

# Crossing the Tiber:

Anglican clerical converts to Rome  
from the 1840s to the 2000s

David Hilliard

# REASONS

FOR SUBMITTING TO

## THE CATHOLIC CHURCH,

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BY R. K. SCONCE, B. A. OXON.,  
LATE MINISTER OF ST. ANDREW'S PARISH, SYDNEY.

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“DUM VOS PARENTUM ERROREM COLENTES, STUDIOSE DEFENDITIS, HÆREDES SCELREIS ESSE VOLUISTIS, CUM FILII PACIS VEL SERO ESSE POSSETIS”—ST. OPATUS, II. 5.

*Published in accordance with a very generally-expressed wish  
among members of the Church of England.*

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From  
Shadow  
To  
Substance

~~~~~  
An  
Australian  
Anglican  
Clergyman  
becomes  
a  
Catholic  
~~~~~

*By C. A. Britten*

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## Former parsons to be R.C. priests

Three former Anglican priests—all married—will be ordained deacons in St. Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral tomorrow. They will be the first three married men ordained Roman Catholic deacons in W.A.

John Lisle, Rodney Williams and Frederick Beyer will be ordained by the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Perth, the Most Rev. Dr L. J. Goody.

After further studies the three men will be ordained priests late this year.

Till recently married men were not admitted as deacons or priests into the Roman Catholic church.

However, since the second Vatican council of 1962 the custom has been growing.

A deacon cannot celebrate Mass nor hear confessions but he can conduct baptisms, weddings and funerals, assist at Holy Communion, and can instruct people in the faith.

The three men will live with their families after their ordination tomorrow and will carry out the parish duties of a deacon.

It is normally the custom for a single man who becomes a deacon to return to college for stu-

dies in the period between his ordination as deacon and his ordination as priest.

Yesterday the three men were in retreat in preparation for their ordination.

Mr Beyer and Mr Lisle were formerly Anglican ministers in the Bunbury diocese. Mr Williams was formerly rector of Cranbrook, in the Great Southern.

In March, last year, Mr Beyer and Mr Lisle received a special papal dispensation through the Roman Catholic doctrinal congregation relieving them of the chastity vow normally required of Roman Catholic priests.

Mr Beyer, who has four children and is in his mid-thirties, resigned from the Anglican ministry in January last year. He has since been teaching science, mathematics and French at the St. Louis School, Claremont. He was educated at Scotch College and is a science graduate of the W.A. University. He was a teacher before he entered the Anglican ministry.

Mr Williams, who is in his forties and has two children, resigned from the Anglican ministry in December, 1967. He has been working in a lay capacity at St. John of God Hospital, Subiaco.

# Dad now a Catholic priest

Former Anglican priest, Fr William Holmes, 51, has been ordained a Roman Catholic priest in an unusual ceremony.



Fr Holmes, with wife Marjorie and son Philip

Despite the celibacy rule governing the ordination of Catholic priests, Fr Holmes' admission to the priesthood was witnessed by his wife, Marjorie, and their son, Philip, 12.

During the ceremony, Mrs Holmes gave the second reading and she and Philip brought the chasuble to the altar to be placed on the shoulders of the newly ordained priest.

The ceremony was in St Patrick's Cathedral, Bunbury, WA.

There have been only four previous cases of ordination of married men—three of them for the Perth Archdiocese.

Asked to comment on the significance of a married man with a wife and child being ordained a

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*By Tom Loftus*

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But one married man had been ordained as a permanent deacon.

Bishop P. Quinn, of Bunbury, said among the factors influencing Fr Holmes' ordination was the need for clergy in the Bunbury diocese.

