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PHILIP GIBBS

ABSTRACT

This article describes some of the major events in the Catholic Church in Papua New Guinea (PNG) following the Second Vatican Council, the ‘self study’ of the church in PNG in the 1970s, and the General Assembly of 2003–4. An outcome of the self study was the establishment of a national Catholic council in which Bernard Narokobi played a significant role. The article continues with a reflection on how Narokobi’s promotion of Melanesian spirituality finds links with a Catholic theology of grace and sacrament and how these two contribute to his understanding of the dual pillars of the PNG *Constitution* with its noble traditions and Christian principles coming together in the ideal of integral human development. The article lays out different ways Bernard Narokobi was formally involved with the church over his lifetime and how his bringing together of Melanesian experience and Christian faith provided a model for the integral liberation he envisaged and expressed – both in his work in the church and in the National Goals and Directive Principles of the PNG *Constitution*.

Key words: Melanesian spirituality, Catholic Church, Melanesian traditions, Christian principles, National Catholic Council

INTRODUCTION

Bernard Narokobi’s published works as well as his actions reflect a vision that is deeply Melanesian and deeply Christian. As a Melanesian, he had a sense of the religious realm, integral to all aspects of life, and the absence of artificial dichotomy between the sacred and profane. The integration of the personal, communal, economic, and political is a way of living that he called ‘the Melanesian Way’.

As a Christian, Narokobi had a vibrant, if sometimes critical, sense of the Catholic faith he inherited from his father, who was a first-generation catechist. Narokobi also participated in important moments in the history of the church in Papua New Guinea, such as the ‘self study’ of the church in the 1970s and the General Assembly of 2003–4. In his later years he served as director of the Right Relations Committee for the Catholic Bishops’ Conference (CBC) of Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Solomon Islands. Aside from active participation in church life, he also practised a Christian responsibility to society whereby faith guides

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politics to allow the power of God to intervene in human history and build the Kingdom of God.¹

Narokobi sought to respond to a fundamental question – how to integrate a genuine Melanesian experience and Christian faith. He eschewed what he termed the ‘American idea of a strict division between church and state’.² Rather, he supported the principle that the two are ‘merged’ in ‘total development’.³ People cannot live by bread, *kaukau* (sweet potato) and politics alone.⁴ They need faith to achieve the integral liberation envisaged by the National Goals and Directive Principles of the *Constitution of Papua New Guinea* (hereafter PNG *Constitution*).⁵

This article describes some of the major events in the Catholic Church in PNG following the Second Vatican Council. These include the self study of the church in PNG in the 1970s and the General Assembly of 2003–4. An outcome of the self study was the establishment of a national Catholic council, in which Bernard Narokobi played a significant role. The article reflects on how Narokobi’s promotion of Melanesian spirituality finds links with a Catholic theology of the sacramental, and integral human development, and how historical events transpiring in both PNG and world Catholicism helped to shape Narokobi’s perspective and discourse.⁶

THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL AND PNG

The Second Vatican Council (1961–5, also referred to as ‘Vatican II’) heralded many changes in the Catholic Church. Prominent German theologian Karl Rahner proposed that the main achievement of the council was the first official self-actualization of Catholicism as a world church.⁷ With more than 2600 bishops from all over the world attending the four sessions of the council over three years (1962–5), the effects of the council were felt throughout the world.

¹ Bernard Narokobi, ‘The Kingdom and Melanesian Human Struggles’, in *Your Kingdom Come: Partnership in Mission and Development*, ed. Helen O’Brien, Point series no. 2 (Goroka, PNG: Melanesian Institute for Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 1980), 54, 68.

² Bernard Narokobi, *Lo Bilong Yumi Yet [Our Own Law]: Law and Custom in Melanesia*, ed. Ron Cromcombe, John May and Paul Roche, Point series no. 12 (Goroka, PNG: Melanesian Institute for Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service; Suva, Fiji: University of the South Pacific, Institute of Pacific Studies, 1989), 40.

³ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁴ Bernard Narokobi, *The Melanesian Way*, rev. ed. (Boroko, PNG: Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies; Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1983), 68.

⁵ Narokobi, ‘The Kingdom and Melanesian Human Struggles’, 68.

⁶ The author was present for both the self study in the 1970s and the General Assembly in 2003–4, and will draw upon personal memoirs and unpublished written sources relevant to those events.

⁷ Karl Rahner, ‘Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II’, *Theological Studies* 40 (1979): 716–27. Another translation may be found under the title ‘Basic Theological Interpretation of the Second Vatican Council’, in Rahner’s *Theological Investigations XX* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 77–89.

