

# Thy Kingdom Come: Political Holiness for Papua New Guinea

Philip Gibbs

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## Introduction

Edward Schillebeeckx makes no reference in his published works to Papua New Guinea—a nation of seven million people in Oceania. With the exception of those trained in Catholic seminaries, very few people in Papua New Guinea would have heard of the theologian, Schillebeeckx. Yet, his theology, particularly his efforts to find alternatives to dualistic thinking about Christian presence in the world, could contribute to developments in local theologies in a place such as Papua New Guinea. This chapter will focus on Schillebeeckx's understanding of political holiness and will enter into dialogue with the Melanesian thinking of Bernard Narokobi—perhaps the most prominent Catholic Papua New Guinean activist and writer.<sup>1</sup>

Though the terms used by both may differ, Bernard Narokobi and Edward Schillebeeckx explore topics associated with mysticism and politics. In this chapter, I will first explain how Narokobi develops his understanding of the Melanesian vision of a total cosmic vision of life and next offer his views of leadership as integrity in human development. Then, after summarising Schillebeeckx's understanding of mysticism and political love,<sup>2</sup> I will argue that Schillebeeckx's notion of 'political holiness' can add theological depth to Narokobi's understandings. The concept of 'political holiness', which includes many elements espoused by Narokobi, opens

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1. Edward Schillebeeckx died on 23 December 2009. Bernard Narokobi died just two and a half months later on 10 March 2010.
  2. See especially Schillebeeckx's Kuyper Lectures presented at the Free University of Amsterdam in 1986. These lectures (originally in Dutch as *Als Politiek Niet Alles Is . . . Jezus in onze Westerse Cultuur*) were published in English as *Jesus in our Western Culture: Mysticism, Ethics and Politics* (London: SCM Press, 1987) and *On Christian Faith: The Spiritual, Ethical and Political Expressions* (New York: Crossroad, 1987).

a theological perspective on relevant issues for the 'Melanesian Way' in Papua New Guinea.<sup>3</sup>

### **Symbols in conflict**

Relations between politics and Christian faith in Papua New Guinea were dramatically brought to public attention early in the year 2000 when the speaker of parliament, Bernard Narokobi, had a large cross fixed on top of the parliament building.<sup>4</sup> It was illuminated so as to be visible at night. In explaining his action to the parliament he said that the cross is:

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.<sup>5</sup>

Not everyone agreed with the Speaker. The Member for Bulolo, Samson Napo, was determined to have it removed, arguing that 'it makes Parliament look stupid in the eyes of Christians in this country'.<sup>6</sup> Many of the arguments centred on the inappropriateness of putting a cross on a 'worldly' building like the House of Assembly. Comments in the daily newspapers centred on the division between light and darkness, godly and ungodly, sin and holiness. A writer from Boroko with the pseudonym of 'Observer' felt that it was an insult to the cross because 'the National Parliament has become a place where Members of Parliament argue, swear and plot ways to destroy each other. The National Parliament is not a holy place. You can never put darkness and daylight together.'<sup>7</sup> The parliament building has a

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3. I am a New Zealander by birth, but have spent the major part of my life in Papua New Guinea, since my first arrival there as a student in 1973. Since then, I have served there as a missionary priest, lecturer and researcher. Through the many encounters with people in Papua New Guinea, including Bernard Narokobi, I have come to appreciate the privileged position of being a guest who has had the fortune to learn much from my hosts.
  4. My account of this incident appears in 'Political Discourse and Religious Narratives of Church and State in Papua New Guinea', to be found at [https://digitalcollections.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/43157/2/05\\_01wp\\_Gibbs.pdf](https://digitalcollections.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/43157/2/05_01wp_Gibbs.pdf)
  5. *Hansard, PNG Parliament*, 13 April 2000, 2.
  6. *Hansard, PNG Parliament*, 21 June 2000, 6.
  7. *Post-Courier*, 27 June 2000, 10.

fascia shaped in the form of a traditional Sepik spirit house or *haus tambaran*, and is adorned with an array of traditional symbols. Another correspondent, 'Citizen' of Madang, went so far as to suggest that the members of parliament leave the cross as it was and remove the bottom part of the fascia of the house with its 'immoral naked carvings'. He continued, '[b]elieve it or not these images represent and manifest the activities of unseen ungodly evil spirits that have been the force behind all these wrong doings, and what evil can bring to the good and well-being of this nation'.<sup>8</sup>

