Paul Grant

Dying German in Ghana: The Basel Mission Wrestles with Grief, 1830–1918

ABSTRACT

Throughout the eighty years preceding the First World War, the Basel Mission's activities in the Gold Coast were overshadowed by endless reports of missionary death and disease. Lengthy bouts of sickness and grief described the very context of mission work. With each turn in the road, the missionaries and the home office alike turned to writing and rewriting their history, and in the process incorporated death into the message of the mission: sacrifice with an assurance of ultimate accomplishment gave way to notions of sacrifice as service in itself. This conversation was profoundly emotional and frequently expressed itself in song and poetry – the field hymnal, for example, included several songs for death and sickness. At the centre of Basel Mission grief lay a particularly German notion of home and spatial belonging called *Heimat*. To these German missionaries, including their supporters in Europe, the tragedy of dying in the mission field was above all dying far away from home.

Keywords: Ghana, Germany, Switzerland, memory, death, disease, Heimat, yellow fever

INTRODUCTION

Although readers of the Basel Mission Society's *Evangelische Heidenbote* magazine were no strangers to outpourings of grief, few will have read as broken-hearted a testimony as David Eisenschmid's account of burying

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his wife with his own hands. 'I am smashed down,' he wrote. 'A harder blow I could not imagine.' It was 1867 in the interior Gold Coast village of Kyebi, and Eisenschmid was all alone, the other Basel missionaries in the district having gone ahead of him to an annual retreat at the society's headquarters in Akropong. As the Basel Mission's district carpenter, Eisenschmid had been called up to build a coffin for a recently deceased local elder. When his wife Frederike fell ill, then, Eisenschmid had to stand vigil over her bed with no companionship. And when she passed away in the night, he embarked on what he would later call the 'sourest labour of his life'. He washed her, dressed her and furnished her coffin, her 'final house'. All alone with his thoughts, he thanked God for her life and for the two years he had been able to share with her. And when morning arrived, he went out into the neighborhood, weeping and asking for companionship in grief. The Africans' 'loud sighs', he wrote, helped him to 'cry out from [his] heart'. Together they laid her in the earth. 'Now she sleeps next to Frau Christaller', Eisenschmid concluded, 'under a palm tree in the mission house garden, until one day the Lord of Life wakes her' (Eisenschmid 1867: 216).[1]

David Eisenschmid's grief strikingly contains no redemptive or sacrificial narrative. It is as stark as he was alone, and transition only came to his sourest hour after the Africans took him in. But Frau Eisenschmid was dead, and was dead far from home, and, after a brief two years of marriage, had given him no children. For David Eisenschmid, this was in every way a fruitless disaster. And in publishing his grief without, as was usually the case, an editor appending a moral of the story, the Basel Mission was inviting its readership to join in the grief and, accordingly, linger in a moment of confusion and contradiction. What was the point of all this loss? Why would God call a German to Africa, only for her to die?

During the eighty years prior to the First World War, German, Swiss, Liberian, Angolan and West Indian missionaries, evangelists, schoolteachers and artisans along with many others from elsewhere in Europe and West Africa worked alongside each other in the Gold Coast under the auspices of the Basel Mission Society. Quite often they fought. Sometimes they married. And many of them died. Indeed, a reading of Basel Mission letters home can seem a lengthy list of death and disease, interspersed with occasional good news. Some missionaries were sick as often as not. After years of preparation, some died almost immediately upon their arrival. Sickness and death were confusing and forced the missionaries to ask basic questions about what they were doing. The Basel

Mission's preferred approach to hard questions was to return to the organisation's history. Over many years, as they rewrote and retold their mission's history, the Baslers began integrating sickness and sudden death into the very message of their mission. The constancy of death and disease, in other words, shaped the Basel Mission in the Gold Coast every bit as much as any significant successes on the field.

