

KIMBANGU, MALULA, AND BOKELEALE:  
FATHERS OF CONGOLESE CHRISTIANITIES

Original Biographies by Jean-Claude Loba Mkole  
from the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*,  
with preface by the author

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## Kimbangu, Malula, and Bokeleale: Fathers of Congolese Christianities

*Dictionary of African Christian Biography* (www.DACB.org)  
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The January 2017 issue of the *Journal of African Christian Biography* introduces Simon Kimbangu, Joseph Malula and Jean Ifoto Bokambanza Bokeleale as three leading figures who have shaped major forms of Christianity in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in the aftermath of the “authenticity” movement.<sup>1</sup> This movement sought to strengthen the cultural identity of black people and their liberation from alienating conditions such as discrimination, oppression, and subservience.<sup>2</sup> It originated with the popular so-called “Negro-spiritual” songs in North America. The first collection of these songs—heavily inspired by biblical texts—was published in 1867. About twelve years later, the quest for self-consciousness and self-determination received support from the American Bible Students Movement led by Pastor Charles Taze Russel. He founded the Watch Tower / Jehovah’s Witness movement in 1879 in Brooklyn, New York. The Watch Tower ideology, which includes the negation of the Trinity among other things, was introduced into South Africa in 1906 through Joseph Booth, a propagandist of the principle of “Africa for Africans.” From

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<sup>1</sup> In this study the adjective Congolese and the name Congo refer to the country and people of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and not those of the Republic of Congo even though this country also uses the same qualifiers of “Congo” and “Congolese.” Indeed, the territory here concerned has changed names several times: Independent State of Congo (1885-1908), Belgian Congo (1908-1960), Republic of Congo-Kinshasa (1960-1964), Democratic Republic of Congo (1964-1971), Republic of Zaire (1971-1997), and again DRC (1997- ). Before the 1885 Berlin Conference, the Kongo Empire included countries such as the DRC, Congo, Angola, and Gabon. However, it excluded all other empires and chieftainships that were attached to the DRC at the Berlin Conference.

<sup>2</sup> For formally published articles from the same author on the same topic, see Jean-Claude Loba Mkole, *Triple Heritage. Gospels in Intercultural Mediations* (Kinshasa: CERIL; Pretoria: Sapientia; Nairobi: WordAlive), 2005/ 2012, p. 111-123; Id., “(Christianity in) Congo, Democratic Republic of,” in *Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity* (Cambridge: University Press), 2010, 267-271; Id., “Bokeleale, Jean Ifoto Bokambanza,” in *Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity* (Cambridge: University Press, 2010, 135); Id., “Malula, Jean,” in *Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity* (Cambridge: University Press), 2010, 757. The correct name Malula, Joseph is to replace the mistakenly written name “Malula, Jean;” Léon, Nguapitshi Kayongo and Jean-Claude Loba Mkole, “Kimbangu Simon,” in *Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity* (Cambridge: University Press), 2010, 287-288. N.B: All the literary data do not agree on the year of birth for Simon Kimbangu and Jean Ifoto Bokeleale.

South Africa, the Watch Tower movement spread to Malawi, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Zambia, and the DRC, the first African Francophone country where it set down roots.

The Watch Tower movement arrived in the Swahili speaking eastern region of the DRC in 1923, two years after the beginning of the prophetic mission of Simon Kimbangu in 1921 in the Western Kikongo speaking region. Kimbangu understood his mission as the liberation of black people: "I, Simon Kimbangu, have been sent by Jesus-Christ for the sake of the black person first."<sup>3</sup> The Congolese Watch Tower movement (known as Kitawala) considers Simon Kimbangu the direct great ancestor of both Kimbanguist and Kitawala religions, the only true religions in opposition to that of the white missionaries. The word Kitawala is a Kiswahili pronunciation of The Tower, an abbreviated form of The Watch Tower. Maintaining the supremacy of the black person in true Christianity, the Kitawala and Kimbanguist ideologies have much in common with the legacy of Dona Beatrice Kimpa Vita (1682-1706). A former Roman Catholic faithful, Kimpa Vita preached that Jesus, Mary and other saints were really the Bakongo, that is, people from the Kongo ethnic group. Kimbangu, who was considered one of the historical Jesus' disciples, belongs to this ethnic group. Kimpa Vita is rightly viewed as the "precursor of the prophetic figures of the independent churches" and could equally qualify to be a great ancestor of Kimbangu and Kitawala.<sup>4</sup> Thanks to Kimbanguism and Kitawalism, the authenticity movement in its popular, radical, and religious expressions resisted colonialism and remobilized the Congolese to heed their religious ancestors Kimpa Vita and Simon Kimbangu.