Bishops serving in PNG who attended the council brought back news from the sessions and initiated the process of reception and implementation of the council decisions. The first document approved by the council was the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*de Liturgia*), about the renewal of prayer, worship, and the sacraments. The church in PNG lost no time in replacing Latin with the vernacular and implementing various other forms of inculturation in prayer and sacraments. The longer-term influence of the council was seen in a change in the understanding of church from it being a hierarchical organization led by expatriate missionaries to appreciation of it as a local church led by the 'people of God'. The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World Today, *Gaudium et Spes*, helped end centuries of defensive isolation, calling for an openness of the church to the joys and hopes of all humanity – a call, in other words, to engage with people's lives and their concerns. The Papal Encyclical Progress of Peoples (*Populorum Progressio*), published shortly after the council in 1967, provided a framework for the concept of 'integral human development', which allows people to reach their full potential in an atmosphere of peace and social justice.

In PNG, the years immediately following Vatican II were marked by optimism and new-found energy. Indigenization of the clergy received a boost when Holy Spirit Seminary was opened at Kap near Madang in 1963, merging in 1968 with de Boismenu Seminary to form a national seminary for the training of local clergy. At this time, the Catholic Church joined with other denominations to address issues of national concern. The Catholic, Anglican, United, and Lutheran Churches began joint ventures such as the Melanesian Institute and Wantok Publishing. The Melanesian Institute in Goroka continues as an important church-run research institute, focusing on socio-cultural matters. Wantok Publishing specializes in materials in Tok Pisin and publishes the weekly *Wantok Niuspepa*, the only national newspaper in Tok Pisin.

Vatican II helped to promote new thinking in various parts of the world. For example, encouraged by the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, in July 1968 the Tanzanian bishops launched a seminar study year to involve as many Catholics as possible in reflection upon the mission of the church in Tanzania. Position papers were prepared and meetings were held at the diocesan and community levels, with reports sent to a national secretariat.

In 1971 the Director of the Melanesian Institute in PNG, Fr Herman Janssen, visited Tanzania and was impressed. He reported back to the PNG Catholic bishops, and they decided to follow a process of self-reflection similar to Tanzania's. Fr Francis Murray, the organizer of the study year in Tanzania, was invited to guide the Catholic Church in PNG in what came to be called a 'self study' of the Catholic Church.

Looking back to the self study, Bernard Narokobi noted how the Second Vatican Council's mood for reform was being felt in PNG at that time and how 'there was great hope that the laity would become increasingly involved in the life of the Church, its administration and management'.⁸ He also noted the formation

⁸ Bernard Narokobi, 'Catholic Church in Papua New Guinea', in *Alive in Christ: The Synod for Oceania and the Catholic Church in Papua New Guinea, 1998–2005*, ed. Philip Gibbs, Point series no. 30 (Goroka, PNG: Melanesian Institute, 2006), 183.

of the NCC and how he became ‘deeply involved in its creation’ when, ‘for a time, the Council was alive and active’.⁹

THE SELF STUDY OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN PNG (1972–5)

In preparation for the self study, a workshop was held at Alexishafen (21 November to 6 December 1972). Some 83 position papers were written by members of the Melanesian Institute and specialists, as well as missionaries, seminarians, and catechists. Of those 83 papers, only three were from Papua New Guineans. Bernard Narokobi was not among them, as he had just returned from studies in Australia. At that time the PNG church had a long way to go towards indigenization. For example, only 30 of 550 priests at that time were Papua New Guinean.¹⁰

With consultation at the time focused on a constitution for PNG and the proximity of self-government, political developments seemed to be leaving the church behind. At the 1972 meeting, National Bishop Peter Korongku (originally from Solomon Islands) presented a paper with the title ‘The Indigenous Laity of Papua New Guinea Today Must Play a Greater Role in the Life of the Church by a Greater Share in the Decision-Making and in Responsibility within the Church’.¹¹ There he argued that it is not enough to have local clergy for the church to be indigenous. Rather, the running of the church needed to be given to the (lay) people.

We taught our people to be silent and to accept things quietly. This is the price we now have to pay for being so mean and so selfish in not sharing our responsibilities with our lay people ... Now in these days we must have more trust and more confidence in our people, and hand over as much responsibility as possible. I am happy that people are working hard for indigenization, and I can say that we must make this indigenization an actualization and not just the object of a lot of theoretical talk and written words.¹²

Papers from the 1972 conference were edited into a *Diocesan Seminar Handbook* containing 35 of the best papers.¹³ English and Tok Pisin texts were prepared, with 7500 copies of each version printed. The self study continued over three years with meetings taking place in villages, hamlets, towns, schools, and special organizations such as teachers’ colleges, universities, the police, and the army. ‘From the middle of 1973 till the end of 1974 thousands of discussions took place in

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Cyril Halley, ‘National Assembly of the Self Study of the Church in Papua New Guinea’, unpublished ms., Melanesian Institute Library, Goroka, n.d., 2.