Narokobi defended his decision to put up the cross saying that the cross was a reminder that Papua New Guinea is a Christian country as provided for in the Constitution, and follows a Christian calendar. He said:

Unlike other men, in kingdoms and empires, this man from Nazareth, born in Bethlehem, he didn't have anything, but had that wooden cross and the world somehow has revolved around that wooden cross. I thought it was worth commemorating that humble man in one of our most important institutions, Parliament, and I thought it was a good idea to put it up on top.<sup>9</sup>

Narokobi then addressed the question of the sacred, saying that Parliament makes decisions that are sacred, and for the common good of the people. He said:

The value, that pillar of our society, its Christian principle with a physical, visible, tangible object and cross is not only worn by reverends, priests and pastors, it can be worn by anybody and it can be put on mountain tops and when the soldiers put the cross on the mountain top nobody really complained.<sup>10</sup>

He was referring to the lighted Easter cross customarily erected by soldiers on a hilltop overlooking Boroko in the Capital, Port Moresby. Not all the members of parliament understood or shared the Speaker's ideal that what goes on in parliament is sacred because it is for the common good of

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8. *Post-Courier*, 3 July 2000, 10.

9. *Independent*, 10 July 2000, 7.

10. *Independent*, 10 July 2000, 7.

the people. Eventually, while Mr Narokobi was absent from the Speaker's chair, Mr Napo successfully moved that the cross be removed.

Narokobi's gesture was an attempt to bring a symbol of the power of Christian humility into the very centre of political power. Some people sensed a shocking conflict in bringing these two formidable symbols together. Few if any could appreciate the theological reasoning behind his actions.

### **Mysticism and a cosmic vision of life**

Bernard Narokobi bore many titles during his lifetime. He was a lawyer, writer, poet, philosopher, academic, judge, human rights activist, diplomat, politician, and a leading Catholic layman. His last position was as Director of the Right Relations Committee for the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. He wrote poems and several novels, and published a number of articles on topics such as traditional customs and concepts, leadership, law and government, and religious issues. Throughout his life, he tried to strike a balance between authentic Melanesian experience and Christian faith.

Narokobi describes the Melanesian vision as 'a total cosmic vision of life' where there is no separation of heaven and earth, or consideration of otherworldly realities. He said, '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.'<sup>11</sup> Life and death are experienced as one reality. Narokobi illustrates death as being like a lobster or a snake that sheds its old skin and puts on a new one 'whereby the person is reborn and lives on the same plane as all other living beings.'<sup>12</sup> Thus, according to Narokobi, 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.<sup>13</sup>

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11. Bernard Narokobi, 'What is Religious Experience for a Melanesian?', in *Point Series No 8 Living Theology in Melanesia: A Reader*, edited by J D'Arcy May (Goroka: Melanesian Institute, 1985), 70.

12. Narokobi, 'What is Religious Experience', 74.

13. He notes that to ask a Melanesian to give a definition of the 'Melanesian Way' is 'like Moses asking the God of Israel to tell him who God was.' Bernard Narokobi, *The Melanesian Way—Total Cosmic Vision of Life (And His Critics and Supporters)* (Port Moresby: Institute of PNG Studies, 1980), 17.

Narokobi rejects dualistic views that separate the transcendent from the rest of life and sees little need to develop theories about mediations of the transcendent, since for him all experience is on the same plane. Melanesian cosmic experience is a total cosmic vision of life in which 'every event within human consciousness has its personal, communal, spiritual, economic, political and social dimensions'.<sup>14</sup>

### The politics of leadership

Narokobi acknowledges that the Melanesian 'Way' of life is changing rapidly and that political independence has brought mixed blessings. He said, 'While we are being captivated and enchanted by the aura of political power, our very feet, and our very souls, are being swept away'.<sup>15</sup> In the face of this danger, people must 'dare to make their own history'.<sup>16</sup> It is not a matter of praying 'for the good to come down like rain from heaven'.<sup>17</sup> Economic development and spiritual life must not be separated.<sup>18</sup> The task is to make good use of physical and chemical laws and to work with God to build our earth.<sup>19</sup>