This paper looks at one subset of this multi-national community – the Germans – and how they died and how the survivors remembered them. Because of the particularly German and Pietist habits prevailing among the Basel Mission, the focus here is on the ways Germans in the Gold Coast sought meaning in suffering by recourse to the past. A half century after Frederike Eisenschmid's passing, most of the Basel Mission's staff would be deported from the Gold Coast during the First World War. To the caretakers of organisational memory, this was the final humiliation in a long sequence of grief and loss, and was written about as a type of death not unlike all the individual deaths over the preceding eight decades. The difference was that the deported missionaries faced an additional challenge upon their arrival in their hometowns in Germany: they needed to make sense of the alien world they encountered there. At that moment and throughout the 1920s, the deportees seem to have instinctively engaged in labours of memory, scouring through the ruins of the lost mission's history for signs of God's hand. What they found were paths not taken during the eighty years of their work in the Gold Coast. This conclusion, in turn, allowed them to apply the lessons of their African experience toward understanding the post-war moral environment of world Christianity. In other words, this paper is less about Ghanaian Christianity than about the creation of a new kind of German in the crucible of grief and loss in a constantly moving intercultural experiment taking place in Ghana.

To anticipate my conclusion, the key to understanding German missionary intellectual change is emotion, especially grief, and above all the missionaries' sense of homelessness. This approach reveals the biggest changes of heart as unfolding during chaotic and tragic times. For decades, and with a few colourful exceptions, the Germans held Africa at arm's length: they never allowed the Gold Coast to become home, even as they were growing progressively alienated from their home culture. It was only with the death of the mission, when they were deported during World War I, that they allowed the African side of their hearts to take over. And by then it was too late. In the years after deportation, the former missionaries' shock evolved into shame, and thence into an ardent

desire for a second chance, this time to belong fully to Africa and to enter fully into brotherhood with the Africans they had usually treated as children. As one tangential example of this grief, here is a deported Basel missionary in Cameroon, Anna Wuhrmann, writing shortly after her 1922 return to the field, this time as a missionary of the Parisian Evangelical Missionary Society: 'In the time of our absence these children had become men ... in matters of the Christian journey they were far ahead of us. And I was ashamed' (Wuhrmann 1922). The argument is that grief, shame, trauma and alienation – emotions, in other words – are the key to understanding how Germans changed in Ghana. And one good way of exploring that is by looking at death.

WAYS OF DYING GERMAN IN GHANA

There are at least four ways to look at dying German in Ghana, expanding outward from the individual to the organisation. We can ask how they died, physiologically, and what cultural or organisational changes, if any, resulted. Second, we can ask how the bodily remains of the German deceased were interred, and how (if at all) this differed from the burials of Africans or other Europeans. A third approach explores how individual dead were remembered over the years. Finally, we can look at the cumulative German effort at making sense of decades of death and dying. Death and burial were ever present in the life of the Basel Mission in the Gold Coast, but not only as a demographic reality. Meditation on death was a mainstay of Basel Mission spirituality, as missionaries and home office alike struggled to derive meaning from death on the field. The mission's evolving customs and thoughts about death reflect an unsteady tension between German assimilation into Africa, on the one hand, and resolute difference from Africans on the other. At least three distinct social worlds were involved: identifiably pietist understandings of the body and of salvation, Central European notions of home and spatial rootedness and African understandings of belonging and social embeddedness. If any historical import is to be found in a study of Basel missionary death in the Gold Coast, it lies in the interplay of these three, and above all in the ways the Germans were learning from Africans.

First, then, how did the Germans die, physiologically, in the Gold Coast? More importantly, what did it mean? The numbers are less relevant than the missionaries' sense that death was omnipresent. The majority of the first few cohorts of Basel missionaries had died almost immediately, succumbing to diseases. But Germans were dying at home,

of course. Cholera made repeated rounds through central Europe in the nineteenth century, and the miserable social situations of urban Württemberg during those years had been met in pietist circles with evangelistic sanitation campaigns.[2] What, then, distinguished Germans dying in Ghana from those dying in Germany? Aside from the biological fact of tropical disease and the fact that so many people died, nothing much. The spectre of tropical disease did, however, trigger one long-term change – the Basel Mission's relocation in the 1830s from the coast to the hills in the interior, where a slightly healthier climate in the town of Akropong allowed the mission to gain a modicum of sustainability. But Germans continued to die and be buried.

