

## Joseph-Albert Cardinal Malula and the “Listening Bishop”: An Institution to (Re) Discover

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**Abstract:** This article presents the device set up around 1978–1979 by Cardinal Malula in the diocese of Kinshasa (DRC) to promote dialogue and listening, which contribute to the emergence of a “culture of dialogue and encounter.” In this respect, the “listening bishop” is an approach, state of mind, and participative device that enables the bishop to listen to his collaborators. A positive ritual and rite that celebrates fraternity, this device unfolds as a path of synodality. In this context, I will attempt to show that the innovative device that builds the *consensus ecclesiae* deserves to be rediscovered and restored, in order to adapt it to the evolution of urban pastoral care.

A Synodal church is a church which listens, which realizes that listening “is more than simply hearing.” It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn.<sup>1</sup>

IT IS A COMMONPLACE TO ASSERT THAT THE SECOND VATICAN Council laid the foundations of a synodal church in a perspective adjoining a universalist approach to the church.<sup>2</sup> Anxious to promote collaboration between the baptized, the last council provided for bodies meant to concretize synodality at the local level (diocesan synod, presbyteral council, college of consultors, chapter of canons, and pastoral council), regional (provinces and ecclesiastical regions, particular councils, and episcopal conferences), and universal (ecumenical council and synod of bishops). This article focuses specifically on the context of the Archdiocese of Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). It is a journey as much

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, “Address Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops,” October 17, 2015. See also *Evangelii Gaudium*, nos. 16, 32.

<sup>2</sup> Hervé Legrand, “Les évêques, les Églises locales, et l’Église entière. Évolutions institutionnelles depuis Vatican II et chantiers actuels de recherche,” *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 85, no. 3 (2001): 228.

historical, theological, sociological, and institutional on a participatory collaboration device set up by Cardinal Joseph-Albert Malula. One of its objectives is to report on the synodal process in the diocese of Kinshasa, by highlighting the potential of the “listening bishop” device for the ecclesial commitment of the faithful men and women, the sharing of their responsibilities in a spirit of fraternity, and the emergence of a synodal church.

In this perspective, as a preliminary, I will present some considerations on Malula; then I will briefly develop the pastoral history of the archdiocese of Kinshasa before indicating the articulations of the device of the “listening bishop”; finally, I will situate this device in relation to synodality. By structuring my conclusions around the ecclesiological challenges of this innovation, I will show why, as the title of my article indicates, this device deserves to be revisited and updated. Indeed, as I will attempt to establish, the “listening bishop” was an empirical implementation of synodality which, in line with the last Council, contributed to the emergence in Kinshasa of a dialogical and fraternal church of the children of God open to dialogue and listening, a place of participation and complementarity that enhances baptismal grace, a site for the development of a just partnership and differentiated communion between the baptized.

### **MALULA, AN AUTHENTIC AND FREE BISHOP IN THE HEART OF THE AFRICAN CONTINENT**

Born in 1917, Joseph-Albert Malula died in 1989. Ordained a priest in 1946, he was appointed bishop in 1959 and created Cardinal in 1969.<sup>3</sup> Trained by the Scheut missionaries in four different locations (Léopoldville, Kabwe, Mbata Kiela, Bolongo), Malula made cultural diversity an integral part of his career. As a result, he distinguished himself as much by welcoming difference as by promoting the differentiated equality of God’s people. As a mobilizing value of his episcopate, fraternity<sup>4</sup> watered the boldness of his pastoral options,

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<sup>3</sup> Malula did not attend university. His profile and intellectual influence have earned him two honorary doctorates from the Katholiek Universiteit Leuven (1979) and Boston University (1980) respectively. Among the important responsibilities he assumed are the presidency of the Episcopal Conference of Zaire (1979–1984), the presidency of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar SECAM (1984), and the delegated presidency of the Extraordinary Synod (1985). On his biography: Jean-Claude Loba Mkole, “Joseph Malula: 1917 to 1989,” *Journal of African Christian Biography* 2, no. 1 (2017): 13–15.

<sup>4</sup> The following brief reflections on fraternity summarize the more extensive developments I have published, notably in Ignace Ndongala Maduku, *Religion et politique en RD Congo. Marche des chrétiens et paroles des évêques catholiques sur les élections* (Paris: Karthala, 2016), 83–97; Ignace Ndongala Maduku, “Des relations

particularly the fight for Congo’s independence, Africanization of the church and Christian life,<sup>5</sup> inculturation of liturgy<sup>6</sup> and religious life,<sup>7</sup> structuring of Christian lay militancy,<sup>8</sup> institution of lay ministries,<sup>9</sup> pastoral care of intellectuals,<sup>10</sup> defense of distributive justice, emancipation of women,<sup>11</sup> decentralization of the diocese of Kinshasa,

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‘ndekologiques’. Un néologisme peu connu de l’Abbé J.-A. Malula. Variations autour de la fraternité,” *Telega* no. 1 (2016): 23–37, Ignace Ndongala Maduku, “L’Église de Dieu qui est à Kinshasa (1979–1989). Contribution à l’étude de l’image de l’Église-fraternité,” in *Théologiens et théologiennes dans l’Afrique d’aujourd’hui*, ed. M. Cheza and G. van’t Spijker (Paris-Yaoundé: Karthala-Cié, 2007), 183–202.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Cardinal Malula, “The Church at the Hour of Africanization,” *AFER* 16, no. 3 (1974): 365–371.

<sup>6</sup> The synodality experienced in the diocese of Kinshasa has had an impact on liturgical life, with Malula’s *missa cum populo* among the projects that would make up the Roman Missal for the dioceses of Zaire. On the importance of the Zairean rite of Mass for Catholicity, see Rita Mboshu Kongo, *Papa Francesco e il ‘Messale Romano per le Diocesi dello Zaire’. Un rito promettente per altre culture* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2020); Ignace Ndongala Maduku, Job Mwana-Kitata, Flavien Muzumanga, eds., *Le rite zairois de la messe en République démocratique du Congo. Hommage posthume au Révérend Père Laurent Mpongo Mpotu Mamba, cism* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2023).