In addition to international support from English speaking black people and the Congolese involvement of Kimbanguists and Kitawalists, the authenticity movement has received further support from French speaking black writers. These authors promoted the same cause under the flag of *Négritude* (Blackness), launched in Paris in the 1930s. The three pioneer fathers of the *Négritude* movement include Aimé Césaire (1913–2008) from Martinique, Léon-Gontran Damas (1912-1978) from French Guiana, and the Senegalese Léopold Sédar Senghor (1906–2001). The most representative work of the *Négritude* movement is arguably Aimé Césaire's book *Le cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939) in which the neologism "négritude" appears for the first time. Beginning as a literary struggle, the authenticity movement moved on to embrace the political world with Léopold Sédar Senghor who was eventually elected as a member of Parliament in 1944 and the president

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Ekutu, *L'apparition miraculeuse de Simon Kimbangu à l'aéroport de Maya-Maya (Brazzaville). Prophétie sur les indépendances africaines* (Kinshasa : Editions Kimbanguistes), 2000, p. 24, 44-49; This and all subsequent translations into English are mine.

<sup>4</sup> Norbert C. Brockman, "Kimpa Vita," [http://www.dacb.org/stories/congo/kimpa\\_vita.html](http://www.dacb.org/stories/congo/kimpa_vita.html). Accessed on November 25, 2016.

prayers, songs and sermons to construct the Pentecostal theology of mission that guides and directs the CEM in its mission. Chapter six explores the agents and strategies of mission that the CEM uses to address the missional challenges they identify in their context. The final chapter raises six key missiological issues that emerged from the study and that require the attention of missiological scholars in order to foster the future of Pentecostal mission in Congo and the Southern African region as a whole. These issues are: preventing ongoing schisms, evangelizing members of other religious traditions, the scope of healing, the impact of rapture theology, the place of women in ordained Pentecostal ministry, and the extent of contextualisation in the CEM.

**Mwambazambi, Kalemba, *L'église des Frères en Christ Gareganze face au problème de la nationalité Congolaise (1996-2003): perspectives missiologiques venant de la République Démocratique du Congo (the Gareganze's Brothers in Christ Church facing the problem of Congolese citizenship (1996-2003): missiological perspectives from the Democratic Republic of Congo)*. M.Div. Dissertation. UNISA, 2009. <http://hdl.handle.net/10500/2526>**

**Abstract:** The mission of the Gareganze's Brothers in Christ Church facing the chaos of the socio-political situation in DRC resulting mostly from the question of the Congolese nationality is to dynamize the Christian mission and to protect the poor, set free the captives, because God is always at their side. The DRC, though, has enormous natural resources and the competent human resources capabilities. The national institutions seem to be unable to handle this situation because of the lack of political culture, mismanagement, and moral untidiness. The successive Congolese crises mostly are the same, the common denominator resides in the causes that brought them about. The main objectives of the antagonist groups are political leadership and material wealth. The findings of our analysis will help the Church of Christ in Congo, to fulfill the prophetic mission and the vision of God, for the positive transformation of the Congolese society.

Fromont approaches the country's conversion as a dynamic process that unfolded across centuries.

The African kingdom's elite independently and gradually intertwined old and new, local and foreign religious thought, political concepts, and visual forms to mold a novel and constantly evolving Kongo Christian worldview. Fromont sheds light on the cross-cultural exchanges between Africa, Europe, and Latin America that shaped the early modern world, and she outlines the religious, artistic, and social background of the countless men and women displaced by the slave trade from central Africa to all corners of the Atlantic world.” --[Amazon](#).