¹¹ ‘Section IV, Self Study Secretariate’, position papers presented at Self Study National Workshop, Alexishafen, 21 Nov.–6 Dec. 1972, mimeographed papers, Divine Word University Library, 1.

¹² Ibid., 376

¹³ *Self Study of the Catholic Church in Papua New Guinea Seminar Handbook* (Goroka, PNG: Self Study Secretariate, 1972).

churches, halls, huts and under trees'.¹⁴ It is estimated that a third of all the Catholic faithful (at least 250,000 people) participated in some way.¹⁵ Change was in the air and the author, based in the Highlands at the time, noticed the willingness of people to spend long hours into the night discussing topics such as 'the nature of the church and role of missionaries', 'towards a theology of development', and 'involvement of the church in politics'.

As the years of the self study were also the years in which PNG was preparing for self-governance and independence, localization and indigenization were topics for debate. In a letter to the *Post Courier* newspaper, a student leader at the University of Papua New Guinea, Michael Mel, supported statements made by Chief Minister Michael Somare, who said that the Catholic Church should be accepting the challenge of self-government and independence. Mel wrote,

We think there are enough local priests to get at least another three bishops who will then look after four regions of the country ... The country should not lack the manpower from the indigenous laity, as by now, the church through its tremendous effort in education should have enough Catholic men and women capable of doing the work. The Western clergy should now no longer call themselves Missionaries, rather servants of the indigenous church. They should now be serving the church the way indigenous people like it to serve and follow Christ ... It means the church run by the indigenous people and in accordance to their way of life, and the white sector serving. After all they came to serve, not to be Masters.¹⁶

It became apparent during the years of the self study that there was a positive (if limited) response to the call for indigenization in the church. At the beginning of the self study, reflecting the colonial experience, catechists and church workers were found to be very dependent upon expatriate missionaries for initiative, advice, and organization. There were few self-confident local leaders in the Christian community. This changed during the self study, however. Cyril Halley commented,

The most important achievement of the Self Study was the fact that thousands of villagers became aware that they are the Church and that it is not an organisation run by expatriate missionaries. Allied to this change in the people was the realisation by many of the expatriates of the same truth.¹⁷

¹⁴ Hermann Janssen, 'From Dar es Salaam to Goroka', *Catalyst* 5, no. 2 (1975): 5.

¹⁵ The Archdiocese of Rabaul did not participate in the self study. Janssen notes, 'In one of the major dioceses the mission leadership objected right from the beginning rather emotionally against the objectives and procedures of the self study and the programme was banned before the discussions could reach the parishes and villages'. *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁶ Michael Mel, 'Action and Reaction', letter to the editor, *Catalyst: Social Pastoral Magazine for Melanesia* 3, no. 3 (1973): 57.

¹⁷ Halley, 'National Assembly of the Self Study', 3.

A change was apparent when it came time for the national assembly held in May 1975 at the Minogere Hostel in Goroka. PNG had achieved self-government in 1973, educated nationals had been drafting the constitution, and independence was only months off. The University of Papua New Guinea had opened in 1968 and the first graduates were emerging, many of these being Catholic, including a number of ex-seminarians. If the people in PNG had been consulted about the constitution, then why not involve the people in planning for the future of the church?

Unlike the workshop three years before, in 1975, of 78 official delegates, 52 were nationals and 40 were lay people. Documents were written in Tok Pisin and translated into English. The chairpersons were all nationals and the main language used in the assembly was Tok Pisin. The top concern, which received 72 votes, was 'We are Church', which highlights the importance of the local church, in contrast to a hierarchical church administered from Rome.

NAROKOBI AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

From 1967 to 1971 Bernard Narokobi studied law at the University of Sydney. He returned to PNG in 1972. While he did not attend the self study workshop at Alexishafen in 1972, he became engaged in follow-up gatherings and attended the 1975 national assembly in Goroka. At the 1975 assembly there was a call for a national Catholic council. Halley recorded,

A young lady, who despite her youth is a lawyer and works in the Chief Minister's Department, asked permission of the chairman, a very young indigenous brother, to move a motion. This was for the immediate establishment of a national lay council. A third young person, who happens to be chairman of the legal reform commission, spoke to the meeting with tremendous passion and conviction.¹⁸

The young woman was the lawyer Meg Taylor and the chairman of the Law Reform Commission was Bernard Narokobi. Meg Taylor recently recalled, 'They couldn't believe that these upstarts were challenging them'.¹⁹ Halley elaborated,

At the meeting itself, the small group of elite Papua New Guineans became by far the most outspoken group. Mr Bernard Narokobi expressed disappointment that no time had been allotted in the programme for the airing of individual views on points of concern not listed on the programme. Time was then slotted to allow for an open discussion. It was a good outlet for the release of frustrations built up during the discussions in small groups.²⁰

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁹ Meg Taylor, pers. comm., Madang, 11 Mar. 2018.