<sup>7</sup> Malula took the initiative of having the nuns of his congregation wear a habit of traditional African dress. The practice has become widespread throughout Congo to the point of affecting all countries of the Black Continent.

<sup>8</sup> Isidore Ndaywel È Nziem, *Nouvelle histoire du Congo. De l’héritage ancien à la République démocratique du Congo* (Bruxelles: De Boeck and Larcier, 1998), 514. See also Jaap van Slageren, “Les laïcs dans une Église d’Afrique: l’œuvre du Cardinal Malula (1917–1989),” *Exchange* 42, no 1 (2013): 118–119.

<sup>9</sup> Although there is a shortage of priests in Kinshasa, Malula justifies the institution of lay ministries by emphasizing baptismal grace and the differentiated equality of God’s people. See Joseph Malula, *Œuvres complètes du Cardinal Malula*, ed. Léon de Saint Moulin (Kinshasa: Facultés catholiques de Kinshasa, 1997).

<sup>10</sup> Malula, “Homélie à l’ouverture de la Ve Semaine des intellectuels catholiques,” in *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. 6, 269. See J. J. Carney, “The People Bonded Together by Love: Eucharistic Ecclesiology and Small Christian Communities in Africa,” *Modern Theology* 30, no 2, (2014): 300–318.

<sup>11</sup> A protagonist of Christian homes as places for the maturing of faith and the emergence of the church, Malula was involved in the emancipation of women. Around 1964, he founded a congregation of diocesan nuns whose mission was to form well-rounded women, first through a fully human formation, then through a fully religious one. Malula, who longed for well-educated, free, and responsible girls of good character, emotionally balanced and capable of leading themselves—in short, authentic girls—created the High school Marie-Thérèse (Motema Mpiko) in 1968 for the training of Congolese women. The project to ensure the official voice of Catholic women through prominent, committed, and democratically elected Christian women from living ecclesial communities led to the creation of the *Mamans catholiques* movement. Malula’s vision of this movement was an apostolic organization for women’s liberation. It was in his eyes the spearhead of the liberation of Zairean women and a place of complementarity, participating in a synodal approach to the church. See Malula, “La vocation particulière de la Congrégation des sœurs de Sainte Thérèse de l’Enfant Jésus selon l’esprit de son fondateur,” in *Œuvres Complètes*, vol.

emergence of a united *presbyterium*, commitment to convening an African synod, and constant crossing of past and present in a prospective perspective.

To illustrate the contribution of fraternity as a mobilizing value with a socializing function, a prelude to synodality, Malula developed a constellation of “adaptive” innovations relating to actors and structures. Under Malula, traditional pastoral care centred on religious catechesis and sacramentalization as necessary elements of individual and private salvation was superseded by detailed action to awaken and animate the laity, mobilized to shoulder ecclesial responsibilities in solidarity with priests. In addition, he initiated a shift in Kinshasa’s “hierarchical ethos” of closeness and positive politeness, whose contact culture favored titles and social rank, adopting the designation “*ndeko*” (brother, sister) and the greeting *Boboto, bondeko, esengo* (Peace, brotherhood, joy). This reduced the autonomisation of priests and the asymmetry between priests and laypeople, men and women in the diocese of Kinshasa, encapsulated social learning about a different way of interacting with one another, and promoted a participative model based on the imaginary of the church as fraternal community of the baptized. We also see this in structural innovations undertaken by Malula. Indeed, the Archbishop of Kinshasa modeled his diocese through fraternity as a global, structuring value that informs the system of action of the Kinshasa faithful.<sup>12</sup> To socialize Christians to the values of listening, solidarity, collaboration, dialogue, co-responsibility, and discernment, and consequently to promote places for learning deliberative mechanisms and religious requalification of the laity, Malula promoted the division of parishes according to the yardstick of networked sociability.<sup>13</sup> He divided his diocese into three apostolic regions. The richness of Malula’s pastoral innovations reinforces the right and duty of all the baptized to participate actively in ecclesial and liturgical life.

This short biography shows that in his thirty years as bishop Malula acted as a founding bishop of the church, giving pride of place to the church’s participatory style “in the same way as the Fathers of the first

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5, 233; Malula, “Mouvement des mamans catholiques, un appel de l’Église locale,” in *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. 6, 274.

<sup>12</sup> Many examples could be given with movements and groups structured around fraternity: Bondeko Group, Bondeko Center, Bilenge ya Mwinda, Kizito-Anuarite. On these groups, see Ndongala, *Religion et politique*, 94–95.

<sup>13</sup> Malula created the Living Ecclesial Communities (CEV) and made the small Christian communities the basic pastoral unit. From then on, a parish in the diocese of Kinshasa meant a multitude of CEVs. Thanks to this instance of primary socialization which favored fraternal relations, the laity took charge of many services, some of which would become ministries. See Carney “The People Bonded Together by Love,” 300–318.

centuries of the Church."<sup>14</sup> Perceiving the episcopate as a charge, a responsibility before God and humans with the sole perspective of not betraying Africa,<sup>15</sup> he set himself the objective of bringing about "a Congolese Church in a Congolese State."<sup>16</sup> Hence its ambition: to give a truly Congolese face to the mission and therefore "encourage the emergence of an authentically Black-African Church,"<sup>17</sup> which takes on "a truly Congolese face in its theological and philosophical expression, in evangelization, and also in its liturgy."<sup>18</sup> In his eyes, "All the mystery contained in the universal Church is found in the particular Church headed by the bishop."<sup>19</sup> He understands this direction through the titles of doctor, pontiff, and pastor, like the other bishops spread throughout the world.<sup>20</sup>

Many prejudices circulated about his uninhibited approach to the episcopate. It must be recognized that his approach contrasted with the unreasoned obedience of bishops whom, in the text published on the occasion of his twenty years of episcopate, Malula described as "black-skinned Westerners,"<sup>21</sup> these beings still locked up in the modes of Western Christianity,<sup>22</sup> formed according to "absolute and immutable principles, untouchable and applicable to any realities and situations, serving as a universal postulate for everything, an indisputable, axiomatic postulate."<sup>23</sup> With his shocking sentences and innovative pastoral practice, Malula distinguished himself as a bishop whose conception of the church had distanced itself from the pyramidal approach within which he was born and raised.

