

Francis Young, *Inferior Office? A History of Deacons in the Church of England*, Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2015, pp. xxxviii + 179, £25.00, ISBN: 978-0-227-17488-3

Francis Young has provided a crisp and clear account of a group of clergy who perform valuable service in the Church of England—and have done so for many generations—and yet whose place in the Church remains ambiguous to this day. This is not a confessional account, nor is it a manifesto for the role of deacons in the Church; rather it is a useful history with a purpose. This book reveals that deacons have been around for a very long time, and it seeks to tidy up various misconceptions about their status and roles, and to provide hard data that will inform current debates about ‘transitional’, ‘permanent’ or ‘distinctive’ deacons. Roles have been subject to debate ever since the first ordination service for deacons was enshrined in the Ordinal of 1550. Interest in this aspect of the three-fold order of the ministry—retained in England and Wales at the Reformation—has waxed and waned over the centuries with frequent calls for ‘revivals’, most notably in the nineteenth and late twentieth centuries. In the former, such calls were associated with the need to cater for the emerging working classes, in the latter they have been spurred on by concerns about the role of women in the ministry.

The book is divided into five chronological sections: two chapters cover the period 1550 to 1832; one is devoted to the Victorians; and the remaining two cover the twentieth century and today. The bulk of the book thus covers the last two centuries. While the first half is strong on practicalities, numbers and pastoral roles, the second is devoted to the various campaigns to raise the status of deacons, coupled as it became with the fight for ordination of women. Deacons actually seem to have been quite common in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in which period there were also many who retained that status rather than proceeding to the priesthood. Notable defenders of the diaconate have included Richard Hooker, George Herbert, Nicholas Ferrar, Thomas Clarkson and Thomas Arnold.

Deacons have served the Church in numerous pastoral capacities, caring for the sick and the poor, educating the young, and, in England, have always had liturgical duties, most notably reading the Gospel. The balance between these different roles has varied over time and by place, as some English dioceses such as Chichester and Portsmouth have a stronger record than others in seeing the potential of deacons. Francis Young has carried out interesting case studies of university and ordination records to reveal how well—or not—the time lapse between ordination to the diaconate and the priesthood was observed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These indicate great variability, an obvious correlation with times of shortage of clergy as in the 1660s,

and also reveal the work of deacons in education—university colleges and schools—and as chaplains and church administrators. The move into the nineteenth century raises more questions regarding shortage of clergy, particularly connected with the need to cater for lower social classes, possibly by the controversial proposal of lowering educational standards required of deacons. Tensions also emerged between deacons and lay readers. The idea that deacons are important intermediaries between the clergy and the laity is a significant theme throughout. Debates about just what deacons could and could not do—regarding baptism, communion, marriage and funerals—have been common ever since the sixteenth century. Fortunately, their place in missionary activity has never really been questioned, hence they have been more widely accepted in the New World than in the old.

The latter part of the work is based heavily—perhaps too theoretically as we become immersed in the complexities of the debate—on discussing key works and reports given to General Synod, notably Mary Tanner's *Deacons in the Ministry* (1988), *Diakonia* by John Collins (1990), *For Such a Time as This* (2001), and *The Mission and Ministry of the Whole Church* (2007). Also important, although not flagged as much as it might have been given the ecumenical aspects of debate over the diaconate, is the work of Deacon Christine Hall together with the Anglo-Nordic Diaconal Research Project that produced two valuable collections of essays entitled *The Ministry of the Deacon* at the turn of the last century. The significance of Vatican II, however, in freeing thinking about the subject is fully acknowledged. The book is completed with a careful exposition of the arguments for and against 'distinctive' deacons, openly acknowledging that this might entail accepting the label of an 'inferior' ministry. Francis Young stands clearly on the side of his deacons and is to be congratulated for producing such a handy, concise account of this neglected branch of the ministry—a branch that many think the Church has yet fully to exploit.

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Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin, *Catholic Europe 1592-1648. Centre and Peripheries*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 270, £60, ISBN: 9780199272723

Recent scholarship stresses the local idiosyncrasies of early modern Catholicism, which developed very different characteristics in different