**Malu, Rodhain Kasubu. Joseph-Albert Malula: liberte et indocilite d'un cardinal africain.** [2014] \$69.00, [Amazon](#); €23.00 [Karthala](#). Paris: Éditions Karthala. ISBN: 9782811112936

**Résumé:** Joseph-Albert Malula aura fait de sa vie un combat pour assurer une transition heureuse entre hier et aujourd'hui, permettre une rencontre féconde entre le message du Nazaréen et les réalités de la vie des hommes et des femmes, construire un dialogue vivant entre l'Occident et l'Afrique. ([Karthala](#))

#### Open Access: Theses & Dissertations

**Kipimo, Jesse Fungwa. Studying pentecostalism missiologically: The Congo Evangelistic Mission in Katanga Province, Democratic Republic of Congo.** Th.D. dissertation, UNISA, 2014.  
<http://hdl.handle.net/10500/18320>

**Abstract:** This thesis is a critical missiological analysis of Pentecostal mission, specifically of the Congo Evangelistic Mission (CEM) in the Katanga Province of the Democratic Republic of Congo. It investigates how CEM members have been interpreting and expressing the Christian message in and for the context of Katanga Province through their communal life, worship and mission since its inception in 1914. It also asks the methodological question of how such a Pentecostal mission could best be studied and evaluated missiologically. To carry out this investigation the researcher developed a “Pentecostal Praxis Missiological Approach” which he used extensively throughout his study. Chapter two demonstrates that, while British missionaries brought the CEM to Katanga province, it was the early Congolese pioneers who actually spread the movement to different parts of Katanga and beyond its borders. Chapter three shows how CEM members have analyzed the Congolese context, identifying it as a lost, unholy and socially broken society with high levels of poverty, unemployment and poor access to basic needs; it is also beset with problems of war and conflict, corruption and injustices as well as abuse of women. Chapter four focuses on the spirituality of power that inspires and motivates the CEM in the various dimensions of its mission. Chapter five uses mainly liturgical sources like

of Senegal in 1960. At the same time, philosophical and theological circles came on board, as witnessed by the publication of *La philosophie Bantu* (1946/8) and *Les prêtres noirs s'interrogent* (“Black priests are wondering,” 1956).

When Joseph Malula was ordained a priest in 1946 and consecrated bishop in 1959, he inherited the intellectual and religious trends that were strongly advocating for the authenticity movement. On the very day of his episcopal ordination, he declared his programmatic stand, explicitly showing that he subscribed to the authenticity campaign by using the expression “a Congolese Church in a Congolese State.”<sup>5</sup> Malula would have been aware that just two years before (1957) Kimbangu's youngest son, Joseph Diangenda had united the Kimbanguist Church under the name “The Church of Jesus-Christ on Earth by the Prophet Simon Kimbangu.”

The quest for the authentic self, fueled by church ministers, literary figures, visual artists, and musicians led to the declaration of the political independence of the DRC on June 30, 1960. Subsequently, political leaders together with church ministers and civil society were relatively free to engage in the ongoing struggle for self-determination. This culminated in the adoption of the philosophy of authenticity by the President Mobutu Sese Seko in 1970 as the ideological guide for his political orientation and actions. The period of the 1970s and 1980s can be considered a golden age in the history of the DRC which became a strong unified country with a strong economy in which the currency equaled the double of the American dollar. Despite its autocratic management, the DRC at that time was one of the most prosperous places in the world, attracting many churches and religious organizations. Yet, during the same period, the Catholic Church faced hard times due to the fact that its leaders, including Malula, clashed with Mobutu on matters pertaining to justice. Mobutu's philosophy of authenticity also meant the fight to restore the dignity of Africa, as spelled out in his speech at the United Nations in 1973 and a four volume book entitled *Dignité pour l'Afrique* (“Dignity for Africa,” 1989).

Jean Ifoto Bokambanza Bokelele assumed leadership of the Protestant church in the DRC during the golden age of Congolese history when Mobutu provided support to the Kimbanguist Church and the Protestant Church. Protestant missions at work in the DRC had taken different initiatives for their unity by establishing organizations such as the Protestant Council of Congo (1930-1960) and the Church of Christ in Congo (since 1941). The Protestant Council was perceived as the realm of liberal Protestants while the Church of Christ was conceived as a place for fundamentalist Protestants. In the decree of December 31, 1971, Mobutu reinforced the authority of the Church of Christ in Congo and recognized it as the only official Protestant Church in the country, which all other

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<sup>5</sup> Léon De Saint Moulin, *Œuvres complètes du Cardinal Malula. Vol 1. Introduction générale, tables et index* (Kinshasa: Facultés Catholiques de Kinshasa), 1997, p. 12.

