

# Christianity and Cultural History in Northern Ghana

A Portrait of Cardinal  
Peter Poreku Dery (1918-2008)

Alexis B. Tengan (ed.)



On Monday 23 April 1906 the Missionaries of Africa, also known as the White Fathers, arrived from Upper Volta, today known as Burkina Faso, in Navrongo to begin their missionary activities in northern Ghana. The small group consisted of three missionaries and a contingent of twenty Africans as helpers. Socially and culturally, the region was still suffering from the consequences of the recently outlawed practice of slave raiding and the terror regimes initiated by Zambarma generals such as Samouri and Babatu.

The inhabitants were still to come to terms with the European use of military force to try to establish colonial rule. Many of the populations and groups residing in what was then called the Northern Territories of Ghana, and also those in semi-urban trading centres such as Tamale, Wa and Bawku, had, over the past century, come to adopt aspects of Islamization within their cultures and had accepted the centralizing chieftaincy structure as their main socio-political system.

Cardinal Dery was born around this time into a priestly class among the Dagara people, and his life story as a religious leader vividly captures the cultural evolution of the whole region within this period.

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Peter Poreku Dery (1918-2008)**



**P.I.E. Peter Lang**

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Peter Poreku Dery (1918-2008)**

“Gods, Humans and Religions”

No.20

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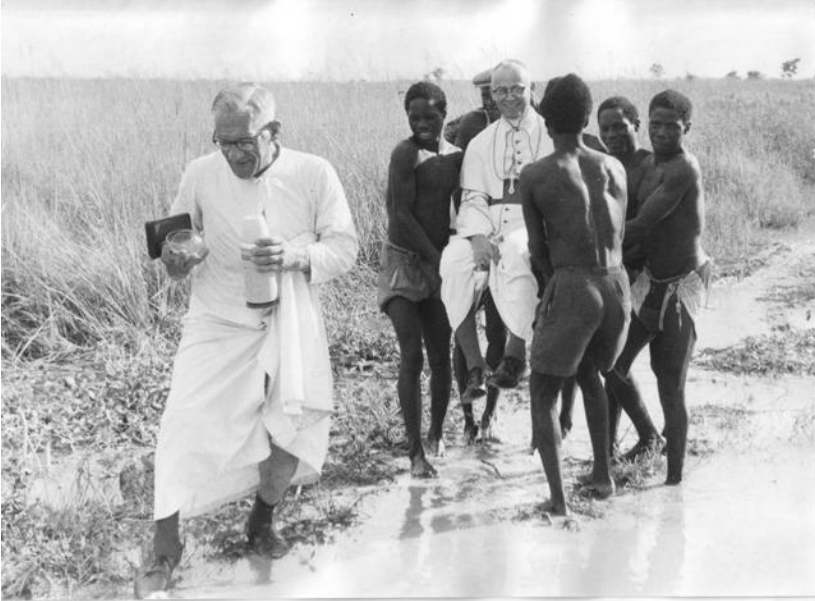
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## Foreword

**Figure 1: Fr. Remigius F. McCoy, first missionary to northwest Ghana, leading Bishop Gabriel Champagne, first bishop of Tamale Diocese (1957-72), northern Ghana, across a stream**



Source: Dery Albums, Tengan digital collection

On Monday, 23 April 1906 the Missionaries of Africa also known as the White Fathers, arrived from Upper Volta, today known as Burkina Faso, in Navrongo to begin their missionary activities in northern Ghana. The small group consisted of Rev. Fathers Jean-Marie Chollet and Brother Eugene Gall from France and Oscar Morin from Canada as missionaries and a contingent of about 20 Africans as helpers. Socially and culturally, the region was still suffering from the consequences of the just outlawed slave raiding and the coming to end of terror regimes by warlords initiated by such Zambarma generals as Samouri and Babatu. The populations were still to come to terms with the European (French, British and German) use of military forces to try to establish their colonial rule. Many of the ethnic populations and groups residing

in what was then called the Northern Territories of Ghana and also those in semi-urban trading centres such as Wa and Bawku had, over the past century, for reasons of security, come to adopt aspects of Islamization for their cultures and the centralising chieftaincy structure as their main socio-political systems. The rest of the populations and ethnic groups, mainly rural farming communities who did not subscribe to Islam and or did not adopt chieftaincy structure were forced to migrate into the arid and less fertile regions of the present day Upper-East and Upper-West Region. A main feature of these populations was constant migration and redistribution of peoples throughout the territory (Rattray, 1932; Fortes, 1945) and the use of linguistic and cultural icons as identity markers rather than territorial localities (Goody, 1967). The words of Cardinal Poreku Dery whose leadership portrait is partly the focus of this colloquium/workshop regarding his own family/clan history capture the general situation at the time.