²⁰ Halley, 'National Assembly of the Self Study', 3.

The motion for a national Catholic council was carried in an open vote by 70 to one, with nine abstentions. According to Society of the Divine Word (SVD) missionary Fr Joseph Knoebel, despite the fact that there was no established chain of communication through which such a body could actually communicate with the grassroots people whom they were to represent, the idealism of the few elite Papua New Guineans present carried the idea across to the majority.²¹

What were these elite envisaging? They wanted a body that would resemble a pastoral council and a justice and peace commission combined, and which would be free and competent to dialogue with the government and church leaders. Just how free and competent they were to dialogue with the bishops was to become an issue. Modern, democratic post-colonial ideals were not necessarily welcomed by all leaders of a church that prized its centuries-old traditions.

Founding members of the National Catholic Council (NCC) developed provisional guidelines for the council. The rationale given in the guidelines follows:

There are very important issues at this time in our country which the Government and private business must act on. Their actions will have far-reaching effects on all peoples in this country. We realise that most missionaries in PNG are foreign. Therefore, they are hesitant to confront the Government and local business groups on national and local issues. This national Catholic Council will not be hindered in its expression, because it is a PNG group speaking to PNG people to help their own country.²²

They listed the first of their six main tasks:

To assist the Bishops and leaders of the Government in leading God's people in Papua New Guinea justly, wisely, and to take into consideration their people's aspirations and desires for self-expression and the need to participate in policy and decision-making, so that the people realise and accept the fact that they are the Church and they are the Government.²³

Other tasks were to clarify the role of the church, to help the government and the business community direct the country in a Christian way, to assure the government that Christianity was not an obstacle to socio-economic and human development, and to dialogue and cooperate with other Christian churches and associations 'to ensure that Jesus Christ lives on in the people of God in PNG'.²⁴

The provisional guidelines were critiqued by SVD missionary Fr Pat Murphy in a three-page letter dated 26 July 1975, in which he pointed out shortcomings such

²¹ Joseph Knoebel, *Final Report* (Goroka, PNG: Self Study Secretariate, 1976), 17, held at the Melanesian Institute Library, Goroka.

²² NCC, 'Provisional Guidelines', unpublished ms., Goroka, Melanesian Institute Library, n.d.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

as proceeding too quickly without the understanding and support of the majority of lay people in the dioceses. 'Surely it is triumphalistic to say that the work of the NCC is to ensure that the Bishops and the government do their work well'.²⁵

The agenda of the NCC was idealistic and wide-ranging, and one may surmise that Narokobi, as the author of *The Melanesian Way*, assumed a significant leadership role. In one of their first meetings in 1976, they voiced opinions on topics such as a consultative vote for the people in the election of their bishops, optional celibacy for priests, leaders in the coming elections, better understanding and cooperation among the Christian churches in PNG, an Institute of Human Development, pay for church workers, and the establishment of national volunteer and national youth services in the country.²⁶

One can see from the minutes of the first NCC executive meeting (15–16 October 1976) that Bernard Narokobi was a leader in the NCC, being one of three persons present at the executive meeting, along with Thomas Ilaisa and Veronica Gevi. (An apology was listed for Meg Taylor.) Agenda issues included family planning, priests in politics, and a proposal that the NCC take over ownership and management of *Wantok Niuspepa* with a view to it becoming a daily paper.

At the NCC meeting the following year (25–6 March 1977) in Madang, Bernard Narokobi represented Wewak. A point was raised that the NCC ought to 'fight the government' in matters concerning the church. Ever the diplomat, Bernard Narokobi interjected that the NCC was set up not for the primary purpose of fighting the government but, rather, to 'assist the church leaders and the government to bring this country into a true Christian country'. He added that the NCC's leading concern was 'to conscientise the church leaders and the government on the need to put greater emphasis regarding the total development of the people of this country'.²⁷ This focus on the total development of people in Melanesia is consistent with the principles articulated by Narokobi in *The Melanesian Way*, which he was developing at the time.

The meeting also discussed the relationship between the NCC and the CBC. It was noted that while the CBC was a legal body the bishops should recognize that the NCC would also soon be a legal entity 'with a mandate from the Catholic people of Papua New Guinea'.²⁸ Their response shows a strong desire on the part of NCC members to provide leadership in the church. However, it also foreshadowed future difficulties concerning the official leadership in the church, which was dominated by expatriate bishops.

Following the NCC March meeting in 1977, a meeting of the CBC was held on 25 April, with representatives of the NCC present for an exchange of views. The NCC delegation was led by Moses Murray, and Narokobi was not present. Forty years

²⁵ Patrick Murphy, letter, 16 Oct. 1976, Goroka, Melanesian Institute Library.