Protestant churches had to join. Consecrated bishop in 1977, Bokeleale continued to shape the Church of Christ in Congo as he worked for its unity and invested in Protestant schools, a strategy for grooming future authentic leaders of the church.

In short, the Congolese golden age counted one state father (*Tata Maréchal*) and three fathers of Congolese Christianities, namely *Tata Cardinal* from the Catholic Church, *Papa Bokeleale* from the Protestant Church, and *Papa Diangenda*, Simon Kimbangu's son from the Kimbanguist Church. Even if Papa Diangenda is, in fact, the most appropriate fatherly figure for the current Kimbanguist church, his father Simon Kimbangu is given more prominence as the founding father of the Kimbanguism. This explains why Father Kimbangu was chosen for this study as one the three leading figures of Congolese Christianities.

It is amazing to realize that the churches shaped by these leading figures bear names that betray competing intentions, as each of them claims to be the authentic church. The Kimbanguist Church acquired the name "The Church of Jesus-Christ on Earth by the Prophet Simon Kimbangu." The Catholic Church referred to itself as "the Church of Congo." The Protestant Church took the name "the Church of Christ in Congo." Fortunately, the Catholic Church lessened the disguised claim of being the sole authentic Church through its official name "National Episcopal Conference of Congo."

Historically, Christianity first arrived in Congo with the Roman Catholic Church in 1482, winning for the Catholic Church in Congo the status of the first born daughter of the Church in Africa. The first Congolese Christian, King Nzinga Nkuwu was baptized in 1491. It is the same Church that recorded the first Bible translation event in Central Africa in 1624 through the production of the Gospel of Matthew 6:9-13 in the Kikongo language. The Protestant Church began in 1878 and the Kimbanguist Church in 1921. This study will present the lives of the fathers of Congolese Christianities in chronological order, starting with the earliest, Prophet Simon Kimbangu (1889-1951), moving to Cardinal Joseph Malula (1917-1989) and then to Bishop Jean Ifoto Bokambanza Bokeleale (1919-2002).

Historically, religion has always been an integral part of Congolese societies. The kingdoms and chieftainships organized themselves according to models inspired by faith in God, represented by ancestors. The views of the ancestors were communicated to the people through the kings or chiefs themselves in their capacity as mediators or through the prophets (diviners).

Over time, the DRC's strategic geographical position, its prestigious historical origins, and the conspicuous place of religion in the culture have helped the Congolese develop an awareness of the pride and dignity destroyed by colonial systems. Christianity, which was introduced into the Kongo Kingdom when Europeans first arrived in 1482, has been perceived as the religion of the colonizer. This has caused the Congolese to react to Christianity with mixed feelings of rejection or accommodation.

## Recent Print and Digital Resources Related to Christianity in Africa

**Bertsch, Ludwig; Marco Moerschbacher and Ignace Ndongala Maduku. Culture et foi dans la théologie africaine: le dynamisme de l'Église catholique au Congo Kinshasa: en mémoire de Ludwig Bertsch (1929-2006).** 2014. \$44.00 [Amazon](#); €19.00, [Karthala](#). Paris: Karthala. ISBN: 9782811111649

**Résumé:** Les contributions rassemblées dans ce volume, en mémoire au père jésuite Ludwig Bertsch (1929-2006), font le point sur quelques défis actuels de la théologie africaine. Ludwig Bertsch s. j. était un grand ami du Congo, pays qu'il a visité plusieurs fois. ([Karthala](#))

**Farronato, Lina. Beata Anuarite Nengapeta Maria Clementina. Martire della Repubblica Democratica del Congo** (Italian). 2016. \$30.00 [Amazon](#). Milano: Paoline. ISBN: 9788831547529

Against the backdrop of a historic stormy period for Central Africa, this is the story of Anuarite Nengapeta, beatified in 1985 by Pope John Paul II. She was a witness of faith, courage, and forgiveness.