Narokobi explores various forms of utopia, such as those found in Marx, and concludes that Marxism is not suited to Melanesia since Melanesian spirituality 'will negate marxist's [sic] Godlessness'.<sup>20</sup> Yet, everywhere in Melanesia, people are yearning for the good life—a utopia. Various prophetic, political and religious movements have emerged as people search for ideal structures, values and relationships.<sup>21</sup>

This is where the church and national politics meet. The Papua New Guinea Constitution with its dual pillars of noble traditions and Christian principles is based on the ideal of integral human development. Narokobi says that the churches' commitment to liberation strives for a more integral liberation [than Marxism] 'in so far as it tries to clearly reveal, at

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14. Narokobi, *Melanesian Way*, 20.

15. Narokobi, *Melanesian Way*, 26.

16. Narokobi, *Melanesian Way*, 27.

17. Narokobi, *Melanesian Way*, 215.

18. Narokobi, *Melanesian Way*, 26.

19. Narokobi, *Melanesian Way*, 27.

20. Narokobi, *Melanesian Way*, 34.

21. Narokobi, *Melanesian Way*, 64.

every level of its activity, him who alone is capable of giving salvation to the world: Jesus Christ.<sup>22</sup> Narokobi believes that the people cannot live by bread, kaukau [sweet potato] and politics alone. They need faith.<sup>23</sup>

For Narokobi, one essential ingredient in what he terms 'rediscovering our souls and the soul of our nation is to be found in good leadership'. He refers to leaders who are,

prepared to be baptized into the power of inspiring others, for blessed is the leader who, whilst leading, develops other leaders. God's leaders have an incandescence which sets those around them aflame with passion and commitment.<sup>24</sup>

He understands true leaders to be persons of fearless temperament, who are prepared to 'offer themselves on the altar of service'.<sup>25</sup> True leaders are not merely idealists with their heads in the sky. They are also men and women 'with their feet sunk into mother Melanesian earth'.<sup>26</sup>

According to Narokobi, the call from God, which is a call to holiness, also involves being an active participant in creating a godly society.<sup>27</sup> Integrity, in his view, is the most important value in a leader. He describes a leader as,

a person of dignity won through commitment to spiritual qualities. He or she should be realistic, hopeful and futuristic. He or she should be inspirational and symbolic of the ideals and good values we yearn to make our own. Our leaders should be honest in politics, as well as in business and in their private social life.<sup>28</sup>

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22. Bernard Narokobi, 'The Kingdom and Melanesian Human Struggles', edited by Helen O'Brien, 'Your Kingdom Come', *Point: Partnership in Mission and Development* (Goroka: Melanesian Institute, 1980), 68. Narokobi uses the plural 'churches' and comments that 'the hundreds of religious sects in this country are enough to make any god embarrassed he was even a god at all!' (*Melanesian Way*, 48.)

23. Narokobi, *Melanesian Way*, 119.

24. Narokobi, 'Your Kingdom Come', 67

25. Narokobi, *Melanesian Way*, 202.

26. Narokobi, *Melanesian Way*, 204.

27. Narokobi, *Melanesian Way*, 58, 168.

28. Narokobi, *Melanesian Way*, 204. The Catholic Bishops of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands argue that priests and religious fulfill a prophetic role by being involved in the political, social and economic life of the people, but not by standing for

Such qualities help explain Bernard Narokobi's understanding of holiness and the ideals that prompted him to place a cross on top of the Papua New Guinea Parliament building in the year 2000 as a symbol of humble hope and a future as Christians.

### Ethics and the praxis of the Kingdom of God

Edward Schillebeeckx seems not to have had direct contact with the Melanesian traditions. Based in the Netherlands, he addressed issues arising in the European context. However, he did establish links with theologians from other parts of the world, particularly through the annual meetings of the board of *Concilium* of which he was a founding member.<sup>29</sup> There, he met with leading proponents of Liberation Theology such as Gustavo Gutiérrez and Leonardo Boff.<sup>30</sup>

Schillebeeckx's openness to socio-political issues is particularly evident in his Kuyper Lectures presented at the Free University of Amsterdam.<sup>31</sup> In these lectures, he offers an alternative to ethics based on natural law, an order which he regards as too abstract. He notes how people are being hurt due to lack of order in society and its institutions. A sense of

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national elections. See *Statements of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands 1993–2006* (Goroka: Liturgical Catechetical Institute, 2007), 268–74. Bernard Narokobi did not comment publicly on this policy.

