



Conversions: Two Family Stories from the Reformation and Modern America (New Directions in Narrative History)

Craig Harline

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This powerful and innovative work by a gifted cultural historian explores the effects of religious conversion on family relationships, showing how the challenges of the Reformation can offer insight to families facing similarly divisive situations today.

Craig Harline begins with the story of young Jacob Rolandus, the son of a Dutch Reformed preacher, who converted to Catholicism in 1654 and ran away from home, causing his family to disown him. In the companion story, Michael Sunbloom, a young American, leaves his family's religion in 1973 to convert to Mormonism, similarly upsetting his distraught parents. The modern twist to Michael's story is his realization that he is gay, causing him to leave his new church, and upsetting his parents again—but this time the family reconciles.

Recounting these stories in short, alternating chapters, Harline underscores the parallel aspects of the two far-flung families. Despite different outcomes and forms, their situations involve nearly identical dynamics and heart-wrenching choices. Through the author's deeply informed imagination, the experiences of a seventeenth-century European family are transformed into immediately recognizable terms.

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