Indeed, Malula, who experienced a Congolese church renewing the structures and organization of the churches of the metropolis, grew up in a context where the mission was "an expansion of the cultural, political, and economic borders of Christianity."<sup>24</sup> His approach to the Church was neither pyramidal nor clerical. Invested with episcopal responsibilities, he revised downward the centrality of pre-conciliar structures centered around the parish. Of Tridentine inspiration, these centralized structures concentrated all powers in the priest. In doing

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<sup>14</sup> Joseph Albert Malula, "L'évêque africain aujourd'hui et demain. Réflexions personnelles et méditations de 20 ans d'épiscopat," in *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. 3, 99.

<sup>15</sup> Malula, "L'évêque africain," 90.

<sup>16</sup> Malula, "Allocution après l'ordination épiscopale le 20 septembre 1959," in *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. 2, 49.

<sup>17</sup> Malula, "L'Église à l'heure de l'africanité," in *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. 3, 51.

<sup>18</sup> Malula, "Allocution après l'ordination épiscopale le 20 septembre 1959," 49.

<sup>19</sup> Malula, "L'évêque africain," 91.

<sup>20</sup> Malula, "L'évêque africain," 92.

<sup>21</sup> Malula, "L'évêque africain," 93.

<sup>22</sup> Malula, "L'évêque africain," 93.

<sup>23</sup> Malula, "L'évêque africain," 93.

<sup>24</sup> Giuseppe Alberigo, "Chrétienté et cultures dans l'histoire de l'Église," in *Église et histoire de l'Église en Afrique*, ed. G. Ruggieri (Paris: Beauchesne, 1988), XIII.

so, they disqualified the laity and reduced the purpose of pastoral ministry to an enterprise of sacramentalization.

Shortly before the Second Vatican Council, in a context dominated by requests in favor of the Africanization of executives and the church, the sixth assembly of the Congolese episcopate had raised the option in favor of the emergence of living communities, committed laity, and adapted liturgy.<sup>25</sup> This openness of the Congolese bishops that the Second Vatican Council endorsed was positively received by the archbishop of Léopoldville, who included it with great ingenuity and inventiveness in an enterprise both of renovation of ecclesial structures and empowerment of lay people and priests. Hence a significant break with societal ecclesiology and the ideology of *Ecclesia societas inaequalis, hierarchica et perfecta*. Turning his back on any monocratic structure that disqualified the laity and empowered priests—and this, I believe, was the most fruitful insight of his episcopate—Malula gave his diocese the contours of a family supported by fraternity rather than organized according to asymmetrical hierarchical relationships. From this ecclesial sociability emerged a fully African church, creative and truly responsible for itself,<sup>26</sup> which has excelled in the inventive reception of the last Council.

#### **FROM CHANGES IN KINSHASA TO UNPRECEDENTED PASTORAL INNOVATIONS: LISTENING AND DIALOGUE AS PASTORAL REQUIREMENTS**

Malula's participation in the Second Vatican Council had fueled in him the project of the Africanization of the church. The young bishop of Léopoldville postulated this Africanization through innovation and the quest for new ways for the work of mission. On a societal level, the transition from semi-rural to urban society characteristic of the Congolese capital, to which is added the extension of the city in its extremities, the rural exodus, and the emergence of an authoritarian state led the archbishop of Kinshasa to integrate into his pastoral projects the changes in the Congolese capital and requirements of its political context. The societal and pastoral challenges of its diocese were met thanks to an organizational culture which promoted, on the one hand, the restructuring of parishes into Living Ecclesial Communities and, on the other hand, the decentralization of the

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<sup>25</sup> See *Épiscopat du Congo, Actes de la 6e Assemblée plénière de l'Épiscopat du Congo. Léopoldville 1961 (20 novembre–2 décembre)* (Léopoldville: Secrétariat Général de l'Épiscopat, 1961).

<sup>26</sup> Malula, "Communication concernant le projet de confier certaines paroisses à des laïcs," in *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. 6, 182.

diocese into three apostolic regions. This underlay the collaboration of the archbishop of Kinshasa with pastoral agents, particularly lay people and, in passing, promoted of the latter.

Along this line, Malula, who wanted to bring about a brotherly church of the children of God, made dialogue and listening the keywords of the pastoral ministry he promoted in Kinshasa. In his opinion:

Pastor of his diocese, the bishop must ensure that he promotes and develops a spirit of dialogue with all his collaborators. If we want to dialogue, declared the episcopate of Congo in 1967, we must admit as a basic principle that everything is not done at the top, that the Church is also built at the base through adaptation and initiatives. It is through dialogue that the bishop can be properly made aware of the problems of the different categories of his collaborators, that he can arrive at successful solutions to these problems. These solutions themselves must be, as much as possible, taken together.<sup>27</sup>

To include dialogue in the observable functioning and consolidate proximity with the people of God, Malula worked to find optimal listening methods for his diocese. He also initiated the work of mixed priest-lay teams, one of which produced the document *Présence de l'Église dans le Congo d'aujourd'hui*<sup>28</sup> and the brochure *Visage de Kinshasa et problème de pastorale*.<sup>29</sup> Between January 1968 and 1970, the meetings of the priestly council were devoted to reflection on overall pastoral care. A commission was appointed to develop the basic document for the discussions which resulted in the release of *Mission de l'Église à Kinshasa. Options pastorales*.<sup>30</sup> This important document reflects the awareness of the pastoral implications of the God-world-church articulation.<sup>31</sup> It concludes with a resolute stance in favor of revaluing the role of the laity and the need to decentralize action through the development of small, human-scale communities, the *Communautés ecclésiales vivantes* (“Living Ecclesial Communities” [CEV]).<sup>32</sup> It was within these communities that various services emerged as a precursor to the lay ministries established in 1975.<sup>33</sup> In

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<sup>27</sup> See Malula, “Place du chrétien dans la société et rôle de la hiérarchie,” in *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. 6, 34.

<sup>28</sup> Jean Lefebvre, Félix Vundowe, *Présence de l'Église dans le Congo d'aujourd'hui. Réflexion d'une équipe de prêtres et de laïcs* (Kinshasa: s. e., 1968).

