RELHIPERRA

ABOUT ABORIGINES

(Incorporating the thoughts of a reluctant missionary)

Paul G E Albrecht AM

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

Over the years, I wrote on various subjects relating to Aborigines. Then, more recently, in my retirement, I gave some lectures on Aboriginal issues to students at Luther Seminary in North Adelaide—since 2005 renamed Australian Lutheran College. In 2003 I combined my lecture notes and extensive excerpts from my earlier papers with additional material not previously included in any of my writings, into a single volume for the benefit of future students. I have entitled this volume *Relhiperra*—Western Arrarnta for About Aborigines, or Aboriginal Issues. I have also stated that these notes incorporate my thoughts, so that anyone reading this material is aware that along with what are the accepted facts about Aborigines and Aboriginal culture, there are my opinions.

Various people who have read *Relhiperra* have suggested that people with an interest in Aboriginal affairs could also be interested in reading what I have written. It is with these people in mind that I have made this material available in this format.

My perspective on Aboriginal issues differs in fundamental aspects from the views expressed in the media by many journalists, activists and self-styled Aboriginal leaders. So it is important that I introduce myself—stating where I was born, my work history, and my professional development—so as to provide a backdrop against which the validity of my views can be assessed.

I was born at Hermannsburg in central Australia, where my father was missionary/superintendent from 1926–51. He had come to Hermannsburg in Australia in 1926 after training at Hermannsburg in Germany. In the course of growing up at Hermannsburg, I learnt the local Aboriginal language, *Arrarnta Aitrolinya* (Western Arrarnta). Some say that Western Arrarnta was my mother tongue, but I can't vouch for that. I learnt German from my parents, most of which, unfortunately, I have forgotten, and lastly also English. All my pre-teen years were spent at Hermannsburg, much of it in the company of Aboriginal children. Early schooling was via correspondence school lessons, under the supervision of a governess. After spending a year at Bethany in South Australia completing my primary schooling, I entered Immanuel College in 1947. At that time the College was situated in North Walkerville. At the conclusion of my secondary studies, I applied for admission to Immanuel Seminary North Adelaide and was accepted as a student at the beginning of 1952. I graduated at the end of 1956, and was ordained into the ministry of the Lutheran Church (the former UELCA) in January 1957.

When I entered the seminary I had no intention of returning to central Australia to work as a missionary/pastor among the Aborigines. However, some church fathers, particularly the late Pastor Laurie Leske, worked some theological blackmail: ‘Where but in Central Australia can you use God's gift i.e., your knowledge of the Arrarnta language?’ I found the argument theologically irrefutable and so was prevailed upon to accept a call to this ministry. So I returned to work in the Finke River Mission (FRM)—albeit very reluctantly. Hence I often refer to myself as a reluctant missionary. However, I am forever grateful that God gave me the grace to be obedient to His call to this ministry. As I look back on my life, I am sure this was the work He had in mind for me. So as I reflect on my life and ministry I have nothing but praise and thanks for His grace and leadership in my life.
A brief potted history of my ministry, in which I was ably supported by my wife Helen, seems in place. My wife and I were first posted to Haasts Bluff, a government-administered Aboriginal settlement situated some 118 km west of Hermannsburg. We were there from January 1957 to April 1958 in a *locum tenens* capacity. (The regular missionary was convalescing from a bout of hepatitis.) Then the FRM transferred us to Alice Springs, where I had a ministry among Aborigines and other Australians in Alice Springs, as well as a ministry among Aborigines on some of the surrounding cattle stations. In 1962 I was appointed field superintendent of the Finke River Mission. Initially this was a part-time position, but it became full-time in 1968. I held this position until 1983 when I resigned as field superintendent to concentrate on vernacular literacy, the training of Aboriginal pastors, and the translation of the Bible and other Christian literature into Western Arrarnta.