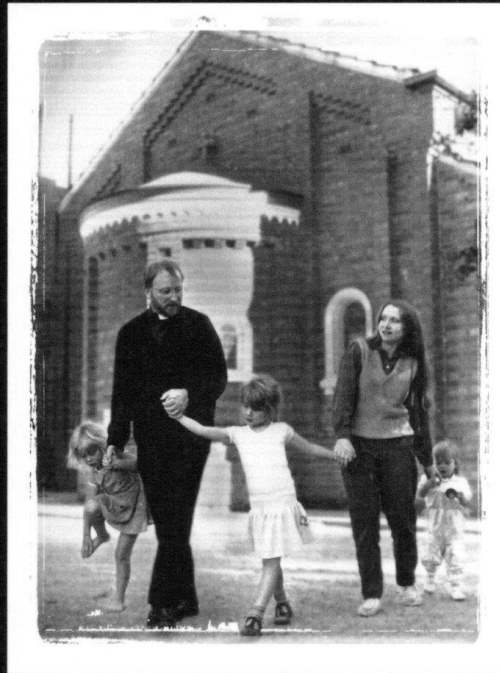
Initially it had been suggested Fr Holmes be ordained as a permanent married deacon, but on the advice of priests it had been decided to ask Rome for a dispensation for ordination to the priesthood.

One of the conditions governing the ordination of Fr Holmes would prevent his re-marrying.

"I don't think this step

.....  
**CONVINCED  
BY THE TRUTH**  
.....

EMBRACING THE FULLNESS  
OF CATHOLIC FAITH



JOHN I FLEMING

# Father John follows his heart to a new faith

## Switch to Roman Catholicism leaves parishioners stunned

By Religious Affairs  
Reporter JANE WILLCOX



Father Fleming ... "I used to think the Anglican Church was a complete manifestation of the Catholic Church ... I was wrong."

Anglican priest and media personality Father John Fleming has left the Anglican Church to become a Roman Catholic.

In an emotional address after his last Anglican sermon yesterday, Father Fleming told a packed congregation at his Plympton church his resignation was immediate.

The man, whose ability to shoot straight from the hip made him one of SA's best known religious figures, had carefully prepared every word of the address.

It was the most difficult speech of his life and the usually lucid clergyman was afraid the right words would not come.

The seeds of doubt which grew into the hardest decision of Father Fleming's life began five years ago.

He said there were plenty of sleepless nights and a few migraines as the self questioning grew more and more intense during the past two years.

His wife, Alison, said she had decided 18 months ago to become a Roman Catholic if her husband eventually reached the same decision.

Father Fleming is the first married Anglican priest to "defect" in SA.

Speaking before his announcement yesterday, he would not comment on the possibility of becoming a Roman Catholic priest.

As he is married with three children — daughters aged six and four years and 20 months — this would require special, but not unprecedented, permission from the Vatican. [Other married Anglican priests in Australia have been accepted as Roman Catholic priests.]

He said his only definite plans were to take an academic appointment as director of a new bioethics institute under the auspices of a Catholic organisation, Southern Cross Homes Inc.

A leader of the movement against women's ordination in the Anglican Church, Father Fleming admitted the issue had spurred him to rethink his beliefs.

But it was not the sole reason.

After a lifetime of dedication to the Anglican Church he said he was wrong

about two things — the doctrine of the church and the question of authority.

"I used to think the Anglican Church was a complete manifestation of the Catholic Church; it was separate from Rome in authority, but it had everything it needed," he explained.

"I was wrong. It is only in communion with the Bishop of Rome that I can have a full catholic (Christian) life."

Yesterday, as Father Fleming finished the announcement, he turned away to remove his glasses and wipe tears from his eyes.

His voice wavered as he bade farewell to people he had served for nine years and struggled to describe "a matter of conscience".

"To leave you all breaks my heart," he said. "Finally I ask that we remain friends as fellow Christians should."

After mass, churchgoers said they were shocked and saddened to lose Father Fleming so quickly, without so much as "a proper goodbye".

A lay worker with the parish, Mr Peter Kay, said many of those with whom he had spoken respected Father Fleming's decision but they would greatly miss such a popular priest.