<sup>29</sup> Léon de Saint Moulin, *Visage de Kinshasa et problèmes de pastorale* (Kinshasa: CEP, 1969).

<sup>30</sup> Malula, *Mission de l'Église à Kinshasa. Options pastorales* (Kinshasa, 1970).

<sup>31</sup> Malula, *Mission de l'Église*, 8–14.

<sup>32</sup> Malula, *Mission de l'Église*, 15–18 *passim*.

<sup>33</sup> This innovation alone reflects Malula's desire to think outside the box. Indeed, while the Catholic Church is still governed according to the 1917 *Codex iuris canonici*

1974, the Archbishop of Kinshasa went so far as to collect the opinion of the people of his diocese by initiating an investigation into the type of priest to train and the type of training given to seminarians.<sup>34</sup> In 1986, another consultation took place in the form of a competition to find a name for the Diocesan Pastoral Center.<sup>35</sup> From 1986 to 1988, in order to promote expanded participation of the clergy and laity, Malula advocated large-scale consultation through the synod of his diocese. We can therefore note a diversification of structures which fuel dialogue throughout the life of the diocese: structures for dialogue, consultation, collaboration, and sharing. Léon de Saint Moulin lists a few of them: Pastoral Notes, pastoral animation days (inaugurated in 1969 at the Nganda Center), visits, and meetings at the base which gave rise to the publication of the brochure *L'évêque à l'écoute*.<sup>36</sup>

This explains the link Malula established between mutual listening, dialogue, and one of the great achievements of his episcopate: the institution of the ministry of parish assistant, the ministry of pastoral animator, and the *bakambi* ministry.<sup>37</sup> As he says, “responding to the opening made by Paul VI, we wanted to listen to the Spirit by listening to the pastoral needs of the people of God in Kinshasa, and we believed we could experiment, at the level of our diocese, by creating the lay ministry of parish *mokambi*.”<sup>38</sup> This shows how much, in its

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which recognizes only one type of ministry (priestly) and the parish as the basic pastoral unit, Malula established three new lay ministries in his diocese and made the CEV the basic pastoral unit.

<sup>34</sup> Malula, “Préparation des candidats au presbytérat,” in *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. 3, 300.

<sup>35</sup> Archidiocèse de Kinshasa, *Centre Pastoral Diocésain Lindonge* (Kinshasa, 1986), 7.

<sup>36</sup> Léon de Saint Moulin, “Biographie du Cardinal Malula,” in *Une vie pleinement donnée à Dieu et aux hommes. Hommage au cardinal Malula* (Kinshasa: Archidiocèse de Kinshasa, 1990), 24.

<sup>37</sup> This is the instituted ministry of the lay parish leader, the *mokambi*. This one collaborates with a priest animator. However, the latter is not in charge of the parish. The valorization of baptismal grace here promotes co-responsibility in a synergy that, beyond listening to lay men and women in the church, institutes lay people as active players in building a listening church. See Malula, “Première annonce du projet de confier des paroisses à des ministres laïcs,” in *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. 6, 199–181; Malula, “Communication concernant le projet de confier certaines paroisses à des laïcs,” 181–182; Malula, “Impressions du Cardinal après la visite canonique des paroisses confiées à des bakambi,” in *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. 6, 196–197; Malula, “Homélie à l’occasion du 10<sup>e</sup> anniversaire de l’institution des premiers ministres laïcs à Kinshasa,” in *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. 6, 212–215.

<sup>38</sup> Malula, “Homélie à l’occasion du 10<sup>e</sup> anniversaire,” 213. The link between the Spirit, the bishop, and the needs of the people of God deserves further development which, in my view, provides a coherent explanation for the institution of lay ministries. In this sense, see the general norms and diocesan directives of the diocesan synod (1986–1988) on the formation and apostolate of the laity and non-ordained ministries. See “Synode diocésain (1986–1988). Options et directives,” in *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. 4, 171–174.

genesis as well as in its institution, the lay ministry was a synodal approach favoring listening to the needs of the people of God and promoting collaboration between men and women, laity and clergy.

It appears from the above that to better listen to the needs of his diocese, Malula resolutely advocated dialogue by listening to the Spirit through listening to the Word of God, which depended on listening to the pastoral needs of the people of God in Kinshasa.<sup>39</sup> It insinuated a renewed approach to the articulation of the relationship between Spirit, episcopate, and people of God. It conceives of listening not in an abstract way but from concrete realities, in this case the pastoral needs of the people of God and Congolese society. We see an opening emerging here not by disjunction, but conjunction. It does not proceed from definitions of the hierarchy, but through reception of the needs defined by the people of God, needs received by the hierarchy as motions of the Spirit. We see, by correlating listening to the needs of the people of God with listening to the motions of the Spirit, Malula recognized the ability of the people of God to know their needs and express them.<sup>40</sup> Consequently, he defined the task of the hierarchy as that of listening not to itself, but to the people of God and thus to the Spirit.<sup>41</sup> He invented an institution to match this new articulation of the relationship between Spirit, episcopate, and people of God: the “listening bishop.”

### THE “LISTENING BISHOP”: A DIALOGIC, PARTICIPATORY, AND CONSULTATIVE DEVICE WITH SYNODAL SCOPE

For a good understanding of what will follow, it is appropriate to note that the episcopate of Malula remains marked by his understanding of the differentiated equality of the people of God and propensity to draw effective consequences from it in practice by promoting fraternity. It is in the name of this mobilizing value that Malula takes the opposite view of the conception of a church *societas perfecta, hierarchica et inaequalis*. It goes beyond the distinction between the “sacredness” of ministers and the “secularity” of the laity.<sup>42</sup> He therefore sees the mission of the church as a common work of members of the same family: the people of God (bishops, priests, religious, lay Christians). It is by counting on the collaboration of

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<sup>39</sup> Here I note the convergence with Pope Francis, who also favors listening to the people of God, the place where, according to him, the voice of Christ resounds through the Spirit. See Pape François, *Un temps pour changer* (Paris: Flammarion, 2020), 126.

<sup>40</sup> Malula, “Lettre à mes collaborateurs et collaboratrices no. 5,” 177.