I headed the team, which translated the New Testament and large sections of the Old Testament into Western Arrarnta. I also worked with others on the revision of the Western Arrarnta hymnbook, particularly the liturgies, the daily prayers and the catechism. I wrote *Tnakintja Nurnaka*, a brief exposition of the Christian faith based on Luther’s Small Catechism, in Western Arrarnta, with an English translation. This latter was completed in my retirement and published in 2000. More recently, at the request of the Finke River Mission board, I wrote *FROM MISSION TO CHURCH, the Finke River Mission 1877–2002*, to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the founding of Hermannsburg. This book was published in 2002. In 2005, I wrote *THE JOURNEY BROKEN AT HORSESHOE BEND, An examination of the events surrounding Carl Strehlow’s death, from the documents*. This was published by the Friends of the Lutheran Archives in 2006. Also published in 2006 was *SUNDAY-AKA PEPA, Exegetical notes on the Historic Gospel Pericopes for the Church Year*, in Western Arrarnta and English.

Two particular interests emerged early in my ministry, and continued to grow throughout my time in central Australia. The first concerned Christianity and Aboriginal culture. Briefly, what was their relationship to each other? For example, could an Aborigine be a Christian while living in, and adhering to a culture, which was rooted in, and permeated by, animism? Now that might seem a strange question today, but not so strange when I began my ministry. Then, much of Aboriginal culture was seen as anti-Christian, and it was thought that Aborigines had to abandon much of their culture in order to be Christians. Of course it was the missionaries who determined what aspects were anti-Christian.

My second interest related to social change. Briefly, how could Aborigines be encouraged or helped to change, as some change seemed necessary if they were to survive in a social and physical environment so radically changed from that in which their culture had developed, and to which their culture had been a response? When I began my ministry, assimilation was the official government Aboriginal policy. According to the 1965 definition:

"The policy of assimilation seeks that all persons of Aboriginal descent will choose to attain a similar manner and standard of living to that of other Australians and live as members of a single Australian community—enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same responsibilities and influenced by the same hopes and loyalties as other Australians. Any special measures taken are regarded as temporary measures, not based on race, but intended to meet their need for special care and assistance and to make the transition"
from one stage to another in such a way as will be favourable to their social, economic and political advancement.

In looking back on the 41 years of my ministry in central Australia, there are two events which have been crucial in shaping my thoughts on Aboriginal issues. The first was my Churchill Fellowship in 1969–70, and the second grew out of what I call the ‘councils experiment’ at Hermannsburg in the early 1970s.

Back of my application for a Churchill Fellowship was a growing realisation that the assimilation policy—the official Commonwealth of Australia Aboriginal policy of that time—was not achieving what it was intended to achieve. In fact, rather than engendering change, it appeared to be causing only social breakdown.

I was successful in gaining a twelve-month Churchill Fellowship to study at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Bombay. My initial intention had been to study some social science subjects, and then to concentrate on practical work, especially community development work. In retrospect, it was fortunate that my original plans ran into a dead end. Without a knowledge of the Hindi language, or any other Indian language, I could not communicate and so could not do any practical work. This forced me to rethink my plans, and I ended up concentrating on studying social change. What is it? Can it be fostered? If so, how? What factors work to inhibit it? And so on. As I said, it was the best thing that could have happened, and I can see the hand of God in this, as the study I undertook gave me the theoretical framework within which to look at the whole gamut of Aboriginal issues—policies, programmes, etc. In order to give a focus to what I was doing, I wrote a thesis under the guidance of Mrs S Chitnis, Lecturer in Sociology at TISS. The thesis was entitled SOCIAL CHANGE AND THE ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIANS OF CENTRAL AUSTRALIA: A study of factors inhibiting change and of policies and methods which can stimulate social change.

The second event critical in shaping my understanding and approach to Aboriginal issues was what I have been want to call the ‘councils experiment’ to which I referred earlier. This grew out of, and was related to, my studies in social change. The overwhelming fact that my studies imprinted on my mind was this: In the final analysis, only the people who are faced with the need to change can successfully bring about social change. It cannot be forced on them successfully from outside, nor can it be socially engineered. Any forced change has to be maintained by force, and even when it is, it usually results in social breakdown, rather than social change. The most that change agents can do is create an environment that is conducive to, or encourages, beneficial change.

I was field superintendent of the Finke River Mission at the time, and this included administrative responsibility for the Hermannsburg Mission. It seemed clear to me, on the basis of my studies, that if there was to be meaningful social change at Hermannsburg, then the mission station had to be de-institutionalised. Authority had to shift from the mission to the Aborigines themselves, so that they could make their own decisions—changing what they considered needed changing, and this at a pace they themselves determined.