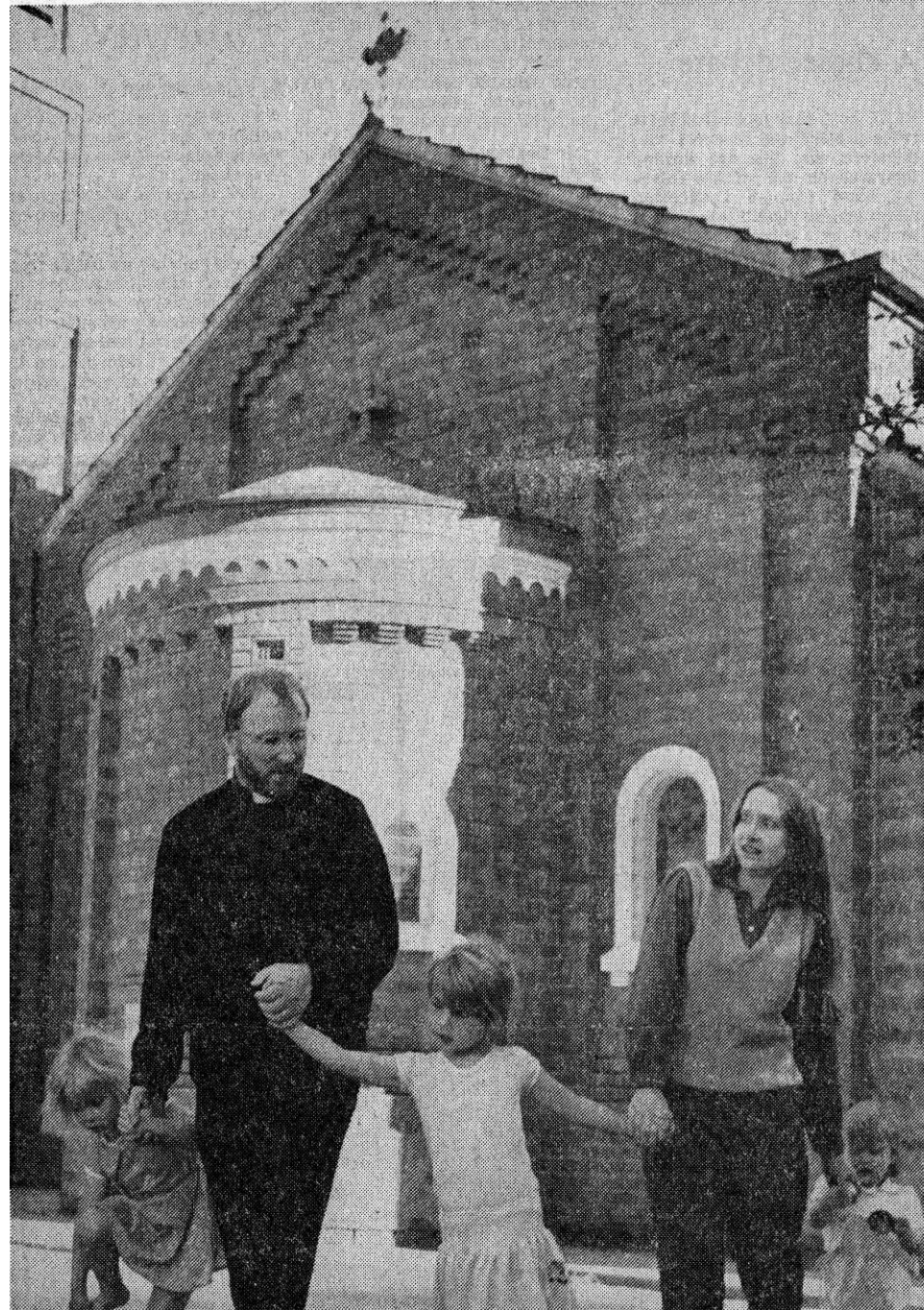
On Tuesday, Father Fleming personally tendered his resignation to the Anglican Archbishop of Adelaide, Doctor Keith Rayner.

He said the Archbishop had been extremely generous — "a sign of these ecumenical times".

Doctor Rayner said he was not surprised by Father Fleming's decision and described him as an articulate spokesperson for Christianity, a good parish priest and a friend.

"I sensed over a period of time that he was moving in that direction," said Doctor Rayner.

"When a member of our family leaves it is always a cause for concern, but we have a church which believes in freedom of conscience."



# Anglican priest and family turn to Rome for salvation

Age  
27/4/87

By EDMUND DOOGUE

Yesterday Father John Fleming of Adelaide celebrated his last Mass as an Anglican priest. Today he is plain Mr Fleming.

Tonight he, his wife Alison, and their three young daughters, Rebecca, Jane and Jessica, will become Roman Catholics.

Arguably Australia's most outspoken Anglican priest, Mr Fleming has resigned from the Anglican priesthood and Church to embrace Rome and the Pope.