²⁶ NCC, 'National Catholic Council Meets', news release, n.d., held at the Melanesian Institute Library, Goroka.

²⁷ Minutes of the NCC meeting, 25–6 Mar. 1977, Goroka, Melanesian Institute Library, 6.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

later, in communication with the author, Murray recalled that meeting.²⁹ He had been given a full day with the bishops, giving a talk (mostly on indigenizing theology) to the bishops in the morning and time for questions and discussion in the afternoon. He also presented resolutions to the bishops from the NCC meeting in Lae. The main controversial point was the recruitment of lay people into the administration of dioceses. Many of the bishops, including Archbishops Noser (Madang) and Bernarding (Mt Hagen) and Bishop Caesar (Simbu), were supportive. Acting Bishop of Rabaul Archdiocese Albert Bundervoet was not. Murray recalled the latter responding, 'You can't be serious'.³⁰ In fact, Murray had been serious, replying, 'With respect, if the Holy Spirit is to be seen to be working, the Holy Spirit uses lay people as well, not just Bishops'. Murray then added, 'Bishop Albert didn't like that'.³¹ Previously the bishops had funded NCC meetings. After that, funding was no longer forthcoming. Murray continued, 'In 1977 we wrote asking for funding and we did not receive a reply. So, we ended up having executive meetings, but we were unable to go around the country as planned to speak to people'.³²

Two years later, in the *NCC Newsletter* of May 1979, Bernard Narokobi clarified the definition of the NCC. It was not a power structure or a law-making body, but a movement to make the Catholic Church an authentic entity in PNG. He clarified words attributed to him in a press report that 'all missions should be abolished', saying that he did not say all 'churches' should be abolished. By 1980 the agenda of the NCC annual general meeting showed little sign of the 'hot' topics of previous years. After that, in the words of Moses Murray, 'it [the NCC] died a natural death'.³³

That year Bernard Narokobi published his book, *The Melanesian Way*, within which he disclosed his difficulties with the institutional church:

Even today, I do not feel I am part of the Catholic Church, though I profess all its major doctrines. I will never feel part of the Christian community until there is more honesty and democracy in the church. When it comes to feeling part of the Bishop's College or the Papal parish I feel very far away from them all.³⁴

He added,

The Church, particularly the Catholic Church has arrived at a point where no foreign missionary should stay on in a community or parish unless the parish requests his stay. This will necessitate structural changes in some places. No longer will the bishop have all the control. The parish should have a council that takes an active interest in the pastors.³⁵

²⁹ Moses Murray, pers. comm., Port Moresby, 10 Feb. 2018.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Narokobi, *The Melanesian Way*, 141.

³⁵ Ibid., 142.

MELANESIAN SPIRITUALITY

Writing in 2006 on the Catholic Church in PNG, Narokobi commented, 'The Church is not a foreign institution owned by some foreigners for their own good. No, the Church is in our part of the world to redeem it and to sacramentise its existence and growth'.³⁶ Narokobi's meaning becomes clearer when it is considered in the context of both Melanesian spirituality and Catholic theology.

Narokobi described the Melanesian vision as 'a total cosmic vision of Life'³⁷ where there is no separation of heaven and earth, or consideration of otherworldly realities. He wrote,

I hold that Melanesians do not differentiate religious and non-religious experience. For them, I believe, an experience, or experience in general is a total encounter of the living person with the universe that is alive and explosive ... An experience for a Melanesian, I believe, is the person's encounter with the spirits, the law, the economics, the politics and the life's own total whole.³⁸

This is exemplified in his touching reflection on the death of his mother, 'I felt and heard the coconuts weep, cocoa trees mourn and banana trees cry. Mama was farewellling all these things'.³⁹

Some might call this an example of animism; however, this way of thinking also complements the Catholic sacramental principle whereby 'grace works through nature'. This is a fundamental Catholic principle somewhat in contrast to what might be termed a Protestant theology of grace. Some theologians, basing their argument on an Augustinian theology of grace, hold that because of the Fall (of Adam and Eve), humanity is alienated from God and it requires God's grace (unconditional love and forgiveness) to bring humanity back into a relationship with God. Catholic theology proposes a less pessimistic view, arguing that one can speak meaningfully about God by analogy with human relationships because there is a fundamental relationship between them.⁴⁰ Put in theological terms, grace builds upon nature, completing it and perfecting it. Hence creation (nature) is the theatre of grace upon which the drama of salvation unfolds. It is a drama not of conflict but of completion. God's grace works through nature. Based on this theology of grace, Catholic theology argues for efficacious symbols that effect what they symbolize. Hence water symbolizing cleansing

³⁶ Narokobi, 'Catholic Church in Papua New Guinea', 184.

