



# **Into Africa: A Transnational History of Catholic Medical Missions and Social Change**

*Barbra Mann Wall*

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The most dramatic growth of Christianity in the late twentieth century has occurred in Africa, where Catholic missions have played major roles. But these missions did more than simply convert Africans. Catholic sisters became heavily involved in the Church's health services and eventually in relief and social justice efforts. In *Into Africa*, Barbra Mann Wall offers a transnational history that reveals how Catholic medical and nursing sisters established relationships between local and international groups, sparking an exchange of ideas that crossed national, religious, gender, and political boundaries.

Both a nurse and a historian, Wall explores this intersection of religion, medicine, gender, race, and politics in sub-Saharan Africa, focusing on the years following World War II, a period when European colonial rule was ending and Africans were building new governments, health care institutions, and education systems. She focuses specifically on hospitals, clinics, and schools of nursing in Ghana and Uganda run by the Medical Mission Sisters of Philadelphia; in Nigeria and Uganda by the Irish Medical Missionaries of Mary; in Tanzania by the Maryknoll Sisters of New York; and in Nigeria by a local Nigerian congregation. Wall shows how, although initially somewhat ethnocentric, the sisters gradually developed a deeper understanding of the diverse populations they served. In the process, their medical and nursing work intersected with critical social, political, and cultural debates that continue in Africa today: debates about the role of women in their local societies, the relationship of women to the nursing and medical professions and to the Catholic Church, the obligations countries have to provide care for their citizens, and the role of women in human rights.

A groundbreaking contribution to the study of globalization and medicine, *Into Africa* highlights the importance of transnational partnerships, using the stories of these nuns to enhance the understanding of medical mission work and global change.

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