29. Edward Schillebeeckx was a founding member of the journal *Concilium* in 1965. He was a member of the Board until 1991.
30. Schillebeeckx admits that Latin American, Asian, and African forms of liberation theology have inspired him in his own theological quest (See *God is New Each Moment*, 169). Antonio Sison notes that 'Schillebeeckx's project is to initiate the formation of a Western theology of liberation that may serve as a dialogue partner to liberation theologies in the Third World. Refer to *Theologie als bevrijdingskunde: Enkele noodzakelijke beschouwingen vooraf*, in *Tijdschrift voor Theologie*, 24 (1984): 391–92. Antonio Sison, *Political Holiness in Third Cinema* (Catholic University of Nijmegen, 2004), 210, footnote 175.
31. See No 2. Schillebeeckx shows some familiarity with the work of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) and their experience of injustice and oppression. He considers that the Christian option for the poor is a contextual expression of universal love for men and women (*Church*, 54–5). 'Here in the West we seek as Christian theologians, to address modern secularised men and women in order to make this faith in Jesus Christ acceptable; Christians, theologians in the Third World, on the other hand, address dehumanised people, non-persons, who ask, rather, how one can believe in a good, liberating God in a world of suffering and oppression. I think that this last approach is closer to Jesus' concern than the first'. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus in Our Western Culture*, 28–9.

indignation at the experience of injustice and innocent suffering that have no rational explanation provides a concrete ethical starting point.<sup>32</sup> He holds that in situations of injustice, what is ethically good will emerge in a praxis of liberation and reconciliation. Moreover, he maintains that an ethics which includes belief in God is anchored in hope for a God who acts in our history for the liberation of humanity. Christian ethics has a particular perspective, being based on the message and praxis of Jesus who revealed the Kingdom of God in reaching out to the poor and the oppressed. Christian faith allows one to view such liberation as the approaching Kingdom of God in fragments of human history. Such action in Christian hope leads to 'the praxis of the Kingdom of God' in solidarity with all men and women and in a partisan choice for the poor and the oppressed.<sup>33</sup>

Schillebeeckx argues that love is an essential element in Christian ethics. Love of God and love of humanity are one and the same indivisible basic attitude or virtue.<sup>34</sup> Without love, ethics can become 'graceless'—eager for vengeance and retribution. Christians, however, speak of compassion and reconciliation. Liberal bourgeois freedoms and communist freedoms can lead to so-called freedom at the expense of other persons. Christian freedom, however, is liberated freedom based on disinterested love. It is 'freedom in solidarity' in which the freedom of one does not become a threat to the freedom of another. He stresses that such an ethics of disinterested love is based in prayer or mysticism.

### **Mystical and political dimensions of Christian faith**

For Schillebeeckx, mysticism is an intensive form of experience of God or love of God.<sup>35</sup> He notes that it has not just to do with silent contemplation, as is commonly thought, but can enter the concrete social and political commitment of Christians in prophetic struggles. Schillebeeckx uses the term 'mediated immediacy' to explain how a relationship between the infinite creator and the finite creature can be mediated through an encounter with the world, human history, and human beings.<sup>36</sup> The divine

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32. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus in Our Western Culture*, 49.

33. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus in Our Western Culture*, 51.

34. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus in Our Western Culture*, 52.

35. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus in Our Western Culture*, 72.

36. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus in Our Western Culture*, 67.



presence to the creature is immediate—the living God is the depth dimension of all reality. From a human perspective, the divine presence is mediated by politics, ethics and concepts. Individual mystics seek to go beyond these to put themselves directly into the immediate proximity of God and in doing so they end up in a dialogue ‘in which one partner, namely God, seems to be silent despite all his active involvement.’<sup>37</sup>