³⁷ Bernard Narokobi, 'What Is Religious Experience for a Melanesian?', in *Living Theology in Melanesia: A Reader*, ed. John D'Arcy May, Point series no. 8 (Goroka, PNG: Melanesian Institute for Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 1985), 70.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Bernard Narokobi, 'A Truly Noble Death', in *Living Theology in Melanesia: A Reader*, ed. John D'Arcy May, Point series no. 8 (Goroka, PNG: Melanesian Institute for Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 1985), 65.

⁴⁰ See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Blackfriars ed. (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964), first part of the second part, question 109.

actually cleanses one of sin in baptism; bread and wine symbolizing nourishment actually nourish the recipient through the Eucharistic bread. Grace builds on nature. Created things with their foundation in God are fundamentally good and, from a sacramental perspective, can be signs of God's power and grace.

There is no need to dwell on such theological issues except to note how many forms of Catholic theology tend towards integration rather than dualism. The spiritual is found not so much in transcendence as in immanence. This is the notion behind Narokobi's term 'sacramentise'. He rejected dualistic views that separate the transcendent from the rest of life and saw little need to develop theories about mediations of the transcendent, since for him as a Melanesian all experience was part of the cosmic experience of life and what might be termed holy was not necessarily supernatural. The term 'sacramentise' was his way of expressing this holistic experience using Catholic terminology.

In 2000, Bernard Narokobi brought his Catholic spirituality dramatically to public attention when, while acting as speaker of parliament, he had a large cross fixed on top of the parliament building. It was illuminated so as to be easily visible at night.⁴¹ In explaining his action to the parliament he said the cross was 'the light of Calvary. With your concurrence I would ask that this cross remains. It is a memory of our hope in the future as Christians. This may not be the mountain or the hill of Calvary, however, the way we tend to crucify each other in here, we may as well nickname the hill on which Parliament stands, the Calvary Hill'.⁴² Speaker Narokobi also addressed the issue of the sacred and profane, saying that parliament makes decisions that are sacred and for the common good of the people.

There was opposition to Narokobi's action. Many of the opinions aired in the press centred on the inappropriateness of putting a cross on a 'profane' building like the House of Assembly. 'Observer' from Boroko said in a letter to the editor that parliament is not a holy place and you can never put darkness and daylight together.⁴³ Member for Bulolo Samson Napo was determined to have the cross removed, arguing that 'it makes Parliament look stupid in the eyes of Christians in this country'. Eventually, while Narokobi was absent from the speaker's chair, Napo successfully moved that the cross be removed.

Some people had sensed a shocking conflict when the two powerful symbols of the cross and House of Assembly were brought together. But for Narokobi it was an attempt to bring a symbol of Christian power into the very centre of political power, and with a Catholic sense of the power of symbols he saw a creative combination, rather than conflict.

In November and December 2013 controversy again erupted when another speaker of the national parliament, Theodore Zurenuoc, a devout Protestant

⁴¹ Philip Gibbs, *Political Discourse and Religious Narratives of Church and State in Papua New Guinea*, State, Society and Governance in Melanesia (hereafter SSGM) Working Paper 2005/1 (Canberra: Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies [RSPAS], Australian National University, 2005), <https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/43157> (accessed 10 Mar. 2020).

⁴² Hansard, 13 Apr. 2000, 2.

⁴³ 'Observer', letter to the editor, *Post Courier*, 27 June 2000, 10.

Christian, tried to rid Parliament House of what he termed ‘ungodly images and idols’.⁴⁴ Zurenuoc had already begun removing the carvings from a lintel above the entrance to Parliament House, and planned to remove many more carvings throughout the building. In contrast to Narokobi’s holistic approach, Zurenuoc was responding to what he perceived as a conflict.

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF 2003–4

The General Assembly of the Catholic Church in PNG took place over two years from 2003 to 2004. Bernard Narokobi did not officially address the assembly, but in the final event at Vunapope near Rabaul he was co-chair with national religious sister Antoinette Vagu‘u. The General Assembly was an invitation to the 1.5 million Catholic people in PNG to take part in a discussion about the state of the church and to plan together for the future.⁴⁵ The process was modelled on the self study, with an initial assembly in Banz in January 2003 and a closing gathering at Vunapope in July 2004. In the interim period, people met in local and diocesan-level groups to discuss 36 issues prepared by a preparatory commission and based on the Papal Exhortation ‘The Church in Oceania’ (*Ecclesia in Oceania*). Topics included family life, youth, community, corruption, sorcery, Christian leadership, and church and politics. Groups tackled challenging issues such as land, localization, and the participation of the laity in decision-making. Thirty years had elapsed since the self study and 28 years since PNG independence, and it seemed time to take stock of the church’s self-understanding and its role in facing social problems that increasingly required a unified response from the church.

