancient Sources* by John N. Collins was a watershed moment in our understanding of the diaconate. Collins traces the source of the modern understanding of the diaconate to the entry in Kittel's dictionary of 1935 by H. W. Beyer, a professor at Greifswald in north-east Germany. Sitting behind Beyer's dictionary was the doctoral dissertation of Wilhelm Brandt whom Collins describes as heavily involved with the Lutheran 'Inner Mission', an organisation which saw 'Diakonie' as 'a service of love', a view arising out of the humble practical service of orders of deaconesses within German Lutheranism. Collins cites Brandt's introduction which states that 'the book's main purpose is to present Jesus the Servant'. Collins's crucial claim is that 'all advocacy of "diakonia" is ultimately founded on the work of one or other of these writers'.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the foundational linguistic works on *diakonia*, rather than being wholly objective studies of ancient usage, were themselves influenced by the pre-existing view of *diakonia* as humble service which had developed within nineteenth-century German Lutheranism.

Collins's own comprehensive review of ancient Christian and non-Christian sources finds that this idea of menial service is unsupported. Instead, he finds that the meanings of *diakonia* cluster around three areas of usage: first, the deacon is a 'courier' or 'go-between',<sup>5</sup> secondly a representative or ambassador,<sup>6</sup> and thirdly an attendant upon an individual or household – and not merely a table waiter.<sup>7</sup> This fundamental reassessment of what a deacon was in early Christianity was initially particularly challenging to those churches of the Reformation which had developed a diaconate of service.<sup>8</sup> Collins's

4 Collins, *Diakonia*, ch. 1, pp. 1–3.

5 *Ibid.*, ch. 4.

6 *Ibid.*, ch. 10.

7 *Ibid.*, ch. 7.

8 The Roman Catholic Permanent Diaconate has a more complex origin. It was restored by Pope Paul VI in 1967, following the Second Vatican Council document *Lumen Gentium*, as a threefold ministry of liturgy, word and charity but with service as an overarching category. Its inception was further complicated in *Ad Gentes* which suggested it was needed to 'strengthen' men already engaged in diaconal activities. See Paul VI, *Sacrum Diaconatus Ordinem* (1967), at [http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/motu\\_proprio/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_motu-proprio\\_19670618\\_sacrum-diaconatus.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_p-vi_motu-proprio_19670618_sacrum-diaconatus.html), §.1.1. Second Vatican Council, 'Lumen Gentium' (1964), at [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html), §.29. Second Vatican Council, *Ad Gentes* (1965), at [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651207\\_ad-gentes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html), §.16 [all accessed 01-04-2021].

work has been a major influence on subsequent writings on the diaconate,<sup>9</sup> being referenced not only in academic works but incorporated into a number of British Methodist and Church of England publications on the diaconate.<sup>10</sup> Roman Catholic publications do not explicitly cite Collins but his influence can perhaps be detected – for example in the reference in 2002 to the ‘historical method’.<sup>11</sup> The debate following Collins’s work has allowed for a widening and freeing of our understanding of *diakonia*. We see this, for example, in the Church of England: just prior to the publication of *Diakonia*, the church had produced a report entitled *Deacons in the Ministry of the Church* (1988) which envisaged a narrow diaconate heavily focused on self-giving service. In contrast, the 2001 report *For Such a Time as This* sees the diaconate as the foundational ministry but rather than rooted in service, it is foundational because of its ‘connecting, bridging role’.<sup>12</sup> Once the concept of *diakonia* was freed from being shackled to the idea of menial service, and scholars and churches had sufficient time to explore other ideas of the diaconate, somewhat paradoxically it became easier also to see the value of the very idea of service which Collins threw into question.<sup>13</sup> Hence a recent British Methodist document

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- 9 The implications for radically rethinking vocations ministry are touched upon in Frederick C. Bauerschmidt, ‘The Deacon and Sacramental Character’ in D. Michael Jackson (ed.), *The Diaconate in Ecumenical Perspective* (Durham: Sacristy Press, 2019), pp. 24–32 (at p. 30).
- 10 Faith and Order Committee, *The Theology and Ecclesiology Underpinning the Diaconate – Interim Report* (London: The Methodist Conference, 2016), <https://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-2016-33-Theology-Underpinning-the-Diaconate.pdf> [accessed 20-08-2021] §.2.3.5-2.3.8, pp. 5–6. Barry Rogerson *et al.*, *For Such a Time as This: a Renewed Diaconate in the Church of England* (London: Church House Publishing, 2001), pp. 31–38. The Faith and Order Advisory Group of the Church of England, *The Mission and Ministry of the Whole Church Biblical, Theological and Contemporary Perspectives*, (2007) at <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2018-01/The%20Mission%20and%20Ministry%20of%20the%20Whole%20Church.pdf> [accessed 04-09-2021], pp. 18–24.
- 11 International Theological Commission (ITC), ‘From the *Diakonia* of Christ to the *Diakonia* of the Apostles’ (2002), at [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_pro\\_05072004\\_diaconate\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_pro_05072004_diaconate_en.html), introduction [accessed 31-03-2021]. Collins anticipated a differing reception of his work in the Roman Catholic church because service is only one aspect of the Catholic Permanent Diaconate; however, he also noted that in practice – and in journals – it was service that was emphasised. Collins, *Diakonia*, ‘Afterword’, pp. 2–3.
- 12 All ministry has this ‘connecting, bridging role’ but it is because all ministry is ‘grounded in *diakonia*.’ The diaconate is ‘the *sine qua non* of all ordained ministry, the base-line, the template on which it is fashioned’. Rogerson, *For Such a Time*, pp. 8, 37. There is not the space here to discuss the implications of the fact (highlighted in the report itself) that these two reports straddle the ordination of women to the presbyterate in 1992 and the assumption of the 1988 report that most deacons would be women.
- 13 Perhaps retaining service as a category of importance could stem from the *Sensus Fidelium*. See, for example: International Theological Commission, ‘Sensus Fidei in the Life of the