She was born on December 9, 1939 in Wamba, north-eastern province of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Aspiring to become a nun, she joined the Congregation of Sisters of the Holy Family, founded by the Bishop of Wamba. Anuarite was killed at the age of twenty-five, after she and fellow sisters were captured by Simba rebels and after savage ill-treatment.

The book covers the most significant stages of her life, the appendix containing testimonies of her martyrdom and the many healings obtained through her intercession. (Blurb translated & paraphrased; visit the [Pauline Website](#) for the original description in Italian)

**Fromont, Cecile. The art of conversion: Christian visual culture in the Kingdom of Kongo.** 2014. \$35.00, [Amazon](#). Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by the University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill. ISBN: 9781469618715

"Between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries, the west central African kingdom of Kongo practiced Christianity and actively participated in the Atlantic world as an independent, cosmopolitan realm. Drawing on an expansive and largely unpublished set of objects, images, and documents, Cecile Fromont examines the advent of Kongo Christian visual culture and traces its development across four centuries marked by war, the Atlantic slave trade, and, finally, the rise of nineteenth-century European colonialism. By offering an extensive analysis of the religious, political, and artistic innovations through which the Kongo embraced Christianity,

- Ndaywel è Nziem, Isidore. *Histoire générale du Congo. De l'héritage ancien à la République Démocratique*. Paris-Bruxelles: Duculot; Kinshasa: Afrique-éditions, 1998.
- Nguapitshi Kayongo, Léon. "Kimbanguism." *Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity*. Cambridge: University Press, 2010, 688-689.
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- Santedi Kinkupu, Léonard. *Dogme et inculturation en Afrique. Perspective d'une théologie de l'invention*. Paris: Karthala, 2003
- UPC & CRIP. *L'Eglise dans la société congolaise: hier, aujourd'hui et demain*. Kinshasa: Université Protestante au Congo, 2002.
- Zana, Aziza Etambala. "Les missionnaires catholiques face au mouvement kimbanguiste à partir de la mort de Simon Kimbangu jusqu'à l'indépendance congolaise en 1960." *Revue Africaine des Sciences de la Mission* 12 (2000): 128–207.

The three biographies in this issue show how the fathers of three expressions of Congolese Christianity have chosen not to reject Christianity but to accommodate it each in his own authentic way. All three leaders promoted the event of an authentic Congolese Church. The major difference lies in the fact that Kimbangu founded what I would call an extreme authentic Church, more closely related to African cultural roots, while Malula and Bokeleale each fought for a moderate authentic Church, with ties to Western Christian traditions.

The Protestant Church and the Catholic Church ended their collaboration with the Kimbanguist Church respectively in 2002 and 2004. To understand the reasons for this development, one has to take into consideration the complex interplay of three factors.

The development that led the Protestant Church and the Catholic Church to stop their collaboration with the Kimbanguist Church respectively in 2002 and 2004 can be revisited on the basis of three major factors. First, all the three churches hold the Bible as normative. Second, they share the doctrine of Trinity, even if its interpretation may vary from one Church to another. Third, they are involved in the authenticity movement or the inculturation / contextualization paradigm. The most difficult difference they must address pertains to the Trinitarian doctrine—if the Kimbanguist Church denies the Trinity or reduces it to the persons of Simon Kimbangu's sons. This particular understanding may be attributed to what is known as popular Kimbanguist theology. However, the development in written Kimbanguist theology invites to more dialogue as it views Kimbangu's sons as symbols and paths to the Trinitarian God.

Differences between these three Churches regarding the interpretation of the Bible, the Trinity, and the authenticity movement or the inculturation / contextualization of theology certainly exist. However, sincere dialogue can lead to a better understanding of the diverse, church-specific theological views that will most likely not change for the time being. Striving towards mutual understanding through dialogue or concrete exchanges is still a way forward. However, theological reflection must contribute to such exchanges and pave the way for ecumenical dialogue. This dialogue has the potential to create more grounds for understanding, as the interlocutors seek to identify and share how the three fathers of Congolese Christianities have exemplified the authenticity movement or the inculturation paradigm in their respective churches.

**Prof. Dr. Jean-Claude Loba Mkole (OP)**

Professor extraordinary, University of Pretoria; Visiting professor, Hekima University College (Kenya); Global translation advisor, United Bible Societies, and *DACB* Advisory Council member.