The assembly was well organized and Bernard Narokobi was co-chair. However, unlike 30 years earlier, there was neither a group of young ‘elite’ challenging the church leadership nor requests to air individual points of view or points of concern not listed on the programme. PNG was living out its independence with the church as provider of almost half the education and health services in the country. While the public service was localized, the majority of Catholic bishops were expatriate and the offices of national lay leadership and youth were no longer recognized as official positions at the national level of the CBC (only at the diocesan level).

Writing in 2006, Narokobi continued his theme of integrating Melanesian experience and Christian faith. ‘The Word of God needs to go deep into our

⁴⁴ Richard Eves and Nicole Haley, ‘Ungodly Images and Idols: Debating National Identity in the National Parliament’, in *Purging Parliament: A New Christian Politics in Papua New Guinea?*, ed. R. Eves, N. Haley, R.J. May, J. Cox, F. Merlan, and A. Rumsey, SSGM Discussion Paper 2004/1 (Canberra: RSPAS, Australian National University), 1, <http://dpa.bellschool.anu.edu.au/experts-publications/publications/1303/purging-parliament-new-christian-politics-papua-new-guinea> (accessed 10 Mar. 2020).

⁴⁵ Douglas Young, ‘Kairos in Papua New Guinea: The General Assembly of the Catholic Church’, in Gibbs, ed., *Alive in Christ*, 189–97.

hearts, our minds, our blood and our lives. We need to breathe, feel, see, hear and live the Word of God in our politics, in our business and in our public service'.⁴⁶ However, unlike before, he chose to focus not on national issues but, rather, on the situation beyond PNG. He wrote about how 'The time has come for the Catholic church in PNG to hear the cries of the world and to do its precious small part to respond to the total world's needs'.⁴⁷ In typical fashion, he offered a theological twist: that this should be celebrated particularly at the feast of Pentecost, when a collection should be taken up for PNG missionaries abroad, including laymen and laywomen.

INTEGRAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

In his address to the 2004 assembly at Vunapope, John Momis referred to the first goal of the PNG *Constitution* – integral human development (which he called the dream of God for the world).⁴⁸ Momis recalled how, before independence, the Constitutional Planning Committee (CPC) was under pressure from Michael Somare and Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlam to come up quickly with a legal document.

But, Narokobi and I said, 'no, we are not interested only in quantitative change which is necessary to effect independence. We are also interested in qualitative change. We are interested to see what kind of leadership Papua New Guinea would need, what kind of system of government Papua New Guinea would need'.⁴⁹

They held out, and integral human development became the first of the National Goals and Directive Principles in the PNG *Constitution*.⁵⁰

Permanent Consultant to the CPC Mr Edward Wolfers recently described how

it was following Deputy CPC Chairman's John Momis's initiative – which drew on contemporary debates in Catholic circles about the importance of social goals, and, in particular, on advocacy of social goals by Father Tony Ruhen – that the National Goals and Directive Principles were developed.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Narokobi, 'Catholic Church in Papua New Guinea', 186.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Hon. John Momis, address to the Rabaul Assembly, July 2004, unpublished transcription, Philip Gibbs personal collection.

⁴⁹ Ibid. Bernard Narokobi was not one of the original permanent consultants to the CPC, but was appointed in response to CPC members' concern that none of the original permanent consultants was Papua New Guinean.

⁵⁰ 1. Integral human development. 'We declare our first goal to be for every person to be dynamically involved in the process of freeing himself or herself from every form of domination or oppression so that each man or woman will have the opportunity to develop as a whole person in relationship with others'.

⁵¹ Edward Wolfers, pers. comm., email to author, 23 July 2019.

Narokobi confirmed this, writing, 'Fr Momis insisted that the Constitution should embody some basic goals of our society. As a result, he and I prepared what is now known as the preamble, the 5 national goals and several more directive principles'.⁵² In his commentary on the constitution, Narokobi explained how in framing the section on integral human development, 'we derived much inspiration from Latin American theology of liberation and hope, and from church social teachings'.⁵³

The concept of integral human development was not new in Catholic circles, having been introduced by Pope Paul VI in his encyclical *On Development of Peoples* (1967).⁵⁴ Liberation theology in Catholic circles was shifting attention from development as growth, to development as liberation, with human history as the locus for divine revelation.⁵⁵ What was novel for PNG was the recognition of the inclusive understanding of Melanesian spirituality as useful and relevant for human development and that one can refer to the holistic experience of Melanesian spirituality using terminology from the Catholic sacramental tradition. Creation (nature) is the theatre of grace and people are called to work with God to build the earth.⁵⁶ Holiness involves being an active participant in creating a godly society, even to the extent of recognizing the sacred dimension of parliament as a locus of history where decisions involve human welfare and the common good of the people.