gives the balanced view that '[a]cts of mercy and loving kindness continue to be a feature of the ministry of deacons, but are an aspect, not the entirety of it'.<sup>14</sup> This stance brings both churches closer to the Roman Catholic view of a 'diaconal portfolio'<sup>15</sup> in which service is both an aspect of a threefold diaconate ministry (of liturgy, word and charity) and an overarching category.<sup>16</sup> Despite these convergences, the actual configuration of the diaconal portfolio continues to vary between churches. This surely is a 'legitimate diversity'<sup>17</sup> and one which presents ecumenical learning opportunities to which I will now turn.

### The Church of England Distinctive Diaconate

In recent years, the Church of England has pulled off something quite remarkable: it has retained the threefold ministry of bishop, priest and deacon<sup>18</sup> whilst simultaneously creating a plethora of fresh expressions of ministry. Among these are: local ministry teams, ordained local ministry, non-stipendiary or self-supporting ministry, lay readers and lay parish assistants.<sup>19</sup> Of the many learning points which could be drawn from this, I will focus on team ministry, the issue of 'overlap', the implications for deacons who are chaplains and the implications of lay ministry for diaconal formation.

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Church' (2014), at [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_20140610\\_sensus-fidei\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20140610_sensus-fidei_en.html) [accessed 31-03-2021].

14 Faith and Order Committee, *The Theology and Ecclesiology Underpinning the Diaconate and the Methodist Diaconal Order*, §. 2.2.9.

15 The phrase 'diaconal portfolio' is used by the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales in their articulation of the theology of the diaconate. Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, *Directory for the Formation of Permanent Deacons in England and Wales* (June 2010), at <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/home/the-church/catholic-bishops-conference-of-england-and-wales/documents-and-publications/permanent-diaconate-directory-2010/>, p. 13 [accessed 31-03-2021].

16 See note 8 and O'Donnell, 'Servant', p. 862.

17 '[L]egitimate diversity is in no way opposed to the Church's unity, but rather enhances her splendour and contributes greatly to the fulfilment of her mission.' John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint: on Commitment to Ecumenism* (25 May 1995), at [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_25051995\\_ut-unum-sint.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint.html), §. 50 [accessed 31-03-2021].

18 Church of England, 'Introduction by the House of Bishops', *Common Worship*, at <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/ministry/common-worship-ordination> [accessed 02-04-2021].

19 Rogerson, *For Such a Time*, pp. 45, 49, 62–63, 39–42, 43–45.

Roman Catholic parishes are increasingly forming ‘clusters’.<sup>20</sup> These are generally groups of three or four churches under the care of one – increasingly time-pressured – priest. Deacons usually stay within their ‘home’ church although they may be appointed to clusters. The parish council may exist at an individual parish or a cluster level. The current *Code of Canon Law* stipulates that a priest must ‘direct’ the pastoral care of a parish or cluster but that a deacon, lay person or group may have a ‘share’ in the pastoral care.<sup>21</sup> Juridically, this gives clusters the scope to learn from the Church of England experience of team ministry.<sup>22</sup> The key learning point here is in the idea of a ‘team’: rather than a top-down participation by deacons and laity in the ministry of the priest a more innovative approach would be a bottom-up team whose creative contributions were ‘moderated’<sup>23</sup> by a priest. Learning from the Church of England experience of local ministry teams includes: the necessity of an agreed mission strategy and systematic outreach, varying degrees of formal commitment, proper assessment and use of the gifts of laity and clergy and clarity that ministry belongs to the whole body of Christ and not just the clergy – whose role is ‘representative’.<sup>24</sup> It has been suggested that such arrangements will ‘make good on what Pope Francis calls “synodality”’.<sup>25</sup> This is true, but juridically synodality has a restricted meaning. Synodality means that regional synods of bishops can make decisions about their own territory as long as the pope agrees with them. It does not mean the laity must be involved

20 Marcus J. Pound and Paul D. Murray, *Receptive Ecumenism and the Local Church: A Comparative Research Project in the North East of England – Project Report for the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle* (2016), p. 229.

21 Catholic Church, *The Code of Canon Law*, at [https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/cic\\_index\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/cic_index_en.html), can.517 [accessed 09-04-2021].

22 Pound and Murray, *Local Church*, p. 17.

23 The connotations of moderator here are important: rather than top-down leadership, moderating implies ensuring that leadership from below remains within the church's accepted boundaries. The idea of a ‘moderator’ has a venerable history in some Reformed traditions such as the Church of Scotland. It is also found in the Catholic tradition. The Carmelite Third Order (Secular) of the British Province of Carmelites, provides an interesting example. Juridically the Prior Provincial of the First Order is responsible for Lay Carmel. Until 2017 he appointed a Delegate to oversee the Third Order on a day-to-day basis. In 2017 a Moderator was elected by a free ballot of Lay Carmelites and her appointment confirmed by the Prior Provincial thus fulfilling the requirements of canon law. This not only provided a good example of subsidiarity in the church but also advanced a woman to a national leadership position within a mix-gender religious order. Carmelite Order, ‘The Carmelite Third Order (Secular)’, <https://www.carmelite.org/family/lay-carmel/carmelite-third-order-secular-4> [accessed 15-04-2021].

