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## **Joseph Malula**

**1917 to 1989**

**Roman Catholic**

**Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaïre)**

Cardinal Joseph Malula was a leading Congolese Roman Catholic visionary during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. During the days when Mobutu proclaimed *authenticité* as a state policy, attempting to cast off the colonial mentality, Malula was engaging in various practices of inculturation, making the Roman Catholic Church authentically African.

### **Family and education background**

Joseph Malula wrote more than 750 documents of which the majority have been compiled and published in seven volumes by Leon de Saint Moulain (1997). Born in Kinshasa on December 17, 1917, Joseph Malula was the fifth child out of eight. He attended the Minor Seminary of Mbata-Kiela in Mayombe (Lower Congo Province), the Minor Seminary of Bolongo, near Lisala (Equator region), and the Major Seminary of Kabwe (Kasaï region). Even if Malula did not attend university classes, two universities granted him the title of *doctor honoris causa*, namely the Catholic University of Leuven on February 2, 1978 and Boston University on March 18, 1980.

### **Leadership**

Malula's leadership skills started with his priestly ordination that was both an ordinary and extraordinary event that happened on June 9, 1946 at Queen Astrid Stadium in Kinshasa (later renamed the Stadium of November 24 to commemorate Mobutu's political takeover). The priestly ordination was a normal event as the culmination of Malula's training in both minor and major seminars. However, though Stephane Kaoze was the first Congolese priest ordained in 1917 in Baudouinville (Kirungu, Eastern Congo), the priestly ordination of Malula and his two companions seems to have been a more significant event. It was attended by some 20,000 people, including Mayor Pierre Reykmans. [1] The latter was the Chief Governor of Belgian Congo during the Second World War. [1b]

Following this grandiose priestly ordination, Malula started building up his leadership skills as a teacher at the Minor Seminary of Bokoro, before working as a vicar and parish priest in Kinshasa (at Christ the King and Saint Peter Parishes). On September 20, 1959, he was consecrated bishop at Tata Raphaël Stadium which was later called the Stadium of May 20 to commemorate Mobutu's political party. Malula considered his episcopal consecration as a great day during which God inspired him to state: "A Congolese Church in a Congolese State" (cf. note 1). Some years later, he

recalled this statement and said: “I did not realise the influence of these words on my life and its great impact in the history of our country.” [2]

Step by step, Malula acquired the leadership quality of a prophet, especially a prophet of justice. In a speech given on January 4, 1969 in the presence of General Mobutu, he pleaded for a distributive justice, which was being neglected by the new regime. On June 29, 1970, before King Baudouin of Belgium and President Mobutu, Malula denounced the luxurious life standards of the political leaders at the expense of harmonious development.

On March 28, 1969, the Vatican announced the elevation of Joseph Malula as cardinal, and he received the red biretta in Rome on April 28, 1969. He declared that this elevation would determine his life less than the episcopal consecration. [3] On January 16, 1972, he wrote a pastoral letter which was deemed subversive. The media attacked him on January 22. On January 24, he was expelled from his residence and obliged to go into exile in Rome from February 11 until June 28, 1972. Before the end of his life, he managed to organise one of the most memorable events in his pastoral ministry, namely the Diocesan Synod of 1986-1988. Further details of his leadership achievements are highlighted in the section on his impact.

## **Impact**

Malula’s pastoral and leadership legacy is immense and diverse, ranging from his empowerment of the Congolese personnel to manage his archdiocese, his liturgical contributions, his pastoral care for the family and for intellectuals, and his advocacy and charity work among the less privileged. [4]

If Joseph Malula did not perform miraculous healings, he certainly prayed for the sick and contributed to restoring the dignity of many marginalized people through social actions and prayer. He acknowledged the importance of prayer in his life, when he said: “I am neither a theologian nor a mystic. I am simply a person who prays or at least who tries to pray.” [5] He questioned the Christian identity of Kimbanguists in terms of invalid baptism, [6] as they baptize in the name of Simon Kimbangu’s metamorphosed sons. Nevertheless, he remained open to collaboration with Kimbanguists and Protestants for the sake of solidarity and sharing. This was illustrated in a lecture he presented in the Cathedral of Our Lady of Lingwala (Kinshasa) on March 28, 1981 under the title: “Christian Laity of Today’s Zaire (Protestants, Kimbanguists, and Catholics) Encouraged to Pursue Solidarity and Sharing.” Malula wanted to be not only a founder of a Congolese Church but also a prophet of justice. He often repeated that he would rather be crucified than crucify the truth. [7] A good number of the Congolese might certainly agree that Malula lived, suffered, and died as a prophet of justice and truth. An attentive tour of Kinshasa city will hardly fail to reveal Malula’s legacy as far as ecclesial and social structures are concerned, though those structures have been adversely affected by lootings since the early 1990s. In short, Malula’s legacy supports his leadership

commitment that consisted of creating living conditions for a moderate, authentic Congolese Church in a Congolese State.

**Endnotes:**

1. Léon De Saint Moulin, *Œuvres complètes du Cardinal Malula. Vol 2. Textes biographiques et généraux* (Kinshasa: Facultés Catholiques de Kinshasa), 1997, p. 14.
- 1b. His son Andre Reyckmans became Division Commissioner and was murdered on Inkisi bridge (Lower Congo) in 1959, probably because of his progressive ideas. He left a son, François Reyckmans, journalist at RTBF (Radio Télévision Belge Francophone).
2. Léon, De Saint Moulin, *Œuvres complètes du Cardinal Malula. Vol 1.* p. 12.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 12,14.
4. Léon De Saint Moulin, *Œuvres complètes du Cardinal Malula*, Vol 1. p. 7; Vol 2, p. 12.
5. Léon De Saint Moulin, *Œuvres complètes du Cardinal Malula*, Vol 1. p. 25.
6. Léon De Saint Moulin, *Œuvres complètes du Cardinal Malula*, Vol 2, p. 82.
7. Léon De Saint Moulin, *Œuvres complètes du Cardinal Malula*, Vol 1. p. 24.