<sup>41</sup> Malula, “Place du chrétien,” 34.

<sup>42</sup> On the aporias of the last council concerning this point, see Christoph Theobald, *Un nouveau concile qui ne dit pas son nom ? Le synode sur la synodalité, voie de pacification et de créativité* (Paris: Salvator, 2023).

these different actors that he intends to “promote the emergence of an authentically Black-African Church,”<sup>43</sup> “a fully African Church of Kinshasa: therefore dynamic, creative, and truly responsible for itself.”<sup>44</sup> The expressions “authentically Black-African,” “fully African,” “truly responsible for itself” have all their importance here: in fact, they postulate a renewal of the means of the mission (*leiturgia, martyria, diakonia, oikodomé, koinonia*). Taken up in line with fraternity following the fundamental equality of the people of God, they are accompanied by the pastoral option of:

Going towards the people of God . . . to bridge the gaps that still separate us from them . . . meet him where he is . . . listen to him to know him, because the Good Shepherd knows his sheep. Go to him to be with him. . . . Be with him to share his joys . . . his sorrows . . . his anxieties . . . clarify his doubts . . . try out his plans . . . appreciate and encourage his efforts. . . . Excuse his weaknesses.<sup>45</sup>

Beyond the inherent predisposition of the episcopal office, the resolute choice of the archbishop of Kinshasa was a prelude to a church on the move, or rather, to a peregrination of the church on the margins. This pilgrimage of the bishop was accompanied by an attitude which placed him in a posture of welcome and listening giving voice to the base. The approach which celebrated fraternity was driven by this conviction encountered above: “The Church is also built from the ground up through adaptation and initiatives.”<sup>46</sup> This conviction in turn carried a spirit reflective of the Malula style.<sup>47</sup> It was experienced as a conjunction of views, combination of thoughts, pooling of expertise, and conspiracy of voices. This was what the institution of the “listening bishop” reported from 1978 onwards.<sup>48</sup>

As the name chosen by Malula clearly indicates, the “listening bishop” is at the same time an approach, a state of mind, and an institutional, discursive, and participatory device which places the bishop in the posture of listening to his collaborators, notably the pastoral agents, *bakambi*, priests, and nuns of a deanery. In successive stages Malula specified his expectations and explained the purpose of

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<sup>43</sup> Malula, “L’Église à l’heure de l’africanité,” in *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. 3, 51.

<sup>44</sup> Malula, “Communication concernant le projet de confier certaines paroisses à des laïcs,” 182.

<sup>45</sup> Malula, “Lettre à mes collaborateurs,” 177.

<sup>46</sup> Malula, “Place du chrétien dans la société et rôle de la hiérarchie,” in *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. 6, 34.

<sup>47</sup> I understand style in the sense in which Pope Paul VI uses this term. See *La Documentation catholique*, 1622 (1972): 1104–1105.

<sup>48</sup> The “listening bishop” institution operated in the diocese of Kinshasa from 1978 to 1979.

the bishop’s meetings with his collaborators as a way to, on the one hand, keep in touch with the base, the problems specific to each deanery and general problems of the diocese and, on the other hand, seek with them answers in line with the major options of the overall pastoral care of the diocese. It was also the time to establish and strengthen bonds of fraternity with all agents of evangelization and ecclesiastical personnel.<sup>49</sup> The insistence on the “base” made this colloquium a means of “establishing a fruitful dialogue”<sup>50</sup> and collecting news, concerns, orientations, projects, problems, expectations, wishes, and questions from the base. It was also the occasion where the bishop reported on his travels and participation in conferences or symposia.<sup>51</sup>

As a practice of communication, the “listening bishop” is also a material device, a ritual, and a positive rite which celebrates fraternity (*bondeko*) and expresses the “dialogical and fraternal” identity of the Church of Kinshasa. The latter tended to become a fraternity of the children of God.<sup>52</sup> Its normative logic made it a meeting of *bondeko* (brothers and sisters), which unfolded in three sequences: the pre-meeting, meeting, and post-meeting. The deanery which received the bishop prepared for the event.<sup>53</sup> The pastoral agents sharpened their questions in Lingala or French, prepared the themes which would be submitted for debate. Everything was coordinated by the dean priest responsible for welcoming the bishop and his delegation. When the assembly began, after the welcome formalities, the Cardinal addressed a preliminary word, then set out the subject to be debated (retained by the pastoral agents). The bishop or his collaborators answered questions from pastoral agents. At the end of the meeting, the bishop thanked the participants. After the meeting, the device being

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<sup>49</sup> Malula, “Doyenné de Saint Joseph,” in *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. 4, 66. At the deanery of Saint Martin, he specifies the aim of these meetings as being “to allow us to listen to what is happening at the base in order to be able to better guide the entire diocesan pastoral ministry.” See Malula, “Doyenné de Saint Martin,” in *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. 4, 75.

<sup>50</sup> Malula, “Doyenné de Saint Alphonse,” in *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. 4, 78.

<sup>51</sup> Malula “Doyenné de Saint Martin,” 76. Malula reports on the symposium of bishops of Africa and Madagascar in which he had just participated.

<sup>52</sup> On this image which I consider characteristic of the ecclesiology of Cardinal Malula, see Ignace Ndongala Maduku, “L’Église de Dieu qui est à Kinshasa (1979–1989). Une *fraternitas quaerens*. Contribution à l’étude de l’image de l’Église-fraternité,” in *Épistémologie et théologie. Les Enjeux du dialogue foi-science-éthique pour l’avenir de l’humanité. Mélanges en l’honneur de son Excellence Mgr Tharcisse Tshibangu Tshishiku pour ses 70 ans d’âge et 35 ans d’épiscopat*, ed. L. Santedi Kinkupu and M. Malu (Kinshasa: Facultés catholiques de Kinshasa, 2006), 517–530.