24 Rogerson, *For Such a Time*, pp. 43–45.

25 Pound and Murray, *Local Church*, p. 17.

in decision making. In *Evangelii Gaudium* Francis calls for bishops to use the existing structures of canon law to encourage lay involvement. The canons that he refers to discuss the diocesan and parish council. The key canons 466 and 514 are clear that legislative authority resides solely in the bishop, everyone else – including deacons and priests – have only a ‘consultative vote’.<sup>26</sup> This is an example of the inconsistency between the *ad intra* and the *ad extra* view of subsidiarity within the Roman Catholic Church. Catholic social teaching proposes the principle of subsidiarity whereby higher-order bodies ‘help’ lower-order bodies but do not arrogate their functions or decision making.<sup>27</sup> It has struggled to apply this principle within the church: here, for instance, it seems unlikely that a local bishop would be better placed to direct parishes than parish councils would be. Conversely, the Church of England canons provide for sharing decision making between a House of Laity, House of Clergy and House of Bishops. The Roman Catholic Church could learn from this subsidiarity at least at the parish level.<sup>28</sup>

What would be the distinctive role of the deacon within this team ministry? The Church of England does not shy away from the fact that the diaconate overlaps the ministry of the laity and the presbyterate, indeed it foregrounds that fact.<sup>29</sup> Pointing to the Holy Trinity as a model, it asserts that all ordained ministry will overlap with lay ministry because ‘the work entrusted to the church is an integrated whole, not a random assortment of discrete functions’.<sup>30</sup> However, there is something which is central to diaconal ministry: ‘[t]he touchstone of a renewed diaconate is whether it builds up the diverse gifts and callings of the members of the Body of Christ’.<sup>31</sup> Within the team, the deacon is the one who facilitates and encourages the talents, the charisms of other team members. Conceptually, for the Church of England this is due

26 Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, at [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html#\\_ftn34](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html#_ftn34) [accessed 03-04-2021], §.31.

27 Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Washington: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004), §.185–188, pp. 81–83.

28 Notwithstanding the difference in the parliamentary/consensus models of the two churches. See Church of England, *Canons – Website Edition*, at <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/leadership-and-governance/legal-services/canons-church-england/canons-website-edition> [accessed 03-04-2021], section H.

29 Rogerson, *For Such a Time*, pp. 36–37.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 46. See also The Church of England, *Common Worship: The Ordination of Deacons*, at <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/ministry/common-worship-ordination-0#mm012> [accessed 04-09-2021] where the deacon is to make the worshipping community ‘better equipped’.

to the centrality of the ‘connecting, bridging’ role of the deacon. Building up the talents of others may be an active co-ordinating role but it may also be an ostensibly passive role in which the deacon is simply ‘there’ – ontologically – ‘not just any old presence, but ... presence as a deacon and representative of the Church’.<sup>32</sup>

The Roman Catholic Church could also learn from the Church of England’s experience of Ordained Local Ministry whereby restrictions on, for example, deployment are put in place. The so called *virī probati* could be such an example where deployment could be restricted to a local church or chaplaincy.<sup>33</sup> However, this step would depend upon the ordination of married men to the presbyterate, not only to the diaconate as now. This could increase access to the Eucharist and to the sacraments of anointing of the sick and reconciliation. Currently, there are many permanent deacons who work as chaplains in hospitals. These deacons are able to bring viaticum to the dying, but are not able to anoint or hear confessions. This is a severe restriction on their ability to exercise the proper functions of a Roman Catholic chaplain. A *vir probatus* chaplain could prevent someone from dying without their receiving the sacrament of reconciliation.<sup>34</sup> However, administration of these sacraments would be inappropriate for permanent deacons as it would be likely to detract from the distinctive nature of the diaconate; indeed, the British Methodist Church has recently prevented deacons exercising eucharistic presidency for that very reason.<sup>35</sup> The point here is that this issue suggests that further clarification of

32 Todd Stockdale and Andrew Orton, ‘The Contemporary Nature of Diaconal Ministry in British Methodism: Purposes and Processes of Good Practice’, *Theology and Ministry* 2 (2013): 4.1–19, ISSN 2049–4513, p. 4.11.

33 The idea of ordaining older married men to the priesthood was widely touted during the Amazon synod in 2019, but it was conspicuously absent from the concluding document *Querida Amazonia*. Francis gives a helpful explanation of why this was so in *Let us Dream* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2020), pp. 89–91, where he also calls for more permanent deacons.

34 This scenario, of course, implies that some permanent deacons want to be ordained to the presbyterate. The issue of reconciliation and anointing was highlighted in a piece of unpublished research into the Roman Catholic diaconate from 2006. It is captured well in the words of one deacon respondent: ‘Not being able to anoint the sick and dying (especially) when they are genuinely seeking/requiring this sacrament is most stressful. There is a sense in which you feel you have let them down.’ See Brendan Geary and Joseph Kendall, *The Diaconate in Scotland, England and Wales: A Demographic Profile and an Investigation of Well-Being and Diaconal Identity. Presentation of Results from the Ushaw Survey on the Diaconate in Scotland, England and Wales* (Ushaw College, 2006), p. 29.