I grew up to learn from my elders that my people originally moved from Dagbong to Mossi country (*Moo-tenga*). How long they stayed there, I do not know. What I gather is that there was fission in the family after some time and a large portion of it moved away from there. They are said to have moved to Southern Ghana. None of those of us still living remembers ever having been told the reason for the move from *Moo-tenga*. Was it due to a quarrel or some family disagreement? I do not know. As the group descended southward from *Moo-tenga*, it came into contact with some Kasena and some Gurunshi. My family must have stayed among and mingled with these people for a short while before moving further South. Further down, they came into contact with the Sisala. Their stay among the Sisala must have been quite long and their interaction with them intensive. For Isaaleng gradually replaced *More* as a medium of communication for my people.

The final phase of their move brought them through Tumu, Gbal, Wiuro, Fielmuo, Nabing and Zoole. They eventually arrived at Konguol where they settled. I do not know what special event took place in Nabing and Zoole. But my family has always felt emotionally attached to these places as the terms nabing-ma and zoole-ma continue to be used as praise-names for the daughters of our patrilineage. These two terms are clearly composites of Sisaala and Dagara words. (Dery, 2001; p. 15)

Given such a historical context, it was normal for these populations to rely on their African Traditional Religion and house-based clan formations as main source features for their social and cultural lives. Hence, leadership for the whole community partly depended on charismatic figures emerging from different descent and clan groups with excellent education in religious and cultural thoughts and practices and partly on custodianship of cultic institutions linked to the family and clan structures and the traditional religion. These included not only the localised institutions linked to the earth, the rain, the river and the

sky as cosmic beings but also to such abstract global notions as the Dagara *bagr*. These institutions supported the training of individuals who will ensure the continuity of traditional religion and its practices. These individuals, considered as custodians of the institutions provided a specific form of leadership based on religious authority.

This situation had begun to change, first with the installation of Islam in northern Ghana, and much radically later, with the implementation of the colonial enterprise and the planting of Catholicism in the area. The colloquium/workshop will focus on issues relating to religion and leadership caused by the installation and plantation of these recent movements (Islam, Colonialism and Catholicism) into the area. One of the few figures who fully participated in these changes and helped to shape the concept and practice of religious leadership during this period is Cardinal Peter Poreku Dery (1918-2008). Also, this period is bound to be the most exciting period for the study of the cultural history of Northern Ghana. It has to be considered as the formation period when a society and a cultural area now known as northern Ghana was founded. A convenient way of studying the different socio-cultural elements and actors over the period is to focus on the portrait of one of the main figures.

Hence, in order to properly understand the relevance of this period, outline the beginnings of the circumstances that have shaped a new cultural historical era, and to fully document the most significant memories that are shaping our future, a colloquium was organised in late July 2011 at the SS Peter and Paul Pastoral Institute, Wa. The call for papers made more than a year before the actual date of the colloquium invited contributors to reflect on religion and leadership generally and within a specific cultural context or with ethnographic references to events in northern Ghana during the lifetime of Cardinal Dery and his contemporaries (1908 to 2008). As organiser, I was looking for paper contributions that are shedding light on and analysing any social, cultural, political and religious phenomena that have taken place since the beginning of the last century and focusing on this region. I was particularly interested in papers that were taking an integrated and inter-disciplinary approach for study of the events that have re-shaped the lives of the different peoples and population within Northern Ghana.

I am very grateful to all those who responded to the call and more particularly to those who finally agreed to write and submit a paper for the colloquium. Sponsorship for such initiatives, especially when not backed by any academic institution or non-governmental organisation with an interest or motive, is never readily available and I did not even make the attempt to search for any. I took the risk to rely on the Ghanaian public willing to attend and to pay a conference fee that will partial-

ly offset the expenses. I call this a risk because I have been deeply ware of the common practice fostered mainly by external funding agencies, particularly non-governmental organization (NGOs), of giving stipends and honorarium to entice Africans to patronise their seminars and how Africans have ordinarily come to associate academic seminars and colloquia with these payments as part of their income. Even though I was prepared to make a contribution from my family budget, I was never in a position to pay for all the organisational expenses and certainly not for the feeding and lodging of the number of people I was hoping will turn up. I am therefore very thankful to the participants for breaking with tradition and accepting not only to lodge and feed themselves but also to pay the conference fee which helped offset the organisational expenses. I am also very grateful to the director of Ss Peter and Paul Pastoral Institute for, Fr. Edward B. Tengan for the affordable rates making it possible for the colloquium to take place in the institute. Many of the participants were very eager to purchase copies of the various presentations. This indicated to me that the publication of the proceedings of the colloquium in a book format to be a good idea.