<sup>53</sup> A study of the layout of the premises where the meeting took place, the proxemics deployed, the dramaturgy of the assembly, in short the spatial circumscription of the place and distribution of speech and its exchange remains to be done.

discursive, the bishop began to write down the written transcription of the exchange published in the brochure *L'Évêque à l'écoute*.<sup>54</sup>

The “listening bishop” was therefore at the same time a structure, a device,<sup>55</sup> a time of conviviality, a brochure, a concrete process, a meeting, a structure for dialogue, a moment of communion where the word circulates and allows a revision, a forecast, and a provision of evangelization.<sup>56</sup> It is important to note that this was concretely a dialogic exchange which was neither protocol nor derogation from mutual respect. It mobilized the pastoral agents of a deanery who, using freedom of speech, discussed with their bishop various themes they had previously chosen. With this device, the Congolese Cardinal seized the common interpretation of events with the aim of laying the foundations of the new Congolese Catholic Church.<sup>57</sup> He learned from the *doxa* of his collaborators and retained the common stock of their knowledge and experience. Attentive to the signs of the times, he integrated the sharing of information and debated ideas with pastoral agents in the development of pastoral directives. In this way, an organizational culture was born open to the collaborative construction of consensus on pastoral and societal issues.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Here, the bishop commits his authority. Consequently, his function of government is open to the participation of the people of God, with a view to pooling the contributions of lay people and priests. The question of how the personal and collegial exercise of the bishop's authority relates to the synodal exercise of discernment by the ecclesial community remains unanswered. In addition, the written version of the exchanges is not, however, discussed or submitted for assessment by the pastoral agents. No place or time is provided where they can express their dissent or criticism of possible selections, censorship, or reformulations. It nevertheless remains certain that the brochure has a positive impact on pastoral agents and stimulates their participation and commitment to ecclesial living together. A reflection on the popularization of the brochure at the CEV level would have enabled the entire diocese to benefit from the achievements of this device.

<sup>55</sup> With this notion of device, I would like to emphasize the aim of efficiency, optimizing the conditions for realizing communion in a perspective that values baptismal grace and promotes the conjunction of the knowledge and charisms of the people of God.

<sup>56</sup> Malula, “Doyenné de Saint Martin,” 75.

<sup>57</sup> Malula, “Doyenné de Saint François,” 72.

<sup>58</sup> The themes covered touch on the various areas of mission (*leiturgia, martyria, diakonia, oikodome, and koinonia*). Here are just a few of the topics discussed: lay formation, irregular couples, the role of the priest and the nun in covenant schools, appointment of a pastoral coordinator, shortage of priests, church-state relations, overworked priests, lay responsibility in parishes, laxity of Christians for communion, information on the construction of the major seminary, the life of the priest as witness, competence of parish commissions, admission of babies to baptism, admission to first communion, seminary and diocesan sisters, *bakambi* suggestion on the sacrament of the sick, CEV and *bakambi* training, schools and parishes, ecumenism, *Bilenge ya mwinda*, finances, non-geographical base communities, pastoral note on sacraments in Kinshasa, current material situation, family pastoral, school problems, sacraments,

The "listening bishop," however, did not empower the archbishop or establish him as a source of knowledge. The interaction allowed him to discover the practical and discursive performances of pastoral agents. They had the initiative of themes and order of the interactions. They participated in developing the bishop's responses. The posture of the bishop was that of listening in a "collective activity" which opened the space for discussion by granting speech to pastoral agents. According to the issues on the agenda, the skills of the auxiliary bishops and those of the bishop's other immediate collaborators were called upon. Malula gave them the floor to shed light on the problems that fell within their areas of responsibility.<sup>59</sup>

The name "listening bishop" clearly describes the structure of the device whose order, scenography, and grammar were a constructive exchange in a collective debate centered on the church to be built and pastoral care to be developed for a new society.<sup>60</sup> Obviously, thanks to this institution, Malula as a pastor was not disconnected from the reality of his diocese nor its localities. The latter were integrated into the development of pastoral care which now relied on the contribution of those on the ground. The inductive approach favored the interaction of the bishop with priests and lay people in ecclesial responsibility, allowing him to better understand the situation of the evangelizers and those evangelized. With professionalism, the archbishop of Kinshasa expanded the tent of each deanery by opening its horizon to overall pastoral care. The pastoral problems of a deanery were therefore put into perspective in a quest for answers which interests and concerns the entire diocese. The answers to the questions, although detailed and contextualized, were always in line with the overall pastoral care to be promoted.

Devoid of arguments of authority and any display of force or power, avoiding clericalism, the dialogue here was also fraternal. On this subject, we note the emergence of this clear awareness in Malula's eyes that the "listening bishop" is not an answer box nor a divinatory authority. More than once, the Cardinal opened the possibility of a

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Mama Yemo hospital chaplaincy, river apostolate, school questions, various problems. The range of themes is an invitation to go further in the study of their inclusion in the Pastoral Letters, directives, in short, the doctrinal teaching and pastoral practices of the bishop of Kinshasa.

<sup>59</sup> At the deanery of Saint-François, on January 9, 1979, Msgr. Moke and Mr. Nkuili, diocesan and regional coordinator of Catholic approved schools in Kinshasa, answered questions. See Malula, "Doyenné de Saint Martin," 72. The same happened on January 12, 1979, at the deanery of Saint-Alphonse. See Malula, "Doyenné de Saint Alphonse," 78. At the deanery of Sainte-Anne, he is accompanied by Msgr. Moke and the vicar general, Fr. De Schaetzen. See Malula, "Doyenné de Sainte Anne," 83.

<sup>60</sup> Malula, "Doyenné de Saint Alphonse," 69.

subsequent deepening of the problems posed.<sup>61</sup> Consequently, the exchange constituted the breeding ground for several Pastoral Letters which were either answers to the questions raised, or reflections on the words exchanged. By promoting respect for the authority of the bishop in the distinction and complementarity of skills, this device allowed subsidiarity between laity and priests. As such, it carried what I call a co-construction of pastoral care.<sup>62</sup> This became like a variegated mat woven by all the baptized.

The organizational style and the institutional rite of this device rendered it a convivial ritual of proximity, a true symbolic space-time which allowed participants to experience emotional and effective communion. The time devoted to dialogue, exchange on pastoral questions produced the church as a family and gave substance to ecclesial fraternity. Ultimately, the “listening bishop” participated in the emergence of a “culture of dialogue and encounter” which unfolded as a journey of synodality.