35 Faith and Order Committee, *Diaconate* (2019), resolution 25/9. Curiously, British Methodist laity may still exercise eucharistic presidency on some occasions. Does this mean ordination of a lay person to the diaconate diminishes their ecclesial functions?



the Roman Catholic permanent diaconate would be helpful. Is hospital chaplaincy an appropriate role for a deacon or would it be better filled by a priest for reasons of access to the sacraments? If it would be better filled by a priest, why are the roles currently being filled by permanent deacons? If the Roman Catholic diaconal ministry could be compared to the ministry of *viri probati*, then the distinctive nature of each of these ministries would stand out more clearly.<sup>36</sup>

The time is perhaps now ripe for the Roman Catholic Church to learn from the Church of England's experience of lay readers and lay parish assistants. The question of ordaining women to the diaconate deserves a separate paper and cannot be covered here; however, the fact that both the Church of England and the Methodist Church of Great Britain admit women to all the orders that they recognise, whereas the Roman Catholic Church ordains women to none of them, cannot go unremarked. The more restricted point that I want to make here follows from Pope Francis's recent letter admitting women to the lay ministries of lector and acolyte.<sup>37</sup> This letter regularised widespread practice, but in doing so it has opened new questions and ecumenical possibilities. Like Church of England readers and assistants, lectors and acolytes could receive training, a rite of admittance and appropriate vesture, such as the alb. Local diaconate formation programmes could include those male and female Catholics who were to be lectors and acolytes learning side by side with future deacons. This would have beneficial effects for the learning and team-working of all parties. Francis's rooting of these ministries in baptism also has ecumenical implications. British Methodism, to which we now turn, is particularly clear that the whole church is diaconal.<sup>38</sup>

### The Methodist Diaconal Order

Of the many learning opportunities for the Roman Catholic Church presented by the Methodist Diaconal Order (MDO), I want to focus here on those presented by the fact that 'deacons in the British Methodist Church are in the distinctive position of belonging to both an order of ministry and a religious

36 On the question whether a those currently serving as permanent deacons feel called to the presbyterate, or would benefit from further discernment see note 78 below.

37 Pope Francis, 'Spiritus Domini' at [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu\\_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20210110\\_spiritus-domini.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20210110_spiritus-domini.html) [accessed 02-04-2021].

38 Faith and Order Committee, *Diaconate* (2019), §.2.1.6.

order'.<sup>39</sup> This duality offers learning both to Roman Catholic religious orders and to the secular clergy. In the Western Church, the diaconate, except as a step towards the priesthood, went into decline during the Middle Ages and had largely disappeared by the twelfth century.<sup>40</sup> In a curious parallel, the mendicant orders developed as the diaconate died out, receiving official recognition in 1274.<sup>41</sup> These orders had clear diaconal features. Originally, they were itinerant, serving the needs of the people. Their members were not necessarily priests, or even ordained. The Carmelites began as anonymous 'brothers': the word 'friar' meaning brother,<sup>42</sup> and St. Francis is reputed to have remained a deacon.<sup>43</sup> The mendicants were disruptive to the established social order and the Second Council of Lyons suppressed newer orders.<sup>44</sup> Perhaps surprisingly, the modern diaconate has found little reception in Roman Catholic religious orders. The Franciscans, Dominicans and Carmelites will ordain to the diaconate, but in 2020 there were just six Carmelite permanent deacons among 1299 Carmelite priests worldwide<sup>45</sup> and the Vocations Director for the Jesuits in Britain admits to not knowing whether or not the Society accepts permanent deacons.<sup>46</sup>

39 Ibid., §.1.2.

40 O'Loughlin traces this to the *missa priuata* or low mass for which a deacon was unnecessary becoming the norm from around the time of Gregory the Great (590–604). See Thomas O'Loughlin, 'The Order of Deacons in Early Irish Canonical Sources: A Contribution to Understanding the Evolution of a 'Major Orders' in the Western Church', *Irish Theological Quarterly* 82/1 (2017), pp. 19–36, DOI: 10.1177/0021140016674277.

41 Richard W. Emery, 'The Second Council of Lyons and the Mendicant Orders', *The Catholic Historical Review* 39/3 (Oct. 1953), pp. 257–271, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25015608>.

42 Carmelite Order, *Rule of St. Albert*, at <http://www.carmelites.ie/Rule.pdf> [accessed 03-04-2021].

43 Thomas of Celano, *First and Second Lives of Saint Francis* (trans. David Burr), at <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/stfran-lives.asp> [accessed 20-08-2021].

44 For 'the subversive character of δῆλον' see Ashley Beck, 'Who Is Being Served At Tables? The Permanent Diaconate Today', *New Blackfriars* 100/1086, pp. 196–205, DOI:10.1111/nbfr.12443.

45 Carmelite Order, *Carmelites Around the World* (2020), <https://ocarm.org/en/carmelites-around-the-world/friars>. Figures for the Franciscans and Dominicans were not readily available but there appear to be at least one of each; see Steve Swope, *Franciscan Permanent Deacon Nicholas Wolfla* (2016), <https://deaconsview.com/2016/01/19/franciscan-permanent-deacon-nicholas-wolfla/>. Dismas Sayre, *Can one be ordained as a permanent deacon in the Dominican Order?* (2017) <https://www.quora.com/Can-one-be-ordained-as-a-permanent-deacon-in-the-Dominican-Order> [all accessed 03-04-2021].