**Simon Kimbangu**  
**1889 to 1951**  
**Baptist / Kimbanguist Church**  
**Democratic Republic of Congo**

Simon Kimbangu is perhaps one of the most famous founders of an African initiated church. The church body he found remains highly influential in the DRC, counting over five million members. He began his ministry after a vision, which led him to become an itinerate preacher and healer. His activities put him in conflict with the authorities, who gave him a death sentence which was commuted to life imprisonment. After his death in 1951, stories circulated about his resurrection. Kimbangu was the founder of a truly indigenous African church, which continues to address the spiritual needs of African people with a creative theology.

**Family and education background**

Though Simon Kimbangu did not write much except for a few letters, literary sources about his life and ministry are numerous. Son of Kuyela and Luezi, Kimbangu was born most likely in September 1889 at Nkamba village (DRC), near the Ngombe-Lutete Protestant Station of the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS). After the death of his mother Luezi, Kimbangu grew up in the house of his aunt Kinzembo. He attended the Baptist Mission School in Ngombe-Matadi. His early jobs ranged from being a cook for the Baptist missionaries to working as a catechist in his native village. He also did some casual work in Kinshasa and Matadi. He married Marie Mwilu who gave birth to three children: Charles Kisolekele (1914), Salomon Dialungana-Kiangani (1916) and Joseph Diangenda (1918).

**Leadership**

Simon Kimbangu's leadership story started with the vision he had on March 18, 1921. According to the testimony he entrusted to one of his friends, the vision showed him a strange person bringing the Bible to him and asking him to read it and preach. He was also told to go to a neighboring village to pray for a sick child and heal him. Simon Kimbangu went to this village the next day, found the child, prayed for him and the child was healed. After that, Simon Kimbangu began to travel around the villages, preaching the Good News and healing the sick. Yet, his divine mission is reported to have started especially on April 6, 1921, which happened to be the 430<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the baptism of King Afonso. The date also corresponds to the number of years that the Israelites spent in slavery in Egypt. [1]

In May 1921, about four thousand pilgrims rushed to Nkamba village. Consequently, Catholic and Protestant catechism schools, hospitals and medical centres emptied themselves, as well as local businesses. Under

- Bujo, Bénézet & Ilunga Muya, Juvénal (eds). *African Theology in the 21st Century. The Contribution of the Pioneers*. Vol. 1. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2003.
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faring in consonance with an authentic Congolese Protestant Church, according to the desires of Bokeleale and his close entourage.

#### Endnotes:

1. *Dictionary of African Biography*, 481.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Philippe B. Kabongo Mbaya, *L'Église du Christ au Zaïre. Formation et adaptation d'un protestantisme en situation de dictature* (Paris : Karthala, 1992), p. 390.

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- Bokeleale Jean. *Lettre circulaire aux gouverneurs provinciaux ainsi qu'au gouverneur de la ville de Kinshasa datant du 22 avril 1970, no 455/SG/KADY/70, concernant la constitution de l'Eglise du Christ au Congo*. Kinshasa : ECZ, 1970.
- Bokeleale Jean. *Lettre du 21 avril 1970 de J. Bokeleale, secrétaire général du CPC, à E.C. Blake, secrétaire général du COE*. Kinshasa : ACOEG, 1970.
- Braekman, E. Maurice. *Histoire du Protestantisme au Congo*. Bruxelles: Librairie des éclairés unionistes, 1961.

the instigation of the Redemptorist Fathers, the colonial administration issued an arrest warrant against Simon Kimbangu. He went underground while his movement developed hostility towards the colonial powers. Some days later, Simon Kimbangu was nevertheless arrested and brought before a military council of war.