### THE “LISTENING BISHOP”: A JOURNEY OF SYNODALITY

Since the first millennium, synodality has been seen as a constitutive dimension of the church.<sup>63</sup> The vision of a synodal church developed by Pope Francis refers to a journey that involves lay people, pastors, the bishop of Rome, and believers. According to my analysis, there is a striking convergence between Pope Francis and Cardinal Malula. The two prelates see in the baptized, members of the Body of Christ who participate in the prophetic function of Christ. What is more, they combine communion, participation, and mission.<sup>64</sup> In the eyes of Pope Francis, the synodal path opens by listening to the people and continues by listening to the pastors.<sup>65</sup> To these points of convergence, we can add Malula’s option to mobilize pastors to listen to the Spirit’s motions through the needs of God’s people, and the path he opened with the institution of the “listening bishop.”

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<sup>61</sup> Regarding the problem of irregular couples, the cardinal affirms that “we should therefore wait for the next General Assemblies of SECAM, where we will talk about family life and the Episcopate of Zaire which will deal with marriage and the couple, to know the thought of the bishops.” See Malula, “Doyenné de Saint Pierre,” 57. The theological problem of the communion of Christians in an irregular situation raised at the Saint-François deanery would give rise to a pastoral letter. The exchange initiated at the Saint Alphonse deanery on the life of the priest as testimony would end with the development of a spiritual directory of the clergy.

<sup>62</sup> I borrow this notion from Michel Foudriat, *La co-construction : une alternative managériale* (Paris: Éditions des Hautes Études en Sciences Politiques, 2019).

<sup>63</sup> Pope Francis, “Discours du 17 octobre 2015,” *Documentation catholique* 1521 (2016): 78. See also *Evangelii Gaudium*, nos. 16 and 32.

<sup>64</sup> *Preparatory Document, Synod 2021–2024*, no. 1.

<sup>65</sup> Malula, “Homélie à l’occasion du 10<sup>e</sup> anniversaire,” 213.

Indeed, through this institution, the church of God which stays in Kinshasa, by concentric and proximal levels (CEV, parishes, deaneries), listens to God to hear the cry of his people, in order to give him a corresponding response. In line with dialogical fraternity, openness to subsidiarity, and respect for the delegation of powers, the construction of pastoral knowledge and reflection on pastoral practice become a co-elaboration, co-construction of meaning, a way of weaving the mat of pastoral care with, by, and in the community. The dialogical fraternity discovered there is a journey of synodality, an ecclesial itinerancy made of learning, which on a few occasions, crosses human roads made of joys, trials, anxieties, and hopes (GS 1). It engages the people of God in a walk together which discovers a different face of the church: a church listening to the Spirit, a church listening to reality and at the forefront of the challenges and opportunities of the hour, a church listening to the cry of the African.<sup>66</sup>

Returning to apprenticeships, it is worth noting that in line with the active participation of the whole people of God and subsidiarity, they are likely to promote, as Hervé Legrand has suggested, “subject Churches and Churches of subjects of rights and initiatives.”<sup>67</sup>

The church of Malula did not wander; the path it took was marked out. Well before the diocesan synod he convened from 1986 to 1988, Malula had initiated a synodal dynamic which allowed the people of his diocese to walk together and build a fraternity of the children of God. As we have seen, the synodal road blazed with and by the people of God under the aegis of Malula, the “listening bishop” demonstrated the synodality of the church, built pastoral co-responsibility, and promoted fraternal consensus matched with the *consensus ecclesiae*. The realization of synodality through this device has bequeathed to the Church of Kinshasa “the necessary framework for an authentically African Church: responsible and committed laity, spiritually solid, intellectually strong and pastorally committed priests, . . . authentically African and authentically religious, effective structures (CEVB, deaneries, apostolic regions, Lindonge Pastoral Center, Listening Bishop) and viable institutions (spirituality movements, Catholic action movements).”<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Jean-Marc Ela, *Le cri de l'homme africain. Questions aux Églises d'Afrique* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1981).

<sup>67</sup> Hervé Legrand, “Pour une Église synodale et fraternelle,” in *Transformer l'Église. Quelques propositions à la lumière de Fratelli Tutti*, ed. M. Camdessus (Paris: Bayard, 2020), 106. See also *Evangeli Gaudium*, no. 120.

<sup>68</sup> Tharcisse Tshibangu Tshishiku, “Préface,” in *Universalité de l'Église catholique et réalisation d'une Église africaine. La pensée et l'œuvre du Cardinal J.-A. Malula. À l'occasion du Centenaire de sa naissance (1917–2017)*, ed. Ignace Ndongala Maduku (Kinshasa: Médiaspaul, 2020), 4.

## SOME ECCLESIOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS TO CONCLUDE

The episcopate of Cardinal Malula is suggestive in more than one way. First, there is the Zairian rite of the Mass of which he was one of the instigators, a rite Pope Francis considers promising for other cultures.<sup>69</sup> Then there is the ministry of lay parish leader which remains suggestive for Christian communities. Finally, there is the device of the “listening bishop” here under study.

This paper has highlighted the achievements of the “listening bishop” initiative. The scope of this device has contributed to the emergence in Kinshasa of a church fraternity of God’s children, a place of participation and complementarity that enhances the value of baptismal grace, a site for the development of a just partnership and differentiated communion between the baptized: laity and priests, men and women. The overall purpose of this article confirms my initial claim that the “listening bishop” was a concrete expression of synodality that deserves to be reappropriated. Precisely, the scope of this device is important in ecclesiology. First, it illustrates the correlation between ecclesiology and pastoral care and verifies the axiom which attests that “one always has the pastoral care of one’s ecclesiology.”<sup>70</sup> Then, it poses the need to find inculturated institutions which translate into identifiable functioning the ecclesiology of the last council. As we know, the Second Vatican Council imposed itself on Malula as a source of inspiration he put into dialogue with African traditions.