46 Jesuit Order, *Jesuit Vocations*, <https://www.jesuit.org.uk/vocations/ask-question> [accessed 03-04-2021].

What could Roman Catholic religious orders learn from the Methodist Diaconal Order? It has a rule of life, an apostolate and a sense of vocation.<sup>47</sup> It captures something of its charism through core symbolism.<sup>48</sup> The MDO is a community, built on prayer and responding to need.<sup>49</sup> It thus affirms the features of those non-monastic orders like the mendicants and Jesuits whose service is rooted in contemplation<sup>50</sup> and fraternity/sorority. It is truly a religious order,<sup>51</sup> but its membership is restricted to those who also minister as deacons in the British Methodist Church.<sup>52</sup> The MDO therefore affirms the importance of charism as developed and transmitted within religious orders and the importance of charism as developed within diaconal ministry. In so doing it challenges religious orders within the Roman Catholic Church, particularly mendicant orders who began as 'brothers' rather than 'fathers', by offering an example of a return to their mendicant origins and simultaneously an adaptation to the needs of today.<sup>53</sup> It is unlikely that a single diaconal order would be appropriate in the Roman Catholic Church, but existing orders could more effectively take advantage of the restored diaconate to transmit their varied charisms. Currently it is unclear where deacons fit in the first, second, third order model.<sup>54</sup> An unmarried deacon who joined the community would be a member of the first order; a deacon who was married or whose attraction to the charism came only after ordination would join a third order. The lack of a clear structural fit for the deacon and the paucity of deacons in religious orders cannot be unrelated facts.

The MDO provides a similar challenge to the secular clergy. *The Code of Canon Law* provides for a Council of Priests in each diocese.<sup>55</sup> This council is to 'assist the bishop' both for the 'governance of the diocese' and the 'pastoral

47 Faith and Order Committee, *Diaconate* (2019), §.3.3.2-3.3.4.

48 Cf. Carmelite core symbols of the mountain, *hortus conclusus*, and desert. The MDO's bowl and towel symbol may capture something about service but it is not unproblematic, as British Methodism recognises: Faith and Order Committee, *Diaconate* (2019), §. 3.4.2.

49 Faith and Order Committee, *Diaconate* (2019), §.4.3-4.5.

50 Whether as a 'contemplative community at the service of God's people' (Carmelite) or as 'contemplation in action' (Jesuit).

51 Faith and Order Committee, *Diaconate* (2019), §.3.3.6.

52 Faith and Order Committee, *Diaconate* (2019), resolution 25/2.

53 As called for at Vatican II: Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae Caritatis*, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651028\\_perfectae-caritatis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_perfectae-caritatis_en.html), §.2 [accessed 07-04-2021].

54 Many Roman Catholic religious orders comprise a first order of male religious (priests and brothers), a second order of nuns and a third order of laity – although secular (diocesan) priests can also join third orders.

55 Catholic Church, *Code*, §. 495-502.

welfare' of the people. There is no corresponding Council of Deacons,<sup>56</sup> yet historically it was the deacon who was the bishop's assistant.<sup>57</sup> Prescinding from the question of governance, certainly pastoral welfare falls within the competencies of the deacon. Dioceses could organise their deacons more effectively and provide them with more support. Councils of deacons could provide similar support functions to the MDO and could even begin to develop distinctive regional charisms. In summary, the example of religious orders and secular clergy show that the Roman Catholic Church is still struggling both juridically and in terms of charism to incorporate the diaconate. How to do this is something it could learn from the MDO which provides deacons with 'high levels of organised mutual support [...] and enable[s] them to work collectively to promote and protect their ministry'.<sup>58</sup>

### Unhealthy Notions of Servanthood

In addition to learning from the strengths of the diaconate in the Church of England and British Methodism, perhaps the Roman Catholic Church could also learn from these churches' responses to problems that have been identified with their diaconates.<sup>59</sup> In interviews with British Methodist deacons in 2013, Stockdale and Orton found that the idea of service was central to the deacons' self-understanding; however, those interviewed were keen to distinguish between 'service' and 'being a doormat'.<sup>60</sup> This theme is taken up in the 2019 *Report* which discusses the central MDO symbol of the bowl and towel. The report discussed the 'problematic' nature of the symbolism which 'might be understood to perpetuate a narrative which equated diaconal ministry only with acts of mercy and loving kindness' and encouraged 'unhealthy notions of servanthood'. The *Report* suggested these negative aspects could be

56 The idea is mentioned by the ITC who merely note that it would need further study: ITC, *Diakonia*, VII, 111, 2.

57 Symbolised by ordination by the bishop alone, see ITC, *Diakonia*, ch. 3.

58 Andrew Orton, 'The diverse and contested diaconate: why understanding this ministry is crucial to the future of the Church', *International Journal of Practical Theology* 16/2 (2013), pp. 260–284 (at p. 278), DOI: <https://doi-org.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/10.1515/ijpt-2012-0017> [accessed 07-04-2021].

59 I am indebted to Anglican Deacon Jessica Foster who, after reading a draft of this essay, suggested that it was too rosy and that I should explore the difficulties faced by deacons in The Church of England and the British Methodist Church. Owing to restrictions of space, I have focused on just one issue.

