



Who Shall Enter Paradise?: Christian Origins in Muslim Northern Nigeria, c. 1890-1975 (New African Histories)

Shobana Shankar

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“Shankar challenges the assumption, so common in the history of Western education and modernity, that the North is backward in both because it did not allegedly encourage the spread of education and Christianity....The book is very clear on religious co-existence, and also on the changes to Islamic culture. Thus, its conclusions open up new avenues to examine further the impact of Christianity on Islam and vice-versa.” —*American Historical Review*

Who Shall Enter Paradise? recounts in detail the history of Christian-Muslim engagement in a core area of sub-Saharan Africa’s most populous nation, home to roughly equal numbers of Christians and Muslims. It is a region today beset by religious violence, in the course of which history has often been told in overly simplified or highly partisan terms. This book reexamines conversion and religious identification not as fixed phenomena, but as experiences shaped through cross-cultural encounters, experimentation, collaboration, protest, and sympathy.

Shobana Shankar relates how Christian missions and African converts transformed religious practices and politics in Muslim Northern Nigeria during the colonial and early postcolonial periods. Although the British colonial authorities prohibited Christian evangelism in Muslim areas and circumscribed missionary activities, a combination of factors—including Mahdist insurrection, the abolition of slavery, migrant labor, and women’s evangelism—brought new converts to the faith. By the 1930s, however, this organic growth of Christianity in the north had given way to an institutionalized culture based around medical facilities established in the Hausa emirates. The end of World War II brought an influx of demobilized soldiers, who integrated themselves into the local Christian communities and reinvigorated the practice of lay evangelism.

In the era of independence, Muslim politicians consolidated their power by adopting many of the methods of missionaries and evangelists. In the process, many Christian men and formerly non-Muslim communities converted to Islam. A vital part of Northern Nigerian Christianity all but vanished, becoming a religion of “outsiders.”



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