Broadly speaking, I could say that the “listening bishop” resonates with an understanding of the church’s communion perceived and experienced as a fraternity of the children of God. It remains a Congolese way of making the regime promoted by the last council a reality. By building knowledge through the conjunction of voices and pooling of skills, its dialogical, participatory dynamic draws on the tradition of the African palaver. It attenuates the pyramidal aspect of the church and promotes consensus-building by overcoming the top-down approach to relations between pastoral protagonists. Articulated with doctrinal achievements on the baptismal equality of the people of God, this device fulfilled both the mission of the presbyteral and pastoral councils (*Lumen Gentium*, nos. 30, 37; *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 10; *Christus Dominus*, no. 27, can. 495; can. 511–514), who struggled to work in Kinshasa and became bogged down in bureaucracy and legalism. It has become institutionalized as a participation structure matched to overall pastoral care, respectful of

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<sup>69</sup> Mboshu, *Papa Francesco*, 3–6.

<sup>70</sup> Bernard Lambert, “Orientations nouvelles de la pastorale,” in *La nouvelle image de l’Église. Bilan du concile Vatican II*, ed. Bernard Lambert (Paris: Mame, 1967), 335.

the “one-all-some” dialectic<sup>71</sup> and provider of a new organizational culture and ecclesial action based on complementarity and subsidiarity. The “listening bishop” functioned as an ecclesial institution deploying ecclesial synodality and placing the bishop in a posture of listening to his base.

This institution can be said to have been for Malula a permanent reminder favoring the pastoral requirement of “being with” and “going towards” the people of God. The bishop goes to recharge his batteries at the base. He leaves his office to meet people and reality. He is on a quest, he puts himself in a position of investigation and collects requests from the people of his diocese, particularly those on the ground. Embarking on this path of “going forth” defines an epistemological posture which consists of unlearning one’s ecclesial culture and learning from the experience of the people of God. The innovative approach which builds the *ecclesiae consensus* also invented a new mode of collaboration which builds overall pastoral care based on the realities of the different deaneries. Even better: it was based on a new form of communication adapted to the changes in the city of Kinshasa. In a sense, one of its major contributions was to deploy the transition from the pyramidal organization to the decentralized circle in a logic which led to the reduction of the autonomisation of the hierarchy. Under these conditions, the people of God saw their status change thanks to a dynamic and interdependent interaction which promoted the development of their skills and pastoral performance against a backdrop of overcoming duality and the priest-laity compartmentalization. By shedding the comfort of authority to open up to a dialogic fraternity, better to “an authority of fraternity,” Malula opened himself to subsidiarity and respect for the delegation of powers. He embarked on this path by focusing on the *sensus fidei*,<sup>72</sup> *charisma*, human potential, and expertise of his collaborators.

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<sup>71</sup> Omnipresent in the New Testament and the institutions of the early church, the articulation “one, all, some” correlates the personal, collegial, and communitarian modes of leadership in the church. It indicates the interactivity and interdependence of all members in ecclesial responsibility in the line of synodal life. For more on this articulation, see Hervé Legrand, “Les évêques, les Églises locales, et l’Église entière. Évolutions institutionnelles depuis Vatican II et chantiers actuels de recherche,” *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 85 (2001): 461–509; Hervé Legrand, “Le rôle des communautés locales dans l’appel, l’envoi, la réception, et le soutien des laïcs recevant une charge ecclésiale,” *La Maison Dieu* 215, no. 3 (1998): 9–32.

<sup>72</sup> For more on this topic, see International Theological Commission, *Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church*, no. 2.

The “listening bishop” promoted co-responsibility between the bishop and the faithful of his diocese<sup>73</sup> from a perspective of “participatory democracy.” It has contributed to the participation of the laity, especially women, in doctrinal teaching and pastoral decisions, fulfilling one of the normative expectations of the archbishop of Kinshasa, in particular that carried by the articulation of Spirit, episcopate, and people of God: the advent of a church fraternity of the children of God in Kinshasa, in which the equality in principle of the faithful as affirmed is not abstract. It was lived concretely as a request to take advantage of ecclesial subsidiarity in a differentiated way through diversification and complementarity of ministries, and taking into account the participation and needs of God’s people and their *sensus fidei*.<sup>74</sup> The synodal vision of the people of God at the root of this device opened to the discovery of pastoral capacities, to the discernment of varied charisms and consolidated mechanisms of interaction and collective dynamics. As such, it constituted an institutional opening in the conciliar vein which Malula, without ignoring the system of councils promoted by Vatican II (presbyteral and pastoral councils), updates, structures and experiments with in the line of a fraternal concertation of the whole people of God.

The institution of the “listening bishop” functioned as an organizational system articulated around pastoral agents (*bakambi*, priests, nuns) and a supra-parochial structure, the deanery. We can immediately see one of its limitations, namely the exclusion of a fringe of the people of God. Here again, we can see how its revival today would include not only other lay people with ecclesial responsibilities at CEV, parish, deanery, and diocesan levels, but also those with no responsibilities at all. If we look closely, such a revival requires the contribution of canonists to determine *de iure condendo* the status of this device devoid of any decision-making power. We must recognize, as Legrand does, that “synodality will remain an intention until Canon Law institutionalizes it.”<sup>75</sup> It would also accommodate revisions to its operation. Its rebirth would place the diocese of Kinshasa in a permanent synodal dynamic and make it an outgoing church, a listening church, in short, a synodal church involving the people of God in the *munus propheticum* of Christ. That other local churches can draw inspiration from the experience of the diocese of Kinshasa is obvious and needs no comment. Taking everything into consideration,

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<sup>73</sup> See in this sense especially, Jean-Paul Durand, “La synodalité des Églises particulières. Fondements théologiques et application juridique,” *Teka kom. Praw.-OL PAN* (2014): 21–33.

<sup>74</sup> Christoph Theobald, “*Sensus fidei fidelium*. Enjeux d’avenir d’une notion classique,” *Revue de sciences religieuses* 104, no. 2 (2016): 228.

<sup>75</sup> Camdessus, ed., *Transformer l’Église*, 112.

can we not see in the potential of this device a pastoral council that does not speak its name?<sup>76</sup> This would be on the condition of not making it autonomous, but of putting it in complementary connection with other participation devices. **M**

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<sup>76</sup> I am inspired by the title of the recent book by Christoph Theobald, cited in note 42.