More importantly, after a five-year struggle with his conscience he has quit what he calls the "increasingly liberal-protestant Anglican Church" to embrace the institution of the papacy itself, with its firmer stance on theological and moral issues.

Roman Catholic observers said last week that at least four more Anglican priests across Australia were expected to become Catholics within a month.

But, despite the publicity and surprise his change of allegiance will bring in both churches, he said his spiritual pilgrimage was neither a protest nor a grand gesture of defiance.

"My resignation is not a protest against anything," he said yesterday, after informing his parishioners at two Sunday Masses of his move. "It is a positive statement that I wish to embrace the truth as I now see it. It is not that I do not love the Anglican Church. I do. But I love the Church of Rome more." The Anglican Church's push for ordination of women, which he has vigorously opposed, was the catalyst, not the cause of his resignation.

Mr Fleming said the possibility of a change had been an obsession with him for the past two years, a time of "turmoil, grief and now a calm happiness". His wife, Alison, decided 18 months ago that she wished to become a Roman Catholic. Mr Fleming spoke with apparent relief of his decision yesterday, but said it had caused him much pain.

As a Catholic layman, Mr Fleming will be the director of a national bioethics institute, to be established in Adelaide by Southern Cross Homes, a conservative, lay Catholic organisation which has pioneered a network of homes for the elderly.

Asked if he would apply to become a Catholic priest, he said: "I may do. First I have to become a Roman Catholic." Over the past 20 years the Catholic Church in Australia has waived its celibacy rule for clergy for a handful of married, former Anglican priests. A Catholic Church spokesman said last month that more married Anglican clergy could be accepted as Catholic priests.

After 17 years as an Anglican priest and an influential conservative, Mr Fleming's loss is a big blow to Anglicanism. Until last week he was a member of the Anglican Social Responsibilities Commission and the president of the Union of Anglican Catholic Priests. He has his own radio program and a regular column in an Adelaide newspaper, 'The Advertiser', and his views are often sought by the media. He has been a leader among Anglicans opposed to liberalism.

Continued: PAGE 5



# Anglican Church crisis – another senior ‘defection’

By Religious Affairs reporter  
JANE WILLCOX

**T**HE Anglican Church in SA emerged yesterday as an institution in a state of crisis.

The resignation of the Regional Director of the Australian Board of Missions, Father Lyall Cowell, to join the Roman Catholic Church was the second “defection” in as many months.

While he does not share the same public profile as John Fleming, who left the church last month, Father Cowell was a highly regarded cleric. His departure is both embarrassing and significant to the Anglican Church.

Like a besieged political party, the church he leaves behind is being torn apart with claims of weak leadership, waning membership and rank-and-file discontent.

Sources say there are as many as half a dozen clergy in SA who will leave the church within the next six months and many of those who remain are disillusioned, angry and upset.

Talks are underway for a few parishes to secede from the church if they disagree with the diocesan view of women’s ordination.

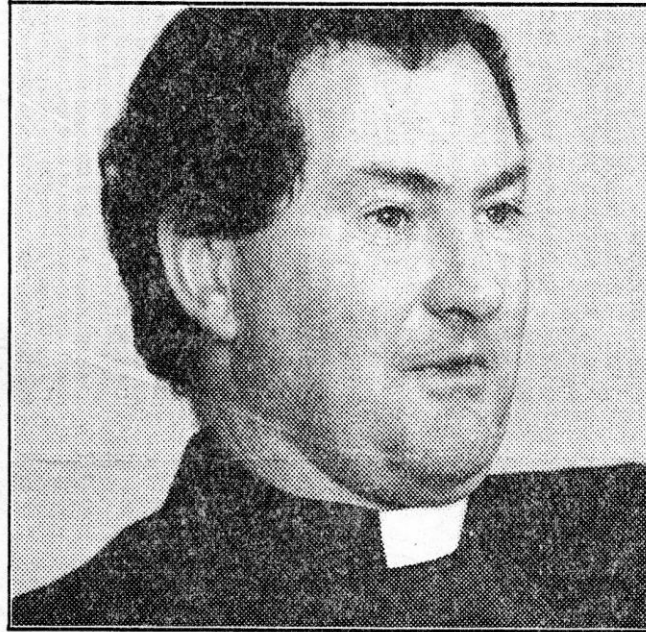
There are strong rumors of a schism, the formation of a new church, by a handful of Anglican priests opposed to ordination.