It is a long and hard road to walk from the moment of conceiving the idea of looking into the life of Cardinal Dery as a cultural biography and getting to the point where the ideas of different authors are put together in a book format. Without the moral and material support of my family, particular my wife and children and Marcelle De Cleene (Mammie Marcelle as she is known by the children), it would have been impossible to complete the journey. We are all connected through Cardinal Dery and he will continue to inspire us to do many things together.

*Alexis Bekyane Tengan  
Zaventem, April 2013*

## Preface

“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth, we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father” (In 1: 14). The Incarnation of Jesus Christ, God’s Supreme gift of himself to us, is a shattering revelation of Love given without restraint. For many of us who are happy enough to have even a small realisation of that mystery, there is something of a death and resurrection. Nothing can ever be quite the same again. The wonder of it may wax and wane, we may even want to forget it, push it out of our lives – because the very fact of Incarnation makes our finite minds boggle and the challenge to respond seems too demanding. But if we are caught up with God, we have come to become givers and receivers of love, without sin, but restraint also.

**Figure 2: Cardinal Dery in 1995 presiding over the installation of Bishop Paul Bemile as the third bishop of Wa Diocese**



Source: Cardinal Dery Album; Tengan digital collection

The essence of this colloquium is the need to share; to share with one another what we have learnt, heard, seen and experienced from a man who lived his humanity and his priesthood to the full. The man in question started his career as an assistant fetish priest and passed through the ranks of the Catholic Church from his baptism in December 1932 to be priest in 1951, a Bishop in 1960 and a Prince of the Church, a Cardinal, in 2006. This man is none other than Peter Cardinal Poreku Dery. He died as an octogenarian – golden *jubilarian*. Like the beloved disciple John, Peter Cardinal Dery soldiered on as a devout Christian and even lived on as a productive Shepherd of Christ even in his ripe old age. This is the man we have gathered here to sketch through photo exhibition and through the different papers that will be presented during these three days.

In a session dealing with Leadership in its Historical and Religious perspective, we shall hear the story of a model priest who is alive, despite his death, vibrant, filled with the Holy Spirit and ready to be used by the Spirit at any time and at any place. As a local leader and stimulator he was in a particular way the light of Dagaaba land. In our time it seems natural for us to be unnerved by the tremendous challenges of the era. Yet when we look up to this man we realise that the beginning, living out and ending in the service of Christ, as Cardinal Dery did, is a full time struggle in which the going is hard and yet exciting, demanding and yet fulfilling, impossible and yet achievable with the help of God. Here stands a man who beckons to us and says that Christianity is a life of joy.

Since what has been lined up for you in this colloquium is a tall order, I would exhort you to participate actively in these workshops in order to derive the maximum benefit from the speakers, the facilitators and the material that they bring to us for consumption.

What I would like to stress is that Cardinal Dery was a priest from the very beginning of his life to the end of it. He was a priest who was duly seen as a man of God, devoted to the service of God and humanity. He was truly a mature priest whose sexuality was fully integrated in his priestly ministry. He was a good listener, a counsellor and healer both in the material and spiritual spheres. He began his healing ministry when he was a seminarian tasked with the work of a dispensary. That explained why he smoked profusely at first and gave up smoking completely after a retreat. Cardinal Dery was a man who became all things to all men at all the time. His neighbourliness was unlimited that is why he had relation with all tribes and clans.

Liturgy was the passion of Cardinal Dery. As soon as he became Bishop he sought permission from his mentor Pope John XXIII to inculcate the Liturgy. Once the permission was granted he went

straight into the translation of the Bible and other liturgical texts into Dagaare. The experimentations he made in liturgical music were carried over to Rome for the Vatican II.

It is my fervent belief that tracing and reliving the ideas of Cardinal Dery can give the present Local Church of Wa and beyond a road map for the future. His ideas and philosophy have a breadth of a vision which will interest and help priests, religious and lay people, because beneath the earthly life of Cardinal Dery is the serene conviction of prayer, faith and a lived priesthood.