During a public trial on October 3, 1921, he was condemned to death. The motives of his condemnation read as follows: attacks perpetrated by his followers on the administrator of Cataractes Division on May 11 and June 6, 1921; the rumours about his healings and resurrections; the preaching of a new God far mightier than the State; the announcement of a national and black church; and the breach of national security. However, civil administration officers and Baptist Missionaries managed to introduce a petition for a reprieve on behalf of Kimbangu, which King Albert granted in November 1921. As a result, Simon Kimbangu's death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. He was put into jail in Stanleyville (Kisangani) and then Elisabethville (Lubumbashi) where he died on Friday, October 12, 1951, after thirty years of suffering. [2]

#### Impact

Simon Kimbangu's disciples claimed that he was resurrected on Sunday, October 14, 1951. He was seen alive in places such as Lubumbashi, Kinshasa, and Lova, to name but a few. In 1956-57, his youngest son Joseph Diangenda gathered different Kimbanguist sects and formed one church: The Church of Jesus Christ on Earth by the Prophet Simon Kimbangu. [3]

Historically speaking, the ministry of Simon Kimbangu consisted of preaching the Word of God, and condemning witchcraft and polygamy. He healed some sick people through prayer while his mother was known as a traditional healer who restored health on the basis of medicinal plants. He announced an imminent coming of Christ who would bring down the colonial powers. In the views of the most famous Congolese historian Isadore Ndaywel, Simon Kimbangu's actions can be considered part of the messianic creations and reactions of an oppressed people who, under severe pressure, struggled for their survival. In any case, for Ndaywel, this is a variant of a Christianity which the missionaries intended to be "classic," but which in practice had always conveyed an ambiguous code and language. The Congolese prophet had his own vision of Christianity and enshrined his own reading of the sacred message. [4] As a matter fact, MacGaffey described the Kimbanguist Church as "one of the world's best known religious movements" and "the largest African-founded Protestant Church." [5] Since 1969, it has been a member of the World Council of Churches. On the basis of a radically authentic view of the Trinity, the Protestant Church in DRC ceased to recognise it as a Christian church in 2002, whereas the Catholic Church in DRC suspended "spiritual ecumenism" with it in 2004. The doctrinal teaching of the official Kimbanguist Church holds that the persons of the

Holy Trinity have metamorphosed and incarnated themselves in the three sons of Simon Kimbangu: the Father as Charles Kisolekele, Salomon Dialungana-Kiangani as the Son and Joseph Diangenda as the Holy Spirit. One might agree that this reflects a radical inculturation or an extreme “appropriation of a faith dogma in an African culture.” [6] Nonetheless, Kimbangu’s legacy continues its historical trajectory through the Church named after him the way it started with little or no support from the Catholic Church or Protestant Churches.

Since Mobutu’s regime, the Congolese government remains the strongest ally of Kimbangu’s Church. Moreover, Kimbangu’s followers honor the memory of their spiritual father through constant Bible reading and local fundraising campaigns for self-reliance in order to avoid financial dependence on Western donors. They are also engaged in evangelizing Western countries. Indeed, the Bible is the most precious legacy that Kimbangu left for his followers with the power to interpret it in an extremely inculturated way that supports not only the dignity of black people but also their supremacy over the whites. In other words, Kimbangu’s legacy led to an extremely inculturated church and an extremely authentic church. Nonetheless, the stand of the Kimbanguist written theology is noteworthy: “The EJCSK believes in the Trinity, yet the Trinity is symbolized by Simon Kimbangu’s three sons, paths to the Trinitarian God.” [7]

#### Endnotes:

1. Charles Ekutu, *Op. cit.*, p. 24.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
3. Isidore Ndaywel è Nziem, *Op.cit.*, p. 414-420.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 415.
5. W. MacGaffey, “Kimbanguism and the Question of Syncretism in Zaire,” in T. Blakely, W. Beek & D. Thomson, et al. (eds.), *Religion in Africa. Experience & Expression* (London: David M. Kennedy Center), 1994, p. 241–256, p. 241.
6. Léonard Santedi Kinkupu, *Dogme et inculturation en Afrique. Perspective d’une théologie de l’invention* (Paris: Karthala), 2003, p. 14.
7. Léon Nguapitshi Kayongo, “Kimbanguism,” in *Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity* (Cambridge: University Press), 2010, 688-689, p. 689.

When Mobutu took power in 1965, he sought more support from Protestant church leaders. Bokeleale availed himself as Mobutu’s ally and adviser while using this opportunity to consolidate his authority over Protestant churches and promote the authenticity movement even through its Mobutist version called the philosophy of authenticity.