Of 73 parishes in the Adelaide Diocese, 20 are already regarded as “non-viable”, or unable to pay their running costs.

Some clergy fear their flock could slowly drift into the Catholic Church or join the burgeoning fundamentalist religions.

The charismatic Assemblies of God claims to be SA’s fastest growing religion.

The Commonwealth secretary, Pastor William Cathie, cites a State membership of 10,000 and says latest figures show an annual increase of 20 p.c..



*Anglican Father Lyall Cowell will join the Catholic Church.*

the symptom than the cause of deep discontent.

According to one Church official, the real issue is the lack of strong leadership — what he describes as “wishy, washy fence-sitting liberalism”.

One of the more outspoken critics of church leadership is Christies Beach priest, Rev Dirk Van Dissel: “The majority of the leadership is completely out of touch with what the balance of the church-going public thinks.

“Most bishops and teachers are into the avant-garde issues of Christian morality, the ordination of women and philosophical hair splitting over who is God and what is God.

“My parishioners are struggling with mortgages and trying to lead a moral Christian life. They want

touch with the eternal — and very relevant — truths of the Bible.

“Our most important task is to distinguish between what is permanently true and relevant and what is just the passing fashion of the age,” he says.

“Above all, we need to concentrate on the central values of Jesus Christ and live them out. I mean things like love, faith, compassion and social justice.

“The sooner we can resolve matters like the ordination of women, the sooner we can concentrate on the really central matters of Christian faith and life.”

Archbishop Rayner says the church is taking initiatives to equip people to share their faith and there are promising signs among young people who are disillusioned with the materialism of

# Women protest at priest's ordination



Sister Roberta Hakendorf remonstrates with Dr John Fleming outside St Francis Xavier's Cathedral after his ordination last night.

Picture: GREG ADAMS

By ANDREW TURNER

The ordination of controversial former Anglican priest Dr John Fleming went ahead last night — but only after a protest by more than 30 women.

Members of the mainly Catholic group Women and the Australian Church held a 90-minute vigil outside the St Francis Xavier's Cathedral to raise the profile of women's issues in the nation's churches.

WATAC spokeswoman Sister Jo Armour said the matters needed to be debated by the public and religious leaders to gain full equality for women in the church.

"It is not a personal attack on John Fleming. It (demonstrations) will be happening at every ordination around the country," Sister Armour said.

"We want to draw attention to women being excluded from the ordained ministry."

Dr Fleming's ordination follows a special dispensation from the Pope.

He is the first married man to be ordained a Catholic priest in Adelaide but one of a handful across Australia.

While an Anglican priest, he opposed the ordination of women because he believes "doctrinally" they should not be allowed to become priests.

He and his family "defected" to

Catholicism in 1987. At the time, he admitted the women priest debate had spurred him to rethink his beliefs.

Speaking after last night's ceremony, Dr Fleming said: "It's terrific.

"It has been quite a number of years in the waiting. Today is the culmination of that period of time."

Dr Fleming said he would now act as a deacon until he became a priest within the next six months.

He also will continue his work at the Southern Cross Bioethics Institute and his religious program on Radio 5AA on Sunday nights.

Despite being the first married priest in Adelaide, Dr Fleming said he did not expect other men to follow in his footsteps in the near future.

He said that, as a married man, his ordination "isn't an issue" and he would not be taking it any further.

"This is an exception," he said.

Dr Fleming spoke briefly to demonstrators last night but would not be drawn on the issue of women priests.

However, last month he said he felt "very deeply" for women who aspired to the Catholic priesthood.

Adelaide's Catholic Archbishop, the Very Reverend Leonard Faulkner, conducted last night's hour-long ceremony in front of more than 200 people.

# DOWN IN ADORATION FALLING



THE JOURNEY IN FAITH  
OF THE REVEREND  
GEOFFREY JAMES TAYLOR



GARETH GRAINGER

PAM  
KMS  
R665

**Why  
not**

BE A

**ROMAN CATHOLIC ?**

By

**The Rev. T. M. ROBINSON**

M.A., LL.B., Th.Soc.

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Anglican Truth Society