Once you and I have lived and tasted the life cycle of such a man as Cardinal Dery, life will no more be the same again, however much we remain selfish and sinful, forgetful and stupid. Cardinal Dery will not be happy that we simply listened to the presentations on his life and philosophy, looked at his photo exhibition or read his biography without any change of life. The famous parting words of Cardinal Dery to all his teeming visitors were: *“I will always remember you in my prayers as I storm God for you – go away now and seek the Lord’s will – and do it”*.

† *Most Rev. Paul bemile,  
Catholic Bishop of Wa.*



## INTRODUCTION

# **Approaching the Cultural History of Northern Ghana**

Alexis B. TENGAN

*Independent Scholar and Teacher*

### **Biographies as Cultural History**

What constitutes the cultural history of a people or of a region if not narratives on the significant lives of individuals embodying social and cultural institutions and practices over a period time? After all, normative history tends to occupy the domain of processing “eventful facts about the past” as narratives that are relevant to remember. Yet much of the eventful facts are nothing but biographical stories about individuals and social groups or communities holding power and authority and how these individuals and groups use power and authority to dominate and re-shape the destinies of populations by creating institutions and ideas that impact in various ways the physical and social environment of the same populations. Apart from the powerful few whose biographies normative history tend to concern itself with, cultural history has to focus on the many other individual and group biographies that are in any way dealing with aspects of cosmology and the symbolic structural creation and practices of the whole population.

### ***Religious Groups and the Re-shaping of Cultural History (The Missionaries of Africa)***

The installation of the Catholic Church in Northern Ghana was just a little over hundred years old in the year 2010. The Missionaries of Africa, known as the White Fathers, arrived from Upper Volta, today known as Burkina Faso, in Navrongo on Monday, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1906. Rev. Fathers Jean-Marie Chollet from France, Oscar Morin from Canada and Brother Eugene Gall from France were the three pioneers. They were accompanied by a contingent of about 20 Africans. They arrived in

Northern Ghana at a time when a big segment of the local population, traditionally engaged in hoe-farming and living in the rural areas, was still contending with the consequences of the just outlawed slave-raiding and still struggling to understand the nature of the impact of incoming social and philosophical movements were having to do with the way they were about to redefine their identities and reshape their lives. First, the Islamic Cultural Revolution provoked by the Trans-Saharan trade in kola nuts and human beings had taken roots in the few urban centres of Northern Ghana and had begun to create centralized social polities within these populations. Long before the arrival of the White Fathers and long before the incorporation of the Northern Territories into the British colonial system of administration, the four principal Northern kingdoms, namely, Mamprusi; Dagomba, Gonja and Wala, had already used rudiments of Islamic ideas to create centralized chieftaincy communities that were culturally and economically outward looking with a global outreach and vision. This gave them economic advantage and with that they tended to marginalize and exclude majority of the rural dwellers from their cultural life in order to feed a global system base on slave raiding and exploitative trade. It is significant to note that the White Fathers arrived in Northern Ghana via the Islamic trade routes, the Trans-Saharan trade route, and after they have had some experience of mission in the Islamic country of Algeria. This experience greatly enhanced their missionary formation and properly equipped them to view clearly the different socio-political currents and the cultural and philosophical movements that were dominating and influencing the lives of the local populations of Northern Ghana, and among whom they had to work.

Within a few years after their arrival, the Missionary Sisters of our Lady of Africa (Msola), known as the White Sisters joined them. Together they put into practice their founder's, Cardinal Lavigerie, repeated refrain, namely, that Africans must be evangelized by Africans.

In 1932, Bishop Oscar Morin started the local Congregation of the Sisters of Mary Immaculate (canonically founded in 1946). As early as 1948, Msgr. Alexis Abatey of Navrongo became the first African in the North of Ghana to be ordained into the priesthood and thereby accepting the task of evangelising his own people. Three years later, in 1951, Peter Poreku Dery was ordained as the first Dagara priest in Ghana. In 1960, Fr. Peter Poreku Dery was consecrated by Pope John XXIII in Rome as the first local Bishop of Wa Diocese. In 1977, he became the first Metropolitan Archbishop of the Tamale Ecclesiastical Province and in March 2006 he was elevated cardinal by Pope Benedict XVI. Today all five dioceses of the North of Ghana (Navrongo-Bolgatanga, Tamale, Wa, Damongo and Yendi) are shepherded by Ghanaian Bishops sup-

ported by many diocesan priests and religious men and women. Also today, there are many men and women, lay, religious and clergy, from Northern Ghana fully engaged in international mission work within and outside Africa. Hence, as though by fate, the current Superior General of the White Fathers Congregation and a key contributor to current volume, Fr. Richard Baawobr, comes from Northern Ghana. There are other many Ghanaians who were later influenced by other religious congregations such as the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) and the Franciscan Sister (FNM) and the Brother Mary Immaculate (FIC) who had followed the White Fathers into the regions.