Most missionaries were nearly constantly sick, and death was never far away. Fevers came with great regularity. Writing on European narratives of exploration in the Congo Basin, Johannes Fabian has observed that most explorers were to some degree 'out of their minds' most of the time, whether because of disease, injury, stupor from mind-altering medicines, intoxication on social drugs like palm wine or because they were quivering with anger or frustration. These ecstatic periods can only be tallied in the narrative gaps, by subtracting the time needed to do things, or to go places, from the amount to time actually taken. Much of the difference was occupied with lengthy phases of insanity or disease. That these gaps rarely found their way into explorers' narratives is meaningful. Fabian identified the gaps in the narratives as attempts at conveying mastery over a situation in which the explorers were quite literally and at multiple scales lost in the forest (Fabian 2000). Similar narrative gaps appear in the missionaries' heavily edited reports published in Basel Mission publications, especially when those published reports are laid alongside the missionaries' original letters to the home office.

Over time, however, organisational leadership came to recognise sickness and disease as occupying a sizeable component of their missionaries' time and spiritual energies. But rather than understanding disease and untimely death as a contradiction, the committee began incorporating sickness into their notions of calling. Speaking at the 1866 deputation ceremony of a missionary named Johann Ulrich Lüthy, whose obituary would appear in the *Heidenbote* (the *Heathen Messenger*) a mere three years later, Inspector Joseph Josenhans said, 'Missionaries in Africa must constantly be prepared, not only for labour, and not only for suffering, but also for labour in suffering' (*Heidenbote* 1869: 149). Even for those who did not die, the constancy of sickness and the proximity

of death on short notice, and the endlessness of mourning, must be understood as the reigning context of the work. More importantly, it became a central spiritual lesson and is reflected in how the workers wrote and sang songs and how they read scripture.

A second and closely related approach is to ask how the Germans handled and disposed of dead Germans' remains. To the Basel missionaries the obvious answer was to bury them in cemeteries (*Gottesacker*), physically separated from residences and landscaped as gardens. A tropical climate demanded prompt burial, but the missionaries seem to have usually taken the time to clean the deceased, to dress them in their finest, and to place them in a custom-built casket. A few times a year, the *Heidenbote* published a detailed account of a funeral, most of which followed similar formulae. Dead missionaries were honoured twice – in the church or chapel, with bells ringing, and then at the graveside. These practices were fairly non-controversial within the broader African community in which the missionaries found themselves, at least in regard to the burial of foreigners. Conflict could, and did, arise over the burial of Christian converts (whether in cemeteries or underneath homes), bringing to a boil unresolved family frustrations over religious change and responsibility to elders. Such conflicts seem not to have applied to the Germans at all: there was no Ghanaian expectation that German bodies be buried in accordance with traditional practices.

Third, how did the Basel Mission mourn and remember the dead? The Mission's field hymnal included specific songs for such things as times of terror or of hunger or of disease, and songs for the graveside of a missionary (Josenhans 1879). Favourite themes in sermon and song seem to have been rest and resurrection (conceived of as waking from sleep). Pietist expectations of the bodily resurrection of the dead upon the return of Christ (see Eisenschmid's reference to sleeping in the garden, above) were imported directly from Germany. But burial in anticipation of resurrection hints at a cultural overlap, however small, between traditional Ghanaian and German pietist approaches to remembering the dead: the deceased were not to be forgotten, but were to be buried in such a way that the survivors could orient themselves around the duties of respect and memory, including anniversaries of notable deaths. If the death of a beloved elder brought a duty to remember, what about the deaths of newcomers? Several of the earlier missionaries (Andreas Riis, among others) would acquire posthumous prestige among the Ghanaian Christians, and much of this prestige derived from the fact of their having

died far from home. Ghanaian pastor Engmann's 1913 sermon over the grave of the young missionary Paul Weiss illustrates this dynamic. Weiss had died of yellow fever only shortly after his arrival in Abokobi; he had not yet acquired command over the language and had, to all appearances, accomplished nothing at all. 'Why did God call him to us blacks', Engmann asked, 'if he would have to die so soon?' For Engmann, the message in Weiss' life was the fact of his death so far from family:

