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Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse (Sather Classical Lectures)

Averil Cameron

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Many reasons can be given for the rise of Christianity in late antiquity and its flourishing in the medieval world. In asking how Christianity succeeded in becoming the dominant ideology in the unpromising circumstances of the Roman Empire, Averil Cameron turns to the development of Christian discourse over the first to sixth centuries A.D., investigating the discourse's essential characteristics, its effects on existing forms of communication, and its eventual preeminence. Scholars of late antiquity and general readers interested in this crucial historical period will be intrigued by her exploration of these influential changes in modes of communication.

The emphasis that Christians placed on language—writing, talking, and preaching—made possible the formation of a powerful and indeed a totalizing discourse, argues the author. Christian discourse was sufficiently flexible to be used as a public and political instrument, yet at the same time to be used to express private feelings and emotion. Embracing the two opposing poles of logic and mystery, it contributed powerfully to the gradual acceptance of Christianity and the faith's transformation from the enthusiasm of a small sect to an institutionalized world religion.

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