**Figure 2b: Cardinal Dery family photo taken on the day of his priestly ordination at Nandim in 1951**



Source: Cardinal Dery Album; Tengan digital collection

Within the hundred-year life of the church in Northern Ghana, the creation of appropriate institutions and the development of relevant pastoral action programs that took into account the specific socio-cultural lives of the populations has been the secret for the successful growth of the church. The pastoral action programs also consisted in filling in the gaps within the social and economic needs of the people created due to years of slave raiding and instability and perpetuated through the colonial policy of maintaining Northern Ghana as a labour reserve pool for capitalist exploitation. The policy deliberately denied the Northern populations education and schooling and presented the

different cultural groups to the outside world as either totally under the influence of Islam or very much steeped in tradition and old “customary ways”. As one would have expected, the focus of the formation was the provision of formal education through the Western style schooling. To this end the majority of the elementary and secondary schools now existing throughout Northern Ghana were built, staffed and run by the Catholic Church. Within the very first years of the mission in Northern Ghana, Catechists Schools were established first in Navrongo and later in Kaleo which were instrumental in the formation of adult catechists. A little later, the Catholic Educational Unit was established as the administrative structure for all Catholic schools for young children. Minor Seminaries, Secondary Schools for both boys and girls, Teacher Training Colleges and Nursing Institutions were established at different time and in different places. As the number of church institutions grew, a close partnership was soon established between church and government in all areas of education except the minor and major seminaries which were regarded as private institutions. Through the partnership formula of Government Assisted Schools which made it possible for the church to build and administer schools and yet financially sponsored by the government, the church has continued to influence in a very positive ways, both the academic and religious education of both the clergy and the civil population of Northern Ghana at large. Apart from this, the church, through the dioceses, has established pastoral and social institutions such as the Wa Pastoral Institute and the Tamale Institute of Cross-cultural Studies to provide different levels of lay as well as clerical formation for the church’s ministry.

### ***Individual Biography as Cultural History (Peter Cardinal Poreku Dery)***

Poreku Dery was born around the year 1918 in the frontier zone between present day Ghana and Burkina Faso into a Dagara noble priestly family that had, for many generations achieved economic, cultural and social successes. He started his career at an early age as an assistant fetish priest in Dagara Traditional Religion and died on March 2008 two years after he had been elevated to the rank of cardinal within the Catholic Hierarchy. As a religious leader Poreku Dery influenced greatly, through his ideas and charismatic leadership, the cultural encounter between Missionary Christianity, especially Catholicism, and African Traditional Religion resulting in an integrated African form of worship and belief with that orthodox Catholicism.

At birth Peter Poreku Dery was given the name Poreku Dery because he was thought to be a spirit incarnate and because his father was called Poreku (Dery, 2001: 20). He was given the name Peter at baptism by the

missionary fathers who had by then recognised his leadership qualities. The Dagara assign the personal name Dery to a male and Derpog to the female gender counterpart for a spirit incarnate who has already experienced a brief moment of human life and death at an early age. This happens when a child of a couple dies before he or she is weaned. He or she is buried with a mark on his body and would be identified as the same individual if the next immediate child born to the same couple and after a few years has the same gender and bears this particular mark. Poreku Dery began to distinguish himself very early in life not just because he was thought to be a spirit incarnate but also because he had begun to display special talents and skills especially in fields of oratory, divination and ritual knowledge. These symptoms made his parents to propose him for very early membership and initiation into the Dagara *bagr*<sup>1</sup> secret society and cult. The *bagr* institution was, and still is for followers of Dagara Traditional Religion, the most prestigious socio-cultural institution specialising in the transmission of cultural knowledge through rites of mythical narratives (Goody, 1972, 1981; Tengan, 1999, 2006) and in the practical training of individuals for various professional skills and talents. Soon after his initiation and graduation into *bagr* rites and mythical narration, Poreku Dery became employed as an assistant ‘fetish’ priest under his grand uncle, Ngmankurinaa. Poreku Dery later described his grand uncle as great religious innovator and described his own contributions at this time in these terms: “at a rather early age, I used to accompany my uncle, Ngmankurinaa, to establish his many and varied fetishes for the prominent people in my area. My main duty was to help my uncle slay the animals and hens required for the establishment of Konkpenebie, Konkyekommo, Sokyere, Doosoglaa, Nyogebaliere, and the rest of them (P. Bemile, 1987: viii).