> He left parents and siblings in Europe and came here out of love for us. Do you think he did not love his kindred? Who of us would leave his parents and siblings, in order to preach the gospel to his fellow humans? No one! (*Heidenbote* 1913: 120)

In Engmann's assessment, then, the missionary's sacrifice was less his death, however miserable, than his voluntary alienation from kin. This notion that death was made worse by alienation from home found its corollary among the Basel missionaries. Even in death they remained foreigners.

Finally, a longitudinal look at how the Basel Mission sought to learn from all of this reveals an effort at integrating these experiences into their faith and message. And here, as they died and mourned the dead, is where the Germans became new people. Precisely because the Gold Coast continued to be a graveyard well into the twentieth century, and because of the likelihood of death, alongside the certainty of disease, the Basel missionaries clung tightly to their testimonies of calling. If that thread of calling were torn, much of their spiritual life would quickly unravel. There needed to be some compelling reason to begin questioning these narratives. That compelling reason was not in the first instance theological or rational, but emotional, and arose in grief and tragedy, above all in death. The death of a colleague was for the German mourners an unwelcome window for confronting nagging questions about the purpose of all of this struggle and sacrifice.

To a reader of the Basel missionary magazines, such as the *Heidenbote*, exotic and heroic stories of evangelisation in Africa would not necessarily leap out as the most memorable, and that for a simple reason – the sheer passion of the death stories. Disease and death overwhelm narratives of evangelisation, in part because of the emotional heft of the grief, so dissonant with customary German reserve, articulated in the passive voice. Success on the mission field is treated with Calvinist caution, with cool requests for continued prayer on the part of readers, while obituaries

and death notices crackle with emotion, even in otherwise dreary annual reports. In his report of October 1876, for example, Johannes Widmann (who had been on the field since 1846 and who would die before the report's publication) wrote,

> Our African mission is under spiritual attack [*ist schwer heimgesucht*]; one worker after the other either sinks into the grave, or returns broken to his old homeland. It grows truly heavy around the heart. The passing of brother Müh is especially painful. In this way the dear Lord strikes lines across our calculations and shows us, that he has other thoughts than ours. (*Jahresbericht* 1877: 82)

Not infrequently these reports conclude with original poems and songs of grief and loss. Nothing of the stiff upper lip here: the German Romantic spirit is on display. For an organisation for whom proper planning and calculating was understood in categories of discipleship, God's striking out the lines was a spiritual challenge. Death was a powerful contradiction.

Many Basel missionaries were aware of these problems. By volunteering as missionaries in the Gold Coast, they were committing themselves to countless hours at the bedside of a diseased and dying colleague and to a life lived in the expectation that it would end far from family and far from home. By the early twentieth century, and despite advances in medicine, Africa continued to be, in the words of one Basel missionary, Immanuel Bellon, 'the white man's grave', but a subtle change had emerged: death and disease were more than obstacles to missionary success. They had become part of the message. 'You are not going to Africa to die, but to live,' said an unnamed instructor at the Basel Mission academy. 'Yet the reaper will demand many sacrifices in Africa.' Bellon had learned of the death, by yellow fever, of Paul Weiss (see above) immediately before the deputation ceremony for Bellon and his wife in Basel. And since the young couple were leaving their children behind in the Mission's boarding school, farewell was a weighty matter. 'We pressed one last kiss on the lips of our child', Bellon wrote, 'and then, in the midnight hour, we walked to the train station in boundless loneliness.' After his arrival in the Gold Coast, news arrived that yet another missionary had died, a certain Forster. When Bellon then concluded, 'We stand in the land of death – pray for us', he was speaking neither metaphorically nor hyperbolically (Bellon 1913: 142).