Mysticism is not just a process of knowing championed by some individuals. It is also a way of life that integrates contemplation and action. It is not a matter of fleeing from the world, but rather fleeing with the world to the Kingdom of God—‘a world made whole, a world as God wants to see it.’<sup>38</sup> Thus, God’s saving presence is mediated through the structure of historical human experience and praxis—manifest as the One who wills good and opposes evil. Mystical love reflects the love of God, not as a void that cannot be contained in concepts or images, but as love of God and neighbour in what Schillebeeckx calls ‘political love.’<sup>39</sup>

Politics is an intensive form of social commitment which is available to all and not limited to professional politicians. In political love, love of God and love of neighbor are one as a unity in tension. Rejecting dualism, Schillebeeckx says that the love of God within the active mystic involved in the world is implicitly present as love of neighbour, and the love of neighbour is implicitly present in the person who prays, for it is the love which comes from God which ‘through the assent of our hearts is taken further towards our fellow men and women.’<sup>40</sup>

From the perspective of political love one can check whether one’s profane history squares with salvation history as God intends it. Casting around one sees that is not the case. So many people experience suffering and injustice, and the latter call for the concrete social and political commitment of Christians. Schillebeeckx stresses how such political love has a mystical dimension in political form.<sup>41</sup>

Christian love in its societal and political dimensions includes what has been included under classical mysticism. It involves conversion and metanoia, ascesis and detachment from self, suffering and dark nights,

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37. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus in Our Western Culture*, 67.

38. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus in Our Western Culture*, 70.

39. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus in Our Western Culture*, 71.

40. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus in Our Western Culture*, 70.

41. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus in Our Western Culture*, 70–75.

losing oneself in the other, and even sometimes martyrdom. Such love also has temptations and threats associated with abuse of power—hence the importance of holiness. Acknowledging the work of Jon Sobrino, Schillebeeckx names Christian love ‘Political Holiness.’<sup>42</sup>

### Political holiness

Schillebeeckx takes up the concept of political holiness and develops it in terms of the mystical dimension of Christian belief in political form. Acknowledging that holiness does not take place in a social vacuum but is always contextual he notes that in the present situation of suffering humanity, ‘political love can become the historically urgent form of contemporary holiness.’<sup>43</sup> He suggests that Christian belief today must involve a:

preferential love for those who are farthest removed from salvation, those who are belittled by fellow human beings or by oppressive structures, the poor and downtrodden; the one lost sheep. And there are many of these: the two-thirds of the world’s population which is underfed.<sup>44</sup>

Schillebeeckx refers to political holiness in terms of negative contrast experiences. He maintains that the person who is poor or oppressed feels a distance between the Kingdom of God and their experience. Suffering is a negation of the divine will. Thus, God becomes present when people resist suffering. Strengthened by Christian hope and resisting against injustice there is the possibility that one may encounter God as the heart and soul of human liberation.

Schillebeeckx offers an example from the life of Jesus. On the one hand, he acknowledges that Jesus had a relationship with God that set him free and allowed him to be aware of the beauty of the lilies of the field and of the faith placed in him by humble people. On the other hand, Jesus wit-

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42. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus in Our Western Culture*, 71. Jon Sobrino’s book with the title *Spirituality of Liberation: Towards Political Holiness* was published in Spanish in 1985. Schillebeeckx’s first reference to Sobrino and political holiness appears in 1983 (‘Jerusalem of Benares? Nicaragua of de Berg Athos?’, in *Kultuurleven*, 50 [1983], 331–47). Although Schillebeeckx refers to Sobrino, the idea most probably came first from Johann Baptist Metz (Cf personal communication with Robert Schreiter, 12 August 2011).

43. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus in Our Western Culture*, 72.

44. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus in Our Western Culture*, 72.

nessed the servitude in human history which sickens, maims, brings unnecessary suffering and stifles freedom. Schillebeeckx states, '[o]ut of this experience of contrast between the contemplative and also practical experience of meaning and human history of evil and suffering, Jesus makes demands on us which humanly speaking are obviously impossible'.<sup>45</sup> Political holiness involves an eschatological hope in the Kingdom of God that overcomes the rational sense of human despair and dissatisfaction.