In 1929, Peter Poreku Dery was about twelve years old when the Catholic Missionary Fathers of Africa first arrived in Jirapa, some twenty-two miles distant from Dery’s village (Zemopare), and began their work of Christian conversion. He was first introduced to the missionaries by his father who had come into contact with them through his work as an itinerant trader. His father was so enthusiastic about the missionary religion to the extent that he was prepared to annul the traditional marriage between him and four of his wives in order to become a Christian. This act provoked a serious religious and cultural conflict between Poreku Dery’s father and his uncle. Ritual sacrifices at the ancestral shrine as well as various acts of divination failed to reconcile the two brothers but led to a scission within the family and the

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<sup>1</sup> The *bagr* cult and society was the single most significant religious institution among the Dagara and some aspects of it were linked to secret knowledge. For more details see Tengan, 2006.

emigration of Dery's father. Poreku Dery assisted in all these rituals and felt the pain of the conflict and the separation; a feeling that helped to make him a religious reformer.

Following the family scission Poreku Dery, now about twelve years old, left his job with his uncle and followed his father to Jirapa in search of the missionaries. The leader of the missionaries, Fr. R.F. McCoy immediately recognised his talents leadership qualities and in January 1932, a few months after Dery's arrival he was enrolled into the Catechist school. The conversion of the Dagara people to Catholicism was a mass movement. Hence within a short period of their arrival, the missionaries were soon overwhelmed by the large number of people and its continued increase turning up at different centres for catechism and baptism (see R.F. McCoy, 1988). A catechist school was therefore established in 1931 for the formation of local pastoral agents. At the Catechist school Poreku Dery became a fast learner and with his previous knowledge and experience as an assistant fetish priest, he soon became a consultant to the missionaries on matters specifically relating to Dagara religion and culture and more broadly on African ways of thinking. He played a key role in developing a program of formation rich with local (Dagara and Sisaala) cultural heritage and religious ideas.

In 1932, Poreku Dery was top of the list of the first baptismal class in northwest Ghana. He was baptised the same year and given the Christian name Peter. In 1935, now already a big boy and in his teens, he was sent to Navrongo in the northeast of Ghana to start his formal education. He combined this with his priestly formation and in 1951 he was the first African to be ordained priest in the area. He later did graduate studies in Canada and Belgium and soon after his return, was ordained bishop in 1960 and given the newly created diocese of Wa. He took over pastoral leadership and administration of the church in northwest Ghana from Fr. R.F. McCoy, the very first missionary leader who converted him and his father.

As a bishop Poreku Dery quickly realised that Dagara conversion to Catholicism was a cultural encounter between two different worldviews. Hence, he immediately began to integrate the development of liturgical rites of worship based on local cultural expressions and ideas, the development of a mission for the laity as a necessary complement to the mission of the clergy and the development of a political philosophy that considered religious life and pastoral work as basically ensuring the integral development of human beings and their environment. In 1974, he was transferred to Tamale and in 1977 he was elevated to the rank of Archbishop. He retired as administrator of the archdiocese in 1994 but continued to be active in pastoral work and was made cardinal in March 2006; a position he enjoyed until his death in March 2008. In December

2009, according to an announcement from the Pope's Nuncio in Ghana, the Pope has made it known that steps are being taken toward his future canonisation as a saint.

Dery's international career as religious leader and innovator began in 1929 when the missionaries of Africa, commonly known as the 'White Fathers' under the leadership of Fr. Remigius F. McCoy arrived for the first time in northwest Ghana and began to preach the Christian message.

In terms of liturgical rites of worship, Dery was the first to have the foresight after his ordination as Bishop of Wa in 1960 and well before the second Vatican Council that brought serious reforms, to submit a petition to Pope John XXII asking him to permit him to "bring the Vernacular music into the liturgy". The Pope not only granted the permission but exhorted him not to transliterate the Latin songs but to compose new songs using the people's thought patterns and cultural symbolism that are expressing the essence of the Christian message and at the same time meaningful to the people. Dery then went ahead to compose, the *Dagara Missa* (The Dagara Mass) a service in the Dagara language and became the first bishop ever in the Catholic Church to compose non-Latin Mass Service. He was also one the first to introduced the use of such African and traditional instruments as the Xylophone and the drum and to encourage rhythmic movements of the body in resonance with ritual music. Having developed a humanist philosophy about religion, Dery for the period of twenty-two years, took on the national task within Ghana and the universal church to build such strong institutional structures as the National Laity Council (NLC) of Ghana, the Ghana national Youth Council (GHANCYC), the National Council of Catholic Women (NCCW) and the coordinator of the Pan African Laity Council Board responsible for organising the African Lay Apostolate.