Remembering an eternal *Heimat*

The characteristic Basler response to confusion in the mission was historical meditation. In their long struggle to build something lasting in the Gold Coast, and especially in the constant presence of death and disease, Basler missionaries bumped up against some religious and cultural contradictions about the nature of belonging, the relationship between mind and body and the meaning of death and healing. Some contradictions had very long roots in Europe. Others were of more recent, Enlightenment, scientific, nationalist, or Romantic provenance. These tensions might be understood as the cultural cohabitation of modern and pre-modern understandings of the spiritual universe and the human body. Germans, along with Europeans more generally, had over several decades learned to live with two worlds at once, and it was never really cosy. As heirs of pietistic habits of memory and testimony, Basel missionaries met confusion and contradiction with meditation on the past. Newsletters and reports carried very little in the way of theological debate, but quite a bit of history-telling and, more importantly, retelling. This preference for testimony over theology firmly locates the Baslers within the passionate central European world of historiography, as distinct from the bloodless traditions of German theology and philosophy (see Confino 2006). Over the decades in the Gold Coast, and especially after grief and death, the Baslers told and retold their history. And in the process, they frequently changed the story. In 1874, for example, in the same issue of the *Evangelisches Missions-Magazin* in which the return of missionaries from four years of Ashanti captivity was reported, the Mission also published a retelling of its history in the Gold Coast, with an emphasis on the defeat of what they called fetish-priests (*EMM* 1874: 129ff.). But only three years later, at a time when many Germans around the world were enthusiastically celebrating the German Empire and calling for the acquisition of colonies, Basel missionary Johannes Zimmermann (by then one of the ranking elders on the field) retold the society's history in the form of a poem, emphasising not German strength, but German humiliation and defeat. During the Napoleonic wars, in Zimmermann's poem, Württemberg was a war zone, and death and destruction were everywhere. It is because we were crushed, rather than because we were victorious, that God called us to Africa, he concluded (Zimmermann 1877: 225). But forty years later, shortly before World War I, this humility was long gone. Paul Steiner's 1909 history of the Basel Mission on the Gold Coast was an exercise in sanguine imperial

celebration, replete with martial metaphors. In Steiner's treatment, Germans came to the Gold Coast out of pity for the Africans. Many missionaries died, but ultimately prevailed and saw the kingdom of God march to victory (Steiner 1909). But seven years later, as the mission lay in total ruins during the war, Wilhelm Schlatter wrote yet another history of the mission, emphasising years of suffering and death (Schlatter 1916). The Basel missionaries died and died again in the Gold Coast, and yet the meaning of their deaths changed quite a bit in reference to the bloody history of the nineteenth century back at home.

Speaking of persistent rumours of cannibalism in Equatorial Africa during the colonial years, Florence Bernault has suggested that the intensity of the culture gap between the Europeans and the Africans tended to hold a mirror to the Europeans, which in turn '[activated] major contradictions within white cultures' surrounding the sacredness – or not – of the human body. In other words, nineteenth-century Europeans had been long acclimated to living with the tensions between the claims of their intellectual communities, on the one hand, and their communities of origin, on the other. But living in Africa showed these foreigners the long-term unsustainability of these tensions and, Bernault continues, forced 'Europeans into a reflexive journey to rethink what was going on'.

Well into the era of immunisations, Germans in the Gold Coast lived with a tension between a disenchanted biomedical vision of the human body as spiritually insignificant machinery, on the one hand, and a continuing pietistic insistence that the body was something more than that. This tension came up in German interactions with Ghanaian regarding the Eucharist. At least since the days of the Swiss reformation, the Eucharist carried multiple meanings of common worship and forgiveness of sin – or, to put it in the missionary context, of a church being created and an individual's sins being forgiven (Wandel 2006). These problems had a pietistic corollary in three closely intertwined questions pertaining to the death of a missionary: (1) the meaning of missionary sacrifice; (2) the meaning of home, family and community; and (3) the nature of African Christian claims on missionary loyalty in companionship.