For Schillebeeckx, the seed of the Kingdom of God germinates and ripens here and now in our world. In that imperfect world one experiences redemption and liberation only in finite fragments in a history that stands open toward eschatological consummation.<sup>46</sup> Political holiness and love witness to the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God disclosing a future greater than our finite history. Ours is not a utopian vision of the consummation of the present. Neither is it an unearthly other world. Rather, it is 'the completion and restoration of this world, our world which is out of joint'.<sup>47</sup> Through action in the world human beings engage in a modern political form of Christian *caritas*. Yet only through the mysticism that is part of political holiness can the tension between action and contemplation be sustained.

Schillebeeckx opposes any complete identification of human salvation and politics. He states, 'God's proviso, which for [humans] takes the form of an eschatological proviso, makes it impossible for the believer to absolutize politics'.<sup>48</sup> Ultimately, he argues that salvation comes from God and that one's fragmentary efforts in the service of justice can be entrusted to God. Liberation movements are incomplete yet essential constituents of salvation, but they will be transcended by the 'eschatological surplus' or superabundance of God's love.<sup>49</sup> Christian redemption is more than emancipatory self-liberation, and 'truly human liberation', supported by political love, 'points in concrete terms to the worldly fruitfulness of Christian redemption'.<sup>50</sup>

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45. Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 821.

46. Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 819.

47. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God* (London: SCM, 1990), 133.

48. Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 776.

49. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report on the Books Jesus & Christ* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 123.

50. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus in Our Western Culture*, 74.

## Theological perspectives on the Melanesian Way

Schillebeeckx's study of the mystical dimension as an intense form of the life of faith, as the transcendent experienced in the *nada* (emptiness), and as the presence of the divine in 'mediated immediacy', bears comparison with Narokobi's understanding of the Melanesian vision. Schillebeeckx needed to explain such terms for the benefit of Western theologians and philosophers trying to understand how a transcendent God might be present in historical reality and how one's experience of God's presence is mediated through the world and history, including socio-political forms. Narokobi, coming from a viewpoint not limited exclusively by scientific and technical reason takes the experience of God for granted.<sup>51</sup> Narokobi, philosopher and Christian politician, and Schillebeeckx, the theologian, share a concern for an integral, non-dualistic approach to the place of Christian action in the world.

In the remaining discussion, I will consider ways that Schillebeeckx can help deepen theologically Narokobi's valuable insights. I will treat three aspects of political holiness: the place of God's love in political action, recognition of the theological significance of poor and marginalised people, and the Kingdom of God in terms of eschatological hope.

### God's love and political action

Schillebeeckx notes that:

Because salvation does not coincide completely with our awareness that this salvation comes from God, we may say that everywhere where good is done and injustice is challenged, through a praxis based on love of our fellow human being, the very being of God that is human love is endorsed and given power.<sup>52</sup>

What Schillebeeckx calls 'political love' reveals God, because God is the source of that love. Narokobi writes in a similar fashion: 'Whenever we love those who would see us dead, whenever we shed tears for the lonely,

51. Schillebeeckx calls such a pre-scientific viewpoint—'first originality' (*Christ*, 805).

52. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus in Our Western Culture*, 74–75. The translation of this passage found in *The Schillebeeckx Reader*, edited by Robert Schreiter (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 274, differs slightly: '... the very being of God, which is love for human beings, is imitated and brought into force.'

whenever we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, minister to the sick, introduce Christ to people, we are serving the king of the kingdom.<sup>53</sup> Narokobi's view is more ministerial than theological. He presumes God's love and is concerned about how we engage in loving service because that is the Christian way to live.

The reference above notwithstanding, Narokobi makes little explicit reference in his writing to the virtue of love. Perhaps this is so because love is a rather abstract manner of referring to a way of life characterised by harmony and respect that he sees in 'noble traditions' of the 'Melanesian Way'. He recognises how the encounter with Christ for Melanesians today has widened the scope of their experience and provided new insight into the Divine. However, he notes that our human task 'is not merely to "love and serve God and be happy forever with him"'. Rather might I say that man's task on earth is to accept that he is a partner, an active participant, in creating a godly society.<sup>54</sup>