60 Stockdale and Orton, 'Contemporary', pp. 4.12–4.14.

ameliorated by ‘being alert to how the symbols may be misused, and by making more explicit their broader meaning’.<sup>61</sup>

Perhaps the danger of restricting servanthood to the diaconate and thereby potentially implying that other sections of the ministry are exempt from the need to serve can be seen more easily in British Methodism owing to the practice of direct ordination to the diaconate or the presbyterate. In both the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England, a priest must first serve a period as a deacon, before their diaconate is supplemented by ordination as a priest, but in British Methodism, the presbyter is never ordained a deacon.<sup>62</sup> This is an important difference. If we imagine the circle as a metaphor for ministry, in the Church of England and Roman Catholicism, the diaconate forms the middle of three concentric circles (the other two being priest and bishop), whereas in British Methodism, the presbyter and deacon are conjoined semi-circles.<sup>63</sup> On the one hand, there is a certain honesty to this: ordinands do not have to make a public claim during their diaconal ordination that they feel called to the diaconate if they actually feel called to the presbyterate.<sup>64</sup> Yet on the other hand, at least theoretically, it separates the territory of the diaconate from that of the presbyterate implying that if the diaconate was conceived primarily as service, the presbyterate must be something other than service.<sup>65</sup>

The Roman Catholic Church could learn from the British Methodist foregrounding of the possibility of an unhealthy servanthood. Here I want to draw a distinction between a theoretical understanding of service and its practical outworking. Theoretically, in its theology of the diaconate, the Roman Catholic Church is clear that all Christians are called to serve by virtue of their baptism. Service cannot be outsourced, it is every Christian’s responsibility because each is a member of the body of the Christ who became ‘the *diakonos*, servant, of all’.<sup>66</sup> Yet in practice, the emphasis is often on the deacon as servant. For

61 Faith and Order Committee, *Diaconate* (2019), §.3.4.

62 Joint Implementation Commission, *Interim Report (2011) of the Joint Implementation Commission (Phase 2) under the Covenant between The Methodist Church of Great Britain and The Church of England* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing, 2011), §.31.

63 There being no order of bishops in British Methodism. If there were, the circle would be three equal sized wedges.

64 Alison Peden, ‘Integrity of Vocation and the Transitional Diaconate’, *Ecumenical Perspectives*, pp. 43–51 (p. 48). Peden also provides an amusing personal anecdote where she is told by her Anglican bishop to learn some humility after asking to go straight from laity to presbyterate because she feels she has no diaconal calling.

65 In reality, service remains an important part of the presbyterate in British Methodism: Methodist Conference, *What is a Presbyter?* (2002), <https://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-what-is-a-presbyter-2002.pdf>, p. 5 [accessed 03-05-2021].

66 ITC, *Diakonia*, §.1. The question of whether all Christians called to be the servant (δίακονος) of all or the slave (δούλος) of all remains pertinent to a theology of ministry (Mark 10:44).

example, in the homily during a recent ordination mass for 24 deacons from 13 countries at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, Cardinal Tagle was reported as repeatedly emphasising the role of humble service in the diaconate.<sup>67</sup> More locally, in my diocese, the first book provided to deacons in the propaedeutic year of formation gives a clear message with its title: *Washing Feet*.<sup>68</sup>

The Roman Catholic Church is hierarchical.<sup>69</sup> Normally, by its very nature a hierarchy implies power differentials. Ideally, in the church this should not be the case,<sup>70</sup> but in practice, from Acts 6 to *Lumen Gentium* Chapter 3, it has been. The effects of this 'pragmatic dissonance between the gospel and ecclesial practice' must not be underestimated.<sup>71</sup> In her analysis of the abuse crisis, Marie Keenan talked of the role of 'hierarchies of social power among men in the project of patriarchy'.<sup>72</sup> In the church, there has often been too ready an identification of the bishop with the power of God, the priest with the authority of the apostles and the deacon with the servant Christ.<sup>73</sup> Getting the theology right has not been enough to prevent the negative consequences of power differentials. Christine Firer-Hinze has suggested that the actions of those with and without power should be different. Those with power should display 'humility, listening, repentance, respectful space-giving, making way, giving and receiving' whereas those with less power<sup>74</sup> should develop 'self-esteem, courage, boldness, speaking the truth, resistance, forgiveness, patience'.<sup>75</sup>

67 'He underscored that "deacons are called to be living signs of Jesus, whose lordship is expressed in humble service to all" [...] He encouraged the new deacons to "show the world the greatness of humble service, which is the fruit of living in Jesus."' Vatican News, 'Cardinal Tagle: Deacons are called to be living signs of Jesus', <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2021-05/cardinal-tagle-deacons-are-called-to-be-living-signs-of-jesus.html> [accessed 02-05-2021].

68 Its christological implications notwithstanding. Thomas O'Loughlin, *Washing Feet: Imitating the Example of Jesus in the Liturgy Today* (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2015).

69 Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, ch. 3.

70 Matthew 20:26.

71 Gregory A. Ryan, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine in a Learning Church* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), ebook ISBN: 978-90-04-43640-4, p. 207.

72 Marie Keenan, *Child Sexual Abuse and the Catholic Church: Gender, Power, and Organizational Culture* (Oxford: Oxford Scholarship Online, 2012), DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199895670.001.0001, ch. 10, p. 5.

73 Ignatius of Antioch, 'Epistle to the Magnesians', <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0105.htm>, ch. 6 [accessed 03-05-2021].

74 Here, I necessarily focus on power differentials within the hierarchy. Clearly the issue of power differentials between those inside and those outside the hierarchy is much more important to a proper understanding of the abuse crisis.

75 Christine Firer-Hinze, 'Identity in Feminist Theological Debate', *Concilium* 2000/2, pp. 113–20 (at p. 118), quoted in Ryan, *Hermeneutics*, p. 207, n. 108.

Perhaps the British Methodist call of alertness to the possibility of the symbols of servanthood being misused and their suggestion these be located in the wider picture of the servant nature of all Christians provides a starting point for an appropriate set of behaviours for Roman Catholic deacons – which may need to be more assertive and challenging than is often the case currently.