First was the question of sacrifice. What exactly was the sacrifice? After all, Germany was a developing country with acute social problems including destitution. Germans dying of yellow fever in the Gold Coast might equally have died of cholera back home. And the series of wars coterminous with the end of the pre-colonial period had their bloody

equals in central Europe. The Ashanti–British wars were in fact not nearly as destructive as those between the Germans and the French throughout the entire period. So what, exactly, was tragic about dying German in Ghana?

To approach this question we need to look closely at German notions of rootedness in space. Put simply, dying was not the issue. The core issue was dying away from home. Among the most acute of the German emotions on the field – emotions more than ideas – were those associated with belonging and home. At the heart of the issue lies the not entirely translatable word *Heimat*. It is a rich and beautiful word, and its genealogy is very broad and its usage politically pluripotent. If in the twentieth century, fascists like Martin Heidegger used it as a term of exclusion, such uses have not prevented *Heimat* from being subsequently appropriated across the German political spectrum as a term of hospitality for immigrants – a concept far more potent than bland tolerance. Several recent studies have explored the tensions and contradictions surrounding imperial notions of *Heimat*. Nearly all of this scholarship relates to the middling German empire, with little or no reference to the sizeable German presence in non-German Africa (O'Donnell *et al.* 2005; also Jaeger 2009). That is a significant distinction because German settlers in the colonies (including the neighbouring Togo) could well imagine themselves as building a new *Heimat*. No such feats of the imagination were possible, or even desirable, for the work of the Basel Mission in the Gold Coast: at no point did the missionaries understand themselves as at home.

Throughout the decades prior to the First World War, the Basel Mission used the word *Heimat* as shorthand for missionary furlough and the activities of the German and Swiss institutions on the home front. It is noteworthy that well into the German imperial period, Basel Mission registries, in speaking of a field worker's '*Heimat*', referred not merely to national citizenship, but the specific village or town of that person's church community. Whatever else it means, *Heimat* always refers to space. 'In the German understanding', says one scholar, 'Heimat is not only a geographical reality, but a symbol of security [*Geborgenheit*], transfigured childhood, and undamaged [*unbeschädigt*] life' (Gelfert 2005: 23). Klaus Weigelt has cast the term within a global language of inclusion and belonging, entirely stripped of racial and national baggage. Although Weigelt was thinking about life and belonging, his ideas gain potency in

their negation. This is what it meant to die German in Ghana, divorced from one's *Heimat*:

> Heimat is the experience of being accepted as a person, not as an undesired foreigner living somewhere in the world, but to belong somewhere, where you are welcome, where you are loved and regarded, where you are taken seriously with all your sorrows and all your joys. (Weigelt 1984: 16)

The Basel Mission in Ghana cannot be understood apart from this word. *Heimat* is not primarily about rootedness in the land, but also about who would take care of the missionaries when they were sick, and who would visit their graves. And yet it is also about land, about rootedness in space. If this spatial element to German distance is not kept in view, scholars may see racial supremacy and imperial fantasies where homesickness and loneliness are far better explanations. If *Heimat* is a uniquely German way of bridging the past and the future and if death and mourning offer to the survivors in the present an opportunity and a challenge to clarify ultimate hopes and fears, then the certainty and finality of bodily death forces those who die away from home to confront all kinds of tensions and contradictions. To die German in Ghana, then, is to renegotiate the meaning of *Heimat*.

