



# Becoming Christian: The Conversion of Roman Cappadocia

*Raymond Van Dam*

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In a richly textured investigation of the transformation of Cappadocia during the fourth century, *Becoming Christian: The Conversion of Roman Cappadocia* examines the local impact of Christianity on traditional Greek and Roman society. The Cappadocians Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Eunomius of Cyzicus were influential participants in intense arguments over doctrinal orthodoxy and heresy. In his discussion of these prominent churchmen Raymond Van Dam explores the new options that theological controversies now made available for enhancing personal prestige and acquiring wider reputations throughout the Greek East.

Ancient Christianity was more than theology, liturgical practices, moral strictures, or ascetic lifestyles. The coming of Christianity offered families and communities in Cappadocia and Pontus a history built on biblical and ecclesiastical traditions, a history that justified distinctive lifestyles, legitimated the prominence of bishops and clerics, and replaced older myths. Christianity presented a common language of biblical stories and legends about martyrs that allowed educated bishops to communicate with ordinary believers. It provided convincing autobiographies through which people could make sense of the vicissitudes of their lives.

The transformation of Roman Cappadocia was a paradigm of the disruptive consequences that accompanied conversion to Christianity in the ancient world. Through vivid accounts of Cappadocians as preachers, theologians, and historians, *Becoming Christian* highlights the social and cultural repercussions of the formation of new orthodoxies in theology, history, language, and personal identity.



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