Throughout his life and in all his activities, Dery was driven by the personal conviction that his actions were guided by Divine Providence and therefore, he could know the will of God just as much by intuition and human interaction as by rational intellectual study and thinking.

## **The Documentation and Writing of Cultural history**

The documentation and writing of cultural history in Northern Ghana has to be a multi-disciplinary research project seeking to provide the whole of Ghana and the academic community a heritage institution of ideas in the fullest sense of the term. The focus of research and documentation has to be the creation intellectual awareness for self and guided education into the depths of religious, cultural, economic, social

and philosophical movements and ideas that have over generations, been shaping the socio-cultural lives of people in the region. The main objective would be to identify and document the tangible and intangible archival institutions and materials of the societies of Northern Ghana in order to build a comprehensive and integral heritage movement of cultural and philosophical discourses within the global context of ongoing events and social change. The project should aim at contributing to the development of a cultural history that is based on individual as well as social biographies of significant life situations in Northern Ghana. The life situations must have been experienced as dynamic interchange and tensions between religion, culture, the economy and society as these dimensions of social realities continue to evolve within given historic periods or epochs.

In other words, the construction of a cultural history focusing on heritage documentation, given our recent historical realities, has to be based on three axes, namely, the active collection and conservation of local heritage of all kinds including materials now found outside Ghana, the provision of scholarly and scientific examination of the heritage as knowledge content and the fostering of public awareness of the knowledge concerns embedded in the heritage examined. The current volume is very much anchoring on these three axes. In the first place, the historical epoch this volume has chosen to focus on, northern Ghana between 1918 to 2008, stands out as the period when populations and cultures, as we know them today, metamorphosed as identifiable units and ethnographically significant. Indeed the whole of northern Ghana as a socio-political entity became an *enfant* only at the start of the twentieth century. Indeed, one can say that the birth process which began in 1908 only became complete in 1918 when Germany lost its colonial territories in Africa to the British and the French and the complete map of Ghana and northern Ghana as we know them today were finalised. Cardinal Dery's birth story, as narrated above, culturally signifies the birth story of the people of northern Ghana and the re-birth of their cultural history. Secondly, the man Cardinal Dery as a pioneer educated elite of the region and as a religious leader, more than any of his contemporaries, experienced fully the dynamic interchange and tension within the diverse socio-cultural spheres of life. The collection of papers presented in this volume tries to lay bare the ongoing development of interchange and tensions within the different social and cultural spheres at this time. Finally, mindful of the fact that all history involves the processing of selected facts and events into scientific narratives worth remembering, the volume chapters consist of selected themes that were of socio-cultural significance for the society of northern Ghana during the period concerned. These themes include the exchange and existing tension between Christianity and African Religions through missionary

and colonial agencies and the fusion of different worldviews and shifts in mental and cultural paradigms within the ongoing tensions, especially between the written and the oral traditions.

It is with this in mind that I decided to present the chapters of the book by dividing them into three parts. The first part, which I have entitled as *Cultures in Contact, Religions in Conflict*, consists of four chapters that are setting the ground within which this cultural biography took place. Hence, in the first chapter entitled, *Spatial Trajectories and Missionary and Colonial Movements into Northwest Ghana since 1929*; Alexis B. Tengan describes the cosmographic mind scope and the socio-cultural features of one ethnic group in northern, the Dagara people, as they first encounter the planting of missionary Catholicism within the region. In the second chapter that follows, Linus Zan, in an ethnographically focused manner, elaborates on the notion and structure of Dagara traditional leadership and successfully applied these to the life biography of Cardinal Dery as cultural history.

In the two chapters that are following the outlines on social and cosmological structures, Paschal Kyoore and Gervase Angsotinge elaborate on themes of orature that were used by traditional society to create a life-sustaining socio-political and a moral economic order allowing the perpetually reproduce itself. The two authors also dealt with themes within the oral world that continually tend to damage and erode the moral and fibres in the socio-cultural system and also corrupt the economic system. The tensions between reproductive capacities and creativity potentials within these systems are very the focus of their analysis within the context of cultural historiography and Dery's biography.