Having convinced the Finke River Mission Board, and then also the mission staff, of the necessity to shift authority for the running of Hermannsburg from the mission to Aborigines, we set about discussing with the Hermannsburg Aborigines the idea of
them electing councils to run various facets of the Hermannsburg township, as a means of passing authority from us to them. In the course of discussions it was agreed to set up several councils—for example, a town council to have general oversight, a school council to oversee education, and so on. The locals went along with this quite enthusiastically. Councils were duly elected, and we looked forward to a new era of social progress and change at Hermannsburg. We, the FRM, even enrolled a staff member at the Queensland University to do the study needed to scientifically document the positive changes that we were sure would be taking place.

You can perhaps imagine my, our, shock horror then when this initiative to transfer authority back to the Aborigines blew up in our faces. Instead of the dawn of a new era in which Aborigines themselves determined their future, Staff–Aboriginal relations deteriorated badly. Exploitation of staff by Aborigines increased. Law and order on the station deteriorated. Alcohol abuse increased. Councillors would hold meetings about grog-running, and how to prevent it, and then would become the worst offenders. Instead of the councillors concerning themselves with the issues as they related to the whole community, individual councillors were only concerned with their own families.

Why did our attempt to return authority to the Aboriginal ‘community’ fail? Why didn’t the Aborigines tell us that what we were proposing couldn’t or wouldn’t work when we were discussing our proposals with them? The following seem to be some of the reasons.

- It’s quite clear that at the time we, the mission staff, didn’t really understand their social system, particularly its implications for joint activities, and so proposed something which could only have worked if they were prepared to give up important parts of their culture. And this they were not prepared to do.
- It is fair to assume that they, for their part, would have thought we understood their social system—after all the mission had been there for nearly 100 years—so the fact that we proposed something that ignored their system could only mean we wanted something else.
- Given their cultural belief that wealth is created through appropriate ritual, they may well have thought that this new idea that we had proposed could deliver the ‘cargo’ that nothing else had delivered to date.
- Aboriginal groups/clans have their own leaders, and their own ‘legitimate’ way of doing things. What we proposed ignored all of this. So while they agreed with what we had proposed, there was no legitimation for the councils in their ‘law’. Hence if the experiment failed, the blame would lie with us and not with them.

It was at the ‘how to’ level, that is at the ‘how to’ shift authority from the mission to the Aborigines, that I, as the responsible person, made a major mistake. The intention was right, and I believe remains right, but the execution was wrong. For example, in my Churchill Fellowship studies I had correctly identified that Aboriginal societies had a diffuse authority structure (for example, no chiefs), that they lived in small groups, that each patri-clan had its own land, that the various groups were autonomous, etc. But I then made the mistake of assuming that since the people comprising these different patri-clans all lived in one location, Hermannsburg, and since they knew their own social system and authority structures, they could operate a non-traditional, that is modern, organisational
structure, such as a community council, as a vehicle for their self-determination and co-operative endeavour. For them this was culturally impossible.

This fiasco became a defining moment for my ministry among Aborigines. I realised that I had to take the Aboriginal realities seriously. I had to learn what these were, and that all my thinking and planning in the social and religious area had to start from these realities, or they were doomed to failure from their inception.

The foregoing gives some background to my thoughts on the various Aboriginal issues that I will be dealing with in the following pages. I have previously expressed many of these in my Churchill Fellowship study/report (to which I have referred) and in papers I have presented over time to various groups and organisations. As I stated earlier, I have culled relevant sections of this material and included them here.

Whenever statistics about Aboriginal health, housing, education, or employment are published, they make depressing reading. Among other things they show that Aboriginal Australians generally have higher rates of infant mortality, higher rates of sickness, enjoy lower standards of housing, have lower standards of education, have higher rates of unemployment, and have higher rates of imprisonment than other Australians.

There are those who, looking at these statistics, maintain that the root cause of all this misery is the destruction of Aboriginal culture and the forcible taking of Aboriginal land by other Australians, and the continuance of racism. Then there are others who maintain that, irrespective of what other Australians may have done in the past, today Aboriginal Australians could enjoy the good life if only they were prepared to work for a living like most other Australians.