Schillebeeckx's insights into the place of love in a godly society could help broaden the resources for Narokobi to respond to his fundamental question which is how to find a balance between a genuine Melanesian experience and Christian faith. Political holiness and love based on an understanding of the very being of God as love for human beings could re-cast the search for that balance. Narokobi views the Melanesian vision as one of cosmic harmony; but the contemporary reality of Melanesian experience is that of yearning for that harmony in the good life which at present is beyond people's experience. According to Narokobi, the search for the 'Melanesian Way' entails rediscovering 'our souls and the soul of the nation'.<sup>55</sup> As a Christian, he believes that 'God's love through the Holy Spirit, is in our hearts'.<sup>56</sup> Schillebeeckx offers a theological manner of integrating these two realities in terms of God's love revealed as the mystery at the heart and soul of any truly human liberation.<sup>57</sup> He acknowledges the importance of encountering God in the natural or the cosmic, but notes how no merely human love can promise the fullness of salvation. 'No single form and level of culture can completely fill the void.'<sup>58</sup> 'Universal and

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53. Narokobi, 'Your Kingdom Come', 58.

54. Narokobi, *Melanesian Way*, 58.

55. Narokobi, *Melanesian Way*, 54.

56. Narokobi, 'Your Kingdom Come', 62.

57. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus in Our Western Culture*, 73.

58. Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 813.

perfect salvation can be promised to us only through the love of God, the Creator who also forgives us.<sup>59</sup> Hence, the search for the ‘Melanesian Way’ must involve not only the search for our souls and the soul of the nation, but also resistance against injustice through the freedom in grace that has its source in the love of God.

### **The theological significance of poor and marginalised people**

Narokobi has been criticised for being a dreamer and an idealist. Though he warns of the dangers of brutal absurdity, chaos, and illusion, he does not dwell on these elements and seldom speaks from the perspective of those experiencing a ‘desert of injustice.’<sup>60</sup> Narokobi is aware that there are many problems in Papua New Guinea today. He writes:

It may well be that I am moving around with wrong company, however I see and hear of too many Papua New Guineans who are suffering from fear, insecurity, enstrangement (sic) and indecision. Too many people are going about our towns and cities without full bellies, and without work. Too many of our people in the villages live in constant fear of sorcery. Many more of our children are suffering from educational and spiritual malnutrition.<sup>61</sup>

Without faith, Narokobi believes, we will see our (Melanesian) society ‘deteriorate from a God-living, God-fearing, ancestral-spirit loving and ancestral-spirit fearing society into a Godless and spiritless [sic] society.’<sup>62</sup> While sounding a warning against such developments, Narokobi the philosopher and politician does not appear to acknowledge any theological significance in the poor, suffering and marginalised.

For Schillebeeckx, a commitment to the concreteness of human history means that one must come face to face with the reality of human suffering, sin, and injustice. He explains theologically how mystical love and political love go together. ‘Without prayer or mysticism politics soon

59. Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 834.

60. Narokobi, *Melanesian Way*, 54.

61. Narokobi, *Melanesian Way*, 156. In 2010 Papua New Guinea rates at 154/178 on the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index ([http://www.transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices/cpi/2010/results](http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2010/results)) and 137/169 on the UNDP human development scale (<http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/PNG.html>).

62. Narokobi, *Melanesian Way*, 155.

becomes cruel and barbaric; without political love, prayer or mysticism soon becomes sentimental or uncommitted interiority.<sup>63</sup> Narokobi agrees: 'Insistence on religious beliefs without regard to human need for decent living will again lead to a large concentration of people living a religious life that has little or no semblance to the radiant beauty, dignity and sanctity of the divine creator, we human beings are supposed to be the image of.'<sup>64</sup> In his view, 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.'<sup>65</sup>

My question is, 'How are we to develop that potential into lived experience?' Schillebeeckx offers theological advice in a situation of sinfulness where there appears to be an absence of political holiness. He notes that, in the relationship between prayer and mysticism, what is politically liberating is ethically asymmetrical. In other words, the God of liberation, forgiveness and reconciliation does not follow an egalitarian reciprocal ethics. Schillebeeckx states:

The hope of believers is dialectically reconciled with the contradiction of the world as they experience it—reconciled, not in an undialectical model of harmony but through the critical and productive, saving practice of living people and through the belief that there is always a surplus of hope over and above the recalcitrant world as we experience it.<sup>66</sup>

Thus, through experiences of negative contrast, people come to see suffering as a negation of the divine will, and in resistance against injustice there is the possibility of encountering God in the hope of human liberation. Thus, from a theological perspective, poverty and injustice are not simply evil, but also a basis for world-renewing prophetic praxis that reflects God's saving presence.