According to one of his entourage who was interviewed by a journalist in 1974, the authenticity campaign allowed the Congolese people to recover their true being and their deep ethos. [3] This was also the year when the authenticity campaign reached a climax as Verkys Vévé Kiamungana Mateta launched his revolutionary song “Nakomitunaka” (I keep asking myself). In a certain sense, it echoed the 1956 book *Les prêtres noirs s’interrogent* (Black priests are wondering ). The song interrogated God about the origin of black people pointing out that Adam and Eve, Jesus, Mary and Joseph are represented as whites. All the saints are also seen as white while only devils are represented as blacks. Black symbols and prophets are rejected or put in the same category as witchcraft, in contrast with the white ones. It is strange that Verkys Vévé was forced into exile while the authenticity movement champions were in command of state affairs and church politics both on Catholic and Protestant fronts.

In 1975, Bokeleale requested that the synod of the Church of Christ in Congo consider ordaining some of the leaders as bishops. In spite of the refusal of the synod and the indignation of the majority of Protestant churches at that time, Bokeleale was elected in 1968 as the General Secretary of the Protestant Council in Congo. Two years later, he became the first chairperson of the Church of Christ in Congo. He was consecrated bishop on May 16, 1977, despite strong opposition from the Protestant elite in Congo. In 1979, he extended this authority to Disciples of Christ Church leaders by raising their social conditions and reaching Christians at the grassroots through social actions such as schools or women’s associations.

#### Impact

During Bokeleale’s leadership, the Church of Christ in Congo took many initiatives in the field of socio-economic growth. It increased its participation in the education sector, in health, social development, micro-finance, and business enterprises like industrial fishing and printing.

Bokeleale will be remembered for having directed the unification of Protestants in the DRC and for introducing the episcopal system into Protestant church structures. However, due to strong opposition to its introduction, the episcopal system has weakened the unity of Protestant churches in Congo. Some of the Protestant elite wondered whether Christ was still the head of the Church of Christ in Congo. Presently, the episcopal system is being accepted even by those who objected to it during Bokeleale’s time. Further research would be appropriate to determine how this system is

## **Jean Bokeleale**

**1919 to 2002**

**Disciples of Christ (L'Église du Christ au Zaïre)  
Democratic Republic of Congo**

Jean Ifoto Bokambanza Bokeleale was a leader in the Church of Christ in Congo. He was a leader from the Disciples of Christ who worked during the Mobutu regime to form a single protestant church in Zaire, L'Église du Christ au Zaïre. He was a talented scholar and bold visionary, but not all protestants shared his particular vision for unity.

### **Family, education and pastoral ministry**

Bokeleale wrote some letters, but very little has been written on his life and ministry. According to the *Dictionary of African Biography*, Bokeleale was born around 1920 near the town of Becimbola, in the vicinity of Lotumbe town, northwest Equateur region. Other sources place this birth on December 23, 1919 at Bompoma, near Djombo, Equateur region. He was the second child of his mother Mputu, one of his father Mbomba's four wives. After attending primary and secondary schools, he worked as a teacher at the Christian Institute of Congo in Bolenge. He married Amba Bokaa, and the couple had seven children.

One year after his appointment as an assistant pastor at Ikongo in 1936, Bokeleale met Pastor Jean Bomenge who persuaded him to enter the Disciples of Christ primary school in 1937 in Lotumbe. He completed the four-year program within two years and joined the Congo Christian Institute at Bolenge for his secondary education, which he finished in 1942 with distinction. He was ordained a pastor on August 24, 1956. From the late fifties or from 1961 to 1963, he studied at the Faculty of Protestant Theology of Brussels and got a Master's degree (licence) in theology. Back in the DRC, he entertained strong ties with the American counterparts of Disciples of Christ not only through frequent trips to USA, but also during his training in public administration in that country. He received his doctorate *honoris causa* from the Christian Theological Seminary of Indianapolis.

### **Leadership**

Bokeleale's leadership ability was noticed throughout his education because he scored high marks and completed a study program within half the required time. In the late 1950s, Disciples of Christ missionaries saw in him as "a major leader of an African-led church." [1] As a matter of fact, he progressively occupied several leadership positions. After his theological studies in 1963, "twelve young elders of the Disciples of Christ anxious to assert African leadership over the continuing American missionary presence chose to elect Bokeleale as the head of the Disciples of Christ in Congo." [2]

## **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.