However, it is my experience that neither of the foregoing points of view accurately reflect the views of the vast majority of Australians. Rather I have found them to be genuinely puzzled, concerned and perplexed about the situation in which Aboriginal Australians find themselves. Puzzled—because Australian society has managed to absorb and integrate millions of new settlers from Europe, and more recently also from Asia, while Aborigines have remained on the fringes of Australian society virtually from the beginning of European settlement. Concerned—because Aborigines lag so far behind the Australian norm when it comes to things like health, housing, education, and employment. Perplexed—because despite the expenditure of billions of dollars on programmes specifically aimed at improving the situation in which Aborigines find themselves, nothing appears to have changed.

I have found that these same puzzled, concerned and perplexed Australians move to a stage of total confusion when they discover that despite health, housing, education, and employment supposedly being the priorities of Aborigines, yet when houses are provided, they are often vandalised, as are health clinics and school buildings, that school attendance figures in different Aboriginal communities indicate truancy rates as high as 50 per cent, that petrol-sniffing is often worse in Aboriginal communities living on their own land, than among Aboriginal communities living elsewhere, that most Aboriginal housing on Aboriginal communities is built entirely by Australian contractors, that large portions of royalty payments to individuals go on motor cars and alcohol, and are rarely if ever channelled into the so-called Aboriginal priorities of health, housing, education and employment.
I have no intention of dwelling on the past treatment of Aborigines. That some Aborigines were shot, that some were poisoned, that some were forcibly deprived of their land, and that others died simply as a result of the massive social and economic dislocation caused by European settlement, are irrefutable facts of history. That this happened remains a matter of profound regret to many Australians, and the extra expenditure on matters such as Aboriginal health, housing, education and employment are present-day attempts to repair some of the damage of the past. Nor, on the other hand, do I wish to dwell on what many Australians put forward as the reasons why Aborigines have remained on the fringes of Australians society—viz., lack of reliability, lack of a work ethic, alcoholism, lack of hygiene, and the like.

Rather, my aims can be summarised as follows.

First, to give some sociological and anthropological information, including insights, which can help you a) to appreciate the cultural factors behind Aboriginal disadvantage; and b) to critically assess Aboriginal issues, including current and proposed government policies aimed at ameliorating the social condition of Aborigines.

Second, to provide some theological perspectives on Christianity and the Aboriginal culture.

And third, to suggest some guidelines that may help you to relate and work with Aboriginal people in a professional and culturally appropriate manner, that is, if you should become professionally involved with them.

The sociological analysis I will be sharing with you was gained largely during my Churchill Fellowship studies at the Tata Institute of Social Science in Bombay 1969–70. The anthropological information and insights I will be sharing with you come from reading the works of various anthropologists and from personal experiences. And finally, the theological knowledge and insights I will be sharing with you are based on my theological studies undertaken at Immanuel Seminary 1952–56 and on subsequent private study undertaken during the course of my ministry.

A note about the anthropological information. While there are regional differences in Aboriginal culture, these differences are largely variations on a single theme. For example, all Aboriginal groups believed the supernatural beings now resting in the earth, sea and/or sky, had shaped the earth and created its flora, fauna and people at the beginning of time (‘Dreamtime’), and left the progeny in whom they had become reincarnated, the creative words needed to continue their creative activity. While the ritual used by the different groups to give expression to this creative activity varied, the underlying belief system was the same, namely, that by using the original creative words of the supernatural beings, they were continuing the creative activity of the supernatural (totemic) beings, and so sustaining this universe, and its flora, fauna and human life. Most of the anthropological information I will be sharing with you, and many of my examples, are drawn from the Arrarnta and some Western Desert groups, and therefore are specific to these various groups. However, the underlying ideology, the underlying worldview, is common to all Australian Aboriginal groups.
1.2 WHO IS AN ABORIGINE?