### **The Kingdom of God and eschatological hope**

Narokobi promotes the Kingdom in both practical and contemplative dimensions. He supports integral human development and leadership by

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63. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus in Our Western Culture*, 75.

64. Narokobi, *Melanesian Way*, 161.

65. Narokobi, *Melanesian Way*, 32.

66. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus in Our Western Culture*, 64.

people of integrity who are prepared to live and practise values and qualities such as freedom and justice, and who accept the consequences of their actions. He says that a good leader, like the humble Jesus, 'should be just at ease with the beggar as he should be with the priest, the prophet and the king'.<sup>67</sup>

In the face of the tragedy of human oppression, Christians are not meant to be 'cowards who escape catastrophe by finding refuge in a Christ that once lived on earth and whose return is a distant eventuality'.<sup>68</sup> Rather, it is a matter of building God's Kingdom in Papua New Guinea, and of responding to the invitation to:

break down the barriers of language, tribalism, of hatred, of political and religious jealousies, and of the oppression of colonialism, neo-colonialism and of capitalism championed by international and national corporate entities.<sup>69</sup>

The Kingdom is at hand, immanent in the world and also with us. Narokobi states, 'Whenever we do good, whenever we overpower evil, we bring forth the forces of good that are the boundaries of God's kingdom'.<sup>70</sup> He notes that, while respecting the human role in shaping the Kingdom, God unquestionably 'has the casting vote'.<sup>71</sup>

Schillebeeckx provides a theological perspective on that casting vote. The eschaton is not a fulfillment of utopian yearnings and will not simply be a consummation of the present. Salvation remains an indefinable horizon in our history. Liberating and reconciling action disclose a new and greater future. He states, 'God gives a future to all our action towards liberation and reconciliation, a future which is greater than the volume of our finite history'.<sup>72</sup> Political holiness, in the tension between action and contemplation promotes a practical love, in the praxis of the Kingdom of God, and the hope that there is no negative eschaton. In viewing the life and message of Jesus Christ, Schillebeeckx holds that 'good, not evil, has the last word'.<sup>73</sup>

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67. Narokobi, *Melanesian Way*, 204.

68. Narokobi, 'Your Kingdom Come', 63.

69. Narokobi, 'Your Kingdom Come', 64.

70. Narokobi, 'Your Kingdom Come', 58.

71. Narokobi, 'Your Kingdom Come', 54.

72. Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 838.

73. Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 139.



## Conclusion

Schillebeeckx offers an important theological dimension to Narokobi's concern for the politics of leadership when he links politics and love in what he terms 'political holiness'. Political love brings together love of God and love of neighbour, since love of God, which is the basis of mysticism, enters into Christian social and political commitment. Schillebeeckx notes that political love may well become the most significant form of contemporary holiness given the current situation of suffering humanity.

Schillebeeckx recognised the importance of intercultural hermeneutics and called for a constantly new inculturation. He said, 'What we have is, rather, the process of a constantly new inculturation of a gospel which is not bound to one culture, but which is not given in the Bible, either, apart from a limited, particular cultural form.'<sup>74</sup> In an effort to expand his intercultural hermeneutics, in this chapter, I have presented some of his ideas about mystical and political love in terms of the realities of Papua New Guinea as found in the work of Narokobi.

Bernard Narokobi's published works, as well as his actions are both deeply Melanesian and deeply Christian. As a Melanesian, he had a sense of the integral quality of religion along with all other aspects of life—including the political. He describes such living as 'The Melanesian Way'. As a Christian with a vivid sense of the way that politics contributes to relevant faith and of the way that faith guides politics to reveal fragments of the Kingdom of God, he provides a striking witness to the importance of political holiness. His placing a cross on the top of the Papua New Guinea parliament building was a prophetic statement based on Christian faith and offered the insight that one cannot delete *salus* from political realities. This is what Narokobi was alluding to when he insisted that there is a sacred dimension to business that occurs in parliament because the former involves human welfare and integrity. Edward Schillebeeckx's explanation of political holiness helps provide new theological insight into the ways that God's saving presence may be expressed in various cultures, and how human welfare and integrity are a foretaste of the Kingdom of God.

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74. Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 43.