

Papal invite unlikely to lure many U.S. defectors: Celibate priesthood is one obstacle

by [John Dart](#) in the [November 17, 2009](#) issue

Although many ex-Episcopalians in the U.S. identify with Catholic rules against ordaining women and noncelibate gays to the priesthood, the traditionalists heading their own rival Anglican organizations in North America say that few followers are likely to become Roman Catholics.

The surprise invitation October 20 from the Vatican pleased many Anglican dissidents for Rome's recognition of their angst over changes in the Episcopal Church.

"We will surely bless those who are drawn to participate in this momentous offer," said Robert Duncan, primate of the fledgling Anglican Church in North America. But Duncan, the former Episcopal archbishop of Pittsburgh, also said he believes that "the great majority of ACNA bishops, priests, dioceses and congregations" will not make the move.

Duncan cited "historic differences" on church authority and dogmas. Bishop Martyn Minns, a leader in ACNA, told the *New York Times*, "I don't want to be a Roman Catholic. There was a Reformation, you remember."

Though unhappy Anglicans could keep their worship practices and married priests would be accepted under Catholic provisions, Jack Iker, former Episcopal bishop of Fort Worth, Texas, commented that "not all Anglo-Catholics can accept certain teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, nor do they believe they must first convert to Rome" to be considered true Christians. "I find the lack of a permanent provision for a married priesthood to be a serious obstacle to unity," said Iker.

Since the 1980s the Catholic Church has on occasion taken in married priests who converted from Orthodox and Anglican churches. But only unmarried men may serve

as bishops in the special dioceses—a restriction consistent with a “long historical tradition” in both the Catholic and Orthodox churches.

Cardinal William Levada, head of the Vatican’s doctrinal office, suggested on October 20 that the new dioceses will not ordain married men unless they have already started their preparation in Anglican seminaries.

The impact of the Vatican gesture to disenchanted Anglicans may be felt stronger in the Church of England, which has long struggled over ordaining female bishops as well as pressures for acceptance of gay priests.

In an editorial the *Times* of London described the Vatican announcement as “potentially the most explosive development in Anglicanism since the Reformation,” in which the “most learned of primates [Arch bishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams] has been outclassed as a politician.”

As many as a thousand Church of England clergy might accept the Roman invitation, predicted John Broadhurst, chairman of Forward in Faith, an Anglican group that opposes women bishops. If that scenario unfolds as predicted, the Vatican will have thrown a “lifeline” to the Church of England on the divisive controversy, said George Pitcher, an Anglican priest who is religion editor of the *Telegraph* newspaper in Britain.

“This is marvelous news,” Pitcher said, that could avert “an Anglican schismatic bloodbath” over the issue. “There really is no excuse for Anglo-Catholics who can’t accept women bishops now. They must accept the pope’s offer, or stay in the Anglican Church and accept women bishops.”