The second part of the book entitled *Reconciling Religions; Reconciling People*, consists of three chapters and is dealing with how the tension of the interchange between tradition and ongoing religious and socio-cultural changes are being reconciled within society and within the individuals, singly and collectively. Hence, in the opening chapter of this section, Richard Baawobr traces the biblical and Christian traditions of reconciliation within human cultures and societies in the global sphere and throughout past times and across cosmographic and geographic spaces. He then proceeded to carefully illustrate the modes and methods via which such Africans as Cardinal Dery have been influencing cultural paradigm shifts in order to reconcile Africans and their cultures and societies to accommodate the new global situation. Dery's particular role in this context is brought home most forcefully through the chapter of Edward Tengan following that of Richard Baawobr. In this chapter, Tengan uses the metaphor of the two house community structure embedded in Dery's code of arms to argue that Christian conversion in Africa must be seen as an ongoing process within which

the best of the religious items from African Religion and worldview are gradually brought into Biblical Christianity; as against the notion that conversion has to be a turn around of Africans and away from their traditional worldview toward an assimilation into a Christianity heavily influenced by European culture. The problem of what Biblical Christianity and its worldview entails becomes the subject of investigation in our next Chapter. With the title; *Evangelising the Dagaaba through Bible translation: Then and now* Fabian Dapila introduces the practical role Cardinal Dery played in ensuring that there is a proper reconciliation between Biblical Christianity and the Traditional worldview. As Dapila argued, Dery was not only the bridge via which the tensions between missionary Christianity and traditional religion could be mediated, but he was also the cultural portrait and lens through which religious and human values could be viewed. The rest of Dapila's chapter uses the process of bible translation to illustrate the processes of cultural and linguistic mediations taking place ever since.

The third part of the book, which I have titled *Renewing Culture, Renewing Religion*, consists of six chapters dealing with specific themes and ways cultural and religious interchange and tensions are being currently viewed and in some cases resolved or dealt with as ongoing issues. In some ways the first three of these chapters, namely, the chapters by Gregory Donkore, Africanus Diedong and Nora Kofognotera Nontera tackle one of the most significant themes that has affected culture change and created the most profound tension with the African personality since its introduction in the last century. The school system of mass education represents one of the most ambivalent forces of tension existing within individuals and society. Hence, these chapters collectively take on the issues of competing ideologies regarding the content of school education, the purpose of the schooling as a system and the evolving role different agencies deliver and use/misuse the schooling system for their interest. In the first of these chapters, Donkore touches on the two main ideological orientations that have been at the background in the development of school education in Ghana, namely, the ideological vision of religious bodies on the one hand and that of the secular government on the other. The chapter is however heavily focused on the issue of quality education. The paper is based on field research and the conclusion seems to suggest that investments in quality teaching are the proper way to resolve the different tensions. In the chapter that follows, Diedong singles out the Catholic Church as one main agent of education particularly in northern Ghana. This position allows him to fully highlight the personal ideology of Cardinal Dery as a religious leader within the period. It also allows him to look at how the worldview of Dery could foster a sustaining environment for proper education. The issue of sustainable environment in terms of peace is

taken on analytically in the chapter of Nora Nontera. Using religious education as a theme of her research, Nontera focuses on the multi-religious and cultural nature of the Ghanaian society and the potentials for tensions and conflicts within it.

The last three chapters of this third part, and indeed of the whole book, consist of ethnographic descriptions of social and cultural actors who are living through these tensions and the shifting periods of cultural history. These actors include both foreign individuals and social groups as well local ones. Aloysius Porekuu has been a member of the missionary organisation, the Brothers of the Immaculate Conception (FIC), for many years and in his chapter, he presents to us a brief history of the congregation and a refined emic description of the congregation's life experiences in northern Ghana. The main issue in the chapter is to make apparent the universal nature of Christianity as a human endeavour. Finally, the last two chapters by the veteran social science researchers, Isidore Lobnibeh and Gariba Abdul-Korah, are the perfect ones to conclude this exploration an approach to the cultural history of North-western Ghana. Having adopted an etic approach following many years of research both Isidore and Gariba in a very complementary way illustrate in detail the different tensions and evolving changes that have been going on within kin groups and domestic social units. Fission and migration have always been the main ways traditional societies in northern Ghana have tried to deal with these tensions and domestic conflicts. Also, gender roles and identities have always been issues of contestations within the society. Hence, the two chapters first put kinship and the domestic groups within a cultural historical perspective and focus on how actors negotiate and act upon the socio-cultural systems in order to realise their individuality and identity. They then outline the structural changes taking place within contemporary society and the new and evolving pattern of recent migration patterns. As a conclusion for their chapters, which is very much fitting with the general conclusion of the book, they discuss in detail the aspirations and the realities that many people continue to experience today.

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