Furthermore, the distinctiveness of the diaconal and presbyteral charisms and callings in British Methodism should encourage the Roman Catholic Church to reflect on the distinctiveness of its own Permanent Diaconate. *The Code of Canon Law* does not differentiate between the permanent and transitional diaconate except to grant a few exceptions to permanent deacons. These exceptions, such as not needing to wear clerical dress or pray all of the Office each day, being allowed to have a trade or to stand for public office, simply recognise that permanent deacons are not financially supported by the church and need to make a living.<sup>76</sup> The 1998 *Directory* takes a significant step towards a juridical circumscription of the permanent diaconate by attempting to prevent a married deacon becoming a priest even after the death of his wife.<sup>77</sup> However, does this make sense given that a transitional deacon remains permanently a deacon even after becoming a priest or a bishop? Currently, the permanent diaconate is the only option for married men who feel a calling to ordination. By proceeding to ordination, are all of these married men really affirming they are called to be deacons and not priests or are they actually affirming an undifferentiated call to ordained ministry?<sup>78</sup> Only when these men are given a choice between the presbyterate and the diaconate will the distinctive nature of the diaconate and its charism be fully understood within the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>79</sup>

76 Catholic Church, *Code*, Canons 276, 281, 288.

77 It allows for exceptional cases which it leaves undefined. Congregation for Catholic Education, Congregation for the Clergy, 'Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons and Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons' (1988), at [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccatheduc\\_doc\\_31031998\\_directorium-diaconi\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_31031998_directorium-diaconi_en.html) [accessed 01-04-2021], §1, 5.

78 The Roman Catholic Church could also learn from the Anglican selection process which presses candidates to articulate a distinctive calling to either the diaconate or the presbyterate: Rogerson, *For Such a Time*, p. 61. This practice makes sense only in the context of a real choice. Pressing married candidates in the Roman Catholic Church currently would force a choice, not between the diaconate and presbyterate but between the diaconate and laity. This is a false choice for a man who can articulate a call to ordination in a church that practices sequential ordination. Unpublished research from 2006 showed that 63.1% of a sample of British Catholic deacons under 65 years of age would proceed to presbyterial ordination if they were able to; see Geary and Kendall, *Ushaw Survey*, p. 8.

79 This applies *a fortiori* to the situation of women in the church. Thérèse of Lisieux provides a somewhat ironic example. She says: 'The vocation of a Priest! With what love, my Jesus,

## Towards the Interchangeability of Deacons

In this final section I will indicate some possible steps towards visible unity, but before doing so I will summarise what can be learned from the current ecumenical reality. First, the reception of the work of John N. Collins has freed the diaconate from being tied to the idea of menial service. This has allowed for diverse expressions of the diaconate whilst retaining the importance of servant ministry. Currently we see a legitimate diversity in the diaconate between the churches and different emphases in the diaconal portfolio of the individual deacon. Secondly, the Church of England experience has shown that it is possible to reconcile traditional and fresh expressions of ministry. These can have legitimate local variations and be organised into teams in which ordained and lay ministries overlap while allowing the diaconate to retain a distinctive value. Thirdly, the MDO has shown that diaconal ministry can be effectively combined with the distinctive charism of a religious order. In the MDO, deacons have access to mutual support in addition to the spiritual and ontological benefits of a religious order. Fourthly, British Methodism's call to be alert to the influence of unhealthy notions of servanthood is timely for a Roman Catholic Church struggling with the structural elements of the abuse crisis. Finally, the British Methodist practice of direct ordination draws attention to the dangers of any attempt to limit servanthood to a part of the ministry and to the difficulty of truly understanding the distinctiveness of the permanent diaconate while a free choice between ordination to the diaconate or the priesthood is not an option for the majority of Roman Catholics.

Overall, the emerging picture of the diaconate in the current ecumenical reality is of a single ministry with a plurality of expressions. In the current historical moment, these expressions are not fixed. There is 'an ecumenical ferment about the nature of the diaconate'<sup>80</sup> which makes this a particularly opportune moment to explore the possibility of taking a further step towards

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would I bear Thee in my hand, when my words brought Thee down from Heaven! With what love would I give Thee to souls! And yet, while longing to be a Priest, I admire and envy the humility of St. Francis of Assisi, and am drawn to imitate him by refusing the sublime dignity of the Priesthood. How reconcile these opposite tendencies? St. Francis is reputed to have chosen to remain a deacon because of his humility and overblown respect for the priesthood. Alternatively, and contrary to the passage quoted, Thérèse was unable to refuse the priesthood because it was not on offer; moreover, she was also unable to imitate St. Francis because the diaconate was not on offer either. Thérèse Martin, *The Story of a Soul (L'Histoire d'une Âme): The Autobiography of St. Thérèse of Lisieux. With Additional Writings and Sayings of St. Thérèse* (trans. Thomas Taylor), (Project Gutenberg, 2005), (UTF-8 ebook), <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/16772>.

80 Joint Implementation Commission, *Interim Report* (2011), §.22.



visible unity. Such a step could emerge from the final learning opportunity for the Roman Catholic Church which I want to outline here. This learning arises not from the Church of England or British Methodist communions individually, but in their efforts to work together.