Finally, if German nationalism tended to embrace the logic of autochthony, German missionaries needed carefully to navigate between competing claims on their loyalty. In pietistic circles the solution to this tension was to emphasise citizenship in the coming Kingdom of God. In song around the open grave, the missionaries remembered the present from a vantage point in the future, in which the homeless missionary finds her true *Heimat*. The field hymnal's song 'At the Grave of a Mission Woman', for example:

> He who quietly led you forth from home [*Heimat*] / Who always stood at your side / Who on rolling ocean waves / Kept you from danger, He shortened your time of wandering here below / And led you to his side / Where he gave to the dove its secure nest / And to his child an eternal homeland [*Heimatland*]. (Josenhans 1869: 239–40 (Song 338, verses 6–7))

In this and similar songs, the Basel missionaries articulated a kind of homelessness which kept them from over-identification with contemporary political developments in Germany and Switzerland.

But the reverse is true as well: such sentiments equally let the missionaries dodge Ghanaian claims on their loyalties. Throughout its history in the Gold Coast, the Basel Mission persisted in speaking of Germany and Switzerland as *Heimat*, in contrast to Africa: the Gold Coast, by virtue of its definition as a mission field, could not be *Heimat*. Thus David Eisenschmid (see above) spoke of his wife's final house [*Haus*], not her final home. If the Gold Coast could never be *Heimat*, we have a sense of the real sacrifice involved in dying there: it was not so much the horror of dying young, it was the horror of dying without a home. This is a particularly German fear, if only in degree, and there was exactly one solution: to re-imagine the Gold Coast as home. This did not happen. The missionaries continually held Africa at arm's length. The exact dynamic varied between missionaries, between the two poles of fully melting into Africa and stubbornly embracing German supremacy, because neither Europe nor Africa was an unmoving cultural monolith.

Recent studies provincialising German missionaries in West Africa, especially those of Birgit Meyer and Sandra Greene, have demonstrated the degree to which the social and cultural background of the missionaries shaped the kind of Christianity they hoped to see established in West Africa (Meyer 1999; Greene 2002). My argument is a twist on these studies. If a close look at the particularity of the missionaries' background is needed within the broader goal of writing an Afrocentric history of Christianity, there is a cost: the same approach tends to brush over the deep and progressive alienation many of the missionaries felt toward their home societies. To put this another way, historians must take great care not to minimise the strangeness of the missionaries at home. The missionaries were foreigners abroad and foreigners at home. When one of their own died in Ghana, their grief process frequently included mourning the lost connectedness to home. To die German in Ghana was to die homeless – and unnecessarily so, because Ghanaian arms had been wide open all along.

For nearly a century, stories of grief and death filled the pages of Basel Mission newsletters – more so than stories of healing.[3] Factor in the sheer emotional weight to the grief, and the question begins to arise: exactly how seduced were the Baslers by science, medicine and empire? Much recent German historiography asks these questions, along with those of race and gender. But to the Germans who died in Ghana and – more precisely – those who buried them and told the story, death and disease may have been the main point. It is important to understand the

emotions in this matter, because these in their intensity overwhelm any German political and racial ideas in contemporary circulation. In fact, the cumulative memory of mortal suffering might prove more important to understanding the emergence of a post-colonial German Christianity than memories of success and accomplishment.

Paul Grant is a doctoral candidate in history at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He grew up in Basel, Switzerland, and worked for several years for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA. Email: pgrant@wisc.edu

NOTES

1 All translations are my own.

2 As one example, students of the pietist missionary school St. Chrischona north of Basel were during the mid to late nineteenth century regularly assigned service in local sanitaria. Among these students was at least one African who would later enter service with the Basel Mission in the Gold Coast, a certain David Cornelius Badu. See Debrunner 1996: 275–86.

3 Although accounts of miracles and healings subsequent to the laying on of hands in prayer occasionally ran in Basel Mission newsletters, the authors and editors consistently dodged the tricky questions implied, by depicting such prayers exclusively as those of African believers. Thus in his November 1865 account of a healing from what appears to be elephantiasis, Johann Dieterle credited the entire story to a local believer named Noah, who had persuaded the victim to destroy his 'fetishes'. The *Heidenbote* editor added a moral to the story for European readers: 'Dear Reader, what is your fetish?' (*Heidenbote* 1866: 11)

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