Foreword

The field of intercultural studies remains a fertile and inexhaustible source of insight. The vast archives of trading companies, colonial governments, and voluntary agencies, including missionary societies, in Europe, the British Isles, and North America provide the enterprising scholar with a wealth of material to pursue fresh lines of research. This study based on the experience of the Basel Mission throws light on several important dimensions of early European efforts to engage with an African culture effectively.

Using the sociological concept of *trained incapacity*, Dr. Birgit Herppich examines how the training missionary candidates received in the early 1800s interfaced with Ghanaian culture. The study is limited to the first contingent of missionaries sent to Ghana by the Basel Mission during the years 1828–1840.

In 1800 the academic study of sociology, anthropology, linguistics, and the religions had not yet been established. Oxford and Cambridge only admitted students from the Anglican Church. The initiatives of the British Methodists in 1786 and Baptists in 1792 set the course for the modern mission movement. It was Evangelical Anglicans and Nonconformists in Great Britain and Pietists on the Continent who furnished the people and financial support for this initiative. The typical missionary candidate had only a rudimentary education. Mission societies recognized that candidates needed basic preparation for service in foreign lands. For this purpose missionary training schools were set up. The curriculum was decidedly practical. No courses were offered in culture, language study, or theology of mission. Medical science was still rudimentary and missionary candidates were encouraged to acquire basic training in treating various common illnesses. There was no known cure for malaria and other tropical diseases. The mortality rate among

missionaries was appallingly high. Effective treatment of these dread diseases lay decades in the future.

The Basel Mission, founded in 1815, became the leading Pietist-sponsored missionary agency in German-speaking Europe. Initially, it saw its role to be the training of people for missionary service. For this purpose it set up the Basel Mission Training Institute. BMTI graduates served with the Anglican Church Missionary Society and various European societies. For several decades the Basel Mission and the Church Missionary Society had a formal agreement whereby CMS accepted BMTI-trained workers for appointment to their missions in Africa and Asia. Early in the 1820s the Basel Mission began establishing missions and sending missionaries.

The BMTI curriculum was shaped by the values promoted by the Pietist movement: emphasis on cultivating personal piety, conservative personal ethics, and a defensive posture toward the world. Missionary candidates who completed the BMTI course were shaped by the Basel Mission ethos. Graduates were not trained to think in terms of missionary adaptation to the host culture. Indeed, the Euro-American attitude in the early nineteenth century toward other cultures was to regard them as inferior. The author shows that this training regime resulted in missionary practices that erected barriers between the Ghanaians and the missionaries. While a few missionaries succeeded in surmounting these obstacles, most did not.

With all the resources available to us in the twenty-first century—linguistic tools, cultural studies, a global world system—one would like to believe we have progressed in our capacity for respectful and effective intercultural communication and collaboration. But the evidence compels caution. Every generation is faced with the challenge of learning how to engage appropriately and respectfully with people of other cultures. Our cultures remain biased toward "trained incapacity."

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