Since 1967 the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission has aimed to facilitate reconciliation and unity. The process appeared to have stalled in the first decade of the twenty-first century, but it was revived in its current iteration (ARCIC III) by a receptive ecumenical approach.<sup>81</sup> Around the time of ARCIC III, the ecumenical dialogue between the Church of England and British Methodism was resulting in real structural progress, which was captured in an *Anglican-Methodist Covenant*.<sup>82</sup> This document, signed in 2003, entered the two churches into a covenant relationship with specific commitments. The latest ARCIC document has no section focusing on diaconal ministry *per se*.<sup>83</sup> There has been a similar Methodist-Catholic process which has also not focused specifically on the diaconate.<sup>84</sup> Conversely, the *Anglican-Methodist Covenant* has a specific section on the diaconate which calls for 'further theological convergence'.<sup>85</sup> The Covenant led to a Joint Implementation Commission and provoked serious attempts to clarify the theology of the diaconate within each church.<sup>86</sup> Because the diaconate does not involve eucharistic

81 Paul D. Murray, 'The Reception of ARCIC I and II in Europe and Discerning the Strategy and Agenda for ARCIC III', *Ecclesiology* 11.2 (2015), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/17455316-01102005>, pp. 199–218.

82 Methodist Church of Great Britain and The Church of England, 'An Anglican-Methodist Covenant', [http://www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/common\\_statement0506.pdf](http://www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/common_statement0506.pdf) [accessed 03-05-2021].

83 ARCIC III, *Walking Together on the Way: Learning to Be the Church – Local, Regional, Universal. An Agreed Statement of the Third Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission (Erfurt: 2017)* (London: SPCK, 2018). The document does have a good coverage of the diaconate overall (though not as extensive as of the priesthood).

84 A review of the Methodist-Roman Catholic International Commission documents on the Vatican website shows no mention of the diaconate in any document later than 2006. The 2006 document has a much briefer treatment of the diaconate than of the priesthood. The point here is not to criticise these documents but merely to note there are opportunities for a fuller treatment of the diaconate. See Joint Commission for Dialogue Between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council, *The Grace Given You in Christ: Catholics and Methodists Reflect Further on The Church (The Seoul Report)* (2006), <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-occidentale/consiglio-metodista-mondiale/dialogo.html> [accessed 20-08-2021].

85 Methodist Church of Great Britain and The Church of England, 'An Anglican-Methodist Covenant', §. 146–147.

86 David M. Chapman, 'Towards the Interchangeability of Anglican and Methodist Deacons', *Ecclesiology* 16 (2020) 34–55, doi:10.1163/17455316-01601004, p. 38. Chapman shows that the picture is more complex than at first appears.

presidency, it is often assumed that there are fewer obstacles to ecumenical reconciliation on this front.<sup>87</sup> Certainly, in the area of ‘charity’ there is no obvious reason why deacons could not take a cross-denominational lead. In the areas of liturgy and word, the picture is more problematic. David Chapman has traced the vicissitudes of the Anglican-Methodist dialogue and notes the disappointment felt by British Methodist deacons when in 2018 – fifteen years after the *Covenant* – the joint report *Mission and Ministry in Covenant* proposed putting the interchangeability of deacons on hold pending further dialogue and theological clarification.<sup>88</sup> Yet the British Methodist institutional response was swift and reassuring: the British Methodist Conference resolved to include the diaconate in all further reports and the 2019 *Diaconate* report clarified the British Methodist understanding of the theology of the diaconate.<sup>89</sup>

The Roman Catholic Church could learn from the Anglican-Methodist dialogue by initiating a diaconate-specific ecumenical process.<sup>90</sup> Chapman’s article provides some interesting categories which could be used to further theological convergence as part of such a process. These categories, taken from the Anglican-Lutheran dialogue are ‘*martyria* (witness), *diakonia* (service) and *leitourgia* (worship).’<sup>91</sup> These could be fruitfully compared with the Catholic categories of liturgy, word and charity, not in order to provide a precise alignment but rather to enhance the legitimate diversity of the ‘diaconal portfolio’ spoken of by the English Roman Catholic bishops. In the area of charity or service, the servant nature of the diaconate could be clarified. In the area of witness of word, the diaconate as a transmitter of charism could be developed, and in the area of liturgy or worship, the precise nature of the diaconate could become clearer if it were ever able to be juxtaposed with the service of *virī probatī*.

Because of the ecumenical ferment of the current historic moment in respect of the diaconate there is currently an opportune moment for ecclesial learning and perhaps for more. The overarching aim of any fruitful comparison of the diaconates in the three churches could be whether deacons could actually participate in the ministry of other churches. A diaconate-specific ecumenical process, as suggested above, could bring us closer to this. In his review of the possibilities for the interchangeability of Church of England and British

87 Ibid., p. 34.

88 Ibid., p. 39.

89 Ibid., p. 40.

90 For such a report in an Anglican-Lutheran context see Anglican-Lutheran International Commission, *The Hanover Report*, [https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/102181/the\\_hanover\\_report.pdf](https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/102181/the_hanover_report.pdf) [accessed 15/04/2021].

91 Ibid.

Methodist deacons, David Chapman, while fully aware of the difficulties of the current ecumenical reality, is still able to conclude with the suggestion that this could be a staging post towards the visible unity of the church.<sup>92</sup> Clearly the involvement of the Roman Catholic Church would be another such staging post – and one much further along the road. Taking a receptive ecumenical approach to the question of what the Roman Catholic Church can learn or receive with integrity from the diaconate in the Church of England and British Methodism at this particular historical moment may not light up this distant scene for us but it does promise to throw a kindly light on the current ecumenical reality and to indicate the next step that we need to take together.

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92 See Chapman, 'Interchangeability', p. 55.