Integral human development was of interest to Narokobi in the context of PNG because its inclusive and liberatory elements complemented his understanding of the holistic nature of Melanesian spirituality. He made the fundamental point that Melanesians interpret their way of life, whether personal, communal, spiritual, economic, or political, in terms of a relationship in which there is no artificial dichotomy between religious and profane experience. His article on village life appearing in *Catalyst* in 1974 provides an example of how he integrated Christian values with economic development and the political process.⁵⁷ Narokobi argued that economic development cannot be separated from spiritual life and an appreciation of natural resources as given by God. He also pointed out how Melanesian Christian faith will help people avoid negative consequences of the modern economy such as individualism and inequality.

⁵² Bernard Narokobi, *Life and Leadership in Melanesia* (Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific; Port Moresby: University of Papua New Guinea, 1983), 80.

⁵³ Bernard Narokobi, 'The Constitutional Planning Committee, Nationalism and Vision', in *Twenty Years of the Papua New Guinea Constitution*, ed. Anthony J. Regan, Owen Jessep, and Eric L. Kwa (Sydney: Law Book, 2001), 30.

⁵⁴ John Momis and Bernard Narokobi heard the term used by the Jesuits in the chaplaincy at the University of PNG, particularly Fr Tony Ruhen, and also Fr Patrick Murphy at the regional seminary at Bomana.

⁵⁵ Philip Gibbs, *The Word in the Third World: Divine Revelation in the Theology of Jean-Mark Éla, Aloysius Pieris and Gustavo Gutiérrez* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1996).

⁵⁶ Narokobi, *The Melanesian Way*, 12.

⁵⁷ Bernard Narokobi, 'Nobility of Village Life: The Economic Development and the Political Process in Papua New Guinea', *Catalyst: Social Pastoral Magazine for Melanesia* 4, no. 4 (1974): 55–70.

No one can claim to be the author of anything in the CPC report or the constitution, since they emerged from protracted debate between the government and the CPC, and with the opposition. However, two important movements were operating in PNG at much the same time: preparation for independence and the constitution for PNG and the awakening of the Catholic Church in the self study. Bernard Narokobi played a significant role in both and continued as a leading figure in both dimensions of PNG history. In my view, the reference to ‘Noble Traditions and Christian Principles’ in the Preamble to the PNG *Constitution* captures Narokobi’s desire to integrate a genuine Melanesian experience and Christian faith.

CONCLUSION

Narokobi’s vision of all experience as part of the cosmic experience of life formed the basis of Melanesian spirituality underpinning the Melanesian Way, the heart of which is the continuous discovery of ‘our souls and the soul of the nation’.⁵⁸ In *The Melanesian Way*, he stressed how Papua New Guineans have the potential to make their own history and to ‘work with God to build our earth’ and to ‘create a new society based on the new and the old’.⁵⁹ One might ask what has happened to that new society and the quality of development he envisaged. In his contribution to the NCC as a sequel to the self study of the Catholic Church in PNG, Narokobi opposed an inward-looking and exclusivist mode of church and promoted a post-Vatican Council view of the role of the Christian in Melanesian society, building, not necessarily a church, but the justice and peace of the Kingdom of God.⁶⁰ His Melanesian experience and Christian faith led him to focus on elements of natural communities, such as kinship and the extended family, that can be strengthened through Christian practice.⁶¹ In that way, people in PNG can pattern development on local Melanesian culture ‘and not on a farcical, shapeless, soulless, coco-cola culture of an illusory universe’.⁶² In his search to bring together Melanesian experience and Christian faith, Bernard Narokobi provided an invaluable model of bringing together noble traditions and Christian principles to achieve the integral liberation envisaged by the National Goals and Directive Principles of the PNG *Constitution*.

⁵⁸ Narokobi, *The Melanesian Way*, 30.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 27. The reference is to chap. 13, verse 52 of Matthew’s Gospel. Narokobi develops this further in his ‘Christianity and Melanesian Cosmos: The Broken Pearls and a Newborn Shell’, in *The Gospel Is Not Western. Black Theologies from the Southwest Pacific*, ed. Garry Trompf (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis books, 1987), 32–7.

⁶⁰ At the Catholic Theological Institute in Port Moresby, Narokobi’s *The Melanesian Way* is listed in the course bibliography for cultural anthropology and for Melanesian philosophy. While the latter is a new elective unit, it has not been taught yet. Brandon Zimmerman, Academic Dean CTI, pers. comm., 26 Aug. 2019.

⁶¹ Narokobi, ‘The Kingdom and Melanesian Human Struggles’, 65.

⁶² *Ibid.*