From the very beginnings of the European settlement of Australia, the indigenous inhabitants, although classed as British subjects, were seen as a distinct category of persons. At first, who belonged to this category of persons, was obvious. But later, as a result of liaisons between settlers and Aboriginal women, children of mixed racial descent were born. To which category of persons did these people belong? Were they to be counted among the settlers, or the indigenous people? The various Australian colonies/states, in the course of their histories, answered the question: ‘Who is an Aborigine?’ in different ways. Additionally, they began to impose restrictions and/or grant privileges to people they classed as Aborigines.

To give an example. When I began my ministry in central Australia in the late 1950s, only people of full Aboriginal descent were categorised as Aborigines. At the same time, they were declared to be wards of the state so that special assistance could be provided to improve their health and general welfare, and to teach them the skills they would need in order to attain the same standard of living as other Australians. In addition they had restrictions placed on them. Among other things, they could not legally marry a non-ward without permission; they were not allowed to purchase or consume alcohol; they were not allowed to vote.

On the other hand, people whose ancestry included a person or persons of Aboriginal ancestry and another race, for example, Caucasian, Chinese, Afghan, were not classed as Aborigines, and therefore not wards of the state. They were Australian citizens who could vote, own property, drink in a pub, buy alcohol, etc. At that time, many of these people of mixed Aboriginal/Caucasian or Chinese or Afghan descent took umbrage if they were referred to as Aborigines. Later, when a change of government policy provided benefits to Aborigines not available to other Australians, but without the restrictions which previously had applied to Aboriginal people, many of these same people chose to identify as Aborigines.

When the various Australian States formed the Commonwealth in 1901, Aborigines, as a category of persons, did not have the right to vote and were not included in the Australian census. (I have been told that Aborigines in South Australia had had voting rights until federation. However, one of the conditions South Australia had to accept in order to join the federation was to withdraw the voting rights of Aborigines living in the State, in order to bring it into line with the other States.)

As the Australian colonies were granted statehood, the Aborigines living in the various States became the responsibility of those States. The Commonwealth, when it was formed in 1901, only had responsibility for Aborigines living in the Australian Territories. The referendum of 1967 did two things in particular. First, it changed the Australian Constitution so that Aborigines could be included in the census. And second, it gave the Commonwealth of Australia power to make laws and do thing for Aborigines Australia-wide. Practically, this meant that the Commonwealth, for the first time since federation, had the constitutional power to override State laws relating to Aborigines. (However, the Commonwealth has not always been prepared to use its constitutional powers, when opposed by the States. For example, Prime Minister Hawke’s attempt to
introduce uniform Aboriginal land rights laws Australia-wide was thwarted by Western Australia and other States.

The powers of the Commonwealth to make laws on behalf of Aborigines, and provide special funds for Aborigines in areas of health, housing, education, economic development, etc., meant there was also the need for an Australia-wide definition of who was an Aborigine. In the event, the Commonwealth adopted the following definition, based on race:

An Aborigine is a person descended from the original inhabitants of this land, who chooses to identify as an Aborigine, and who is accepted as such by his/her group.

This definition replaced the past official practice of referring to Aborigines either as full bloods, half-castes, quarter castes, octoroons, or whatever the case may have been. Understandably, many Aborigines found this former practice objectionable and demeaning. The current definition also echoes the common Australian practice of referring to anyone with Aboriginal features as an Aborigine.

The current definition makes it clear who is an Aborigine, for legal purposes, and therefore eligible for the special assistance provided by governments for Aborigines only. At the same time, the Commonwealth government also uses the definition to frame its Aboriginal policy and its programmes aimed at ameliorating Aboriginal disadvantage.

However, the definition says nothing about Aboriginal culture, or the cultural differences between the more traditional Aborigines and those who have lost much, if not all, of their culture. Hence it is legitimate to ask whether the definition provides an appropriate base for the development of policies and programmes.

Race is a largely meaningless concept when it comes to defining social problems and working out their solutions. Whether one has an aquiline or broad nose, whether one’s skin is dark brown, beige or some combination of pink/white, is irrelevant—except to bigots and racists. Rather, what is important is how a defined group of people perceives reality, how they organise themselves socially, what their values are, what their goals in life are, what they consider to be adequate punishment and reward, and so on. These are matters determined by culture, not race.

The definition of who is an Aborigine, by omitting any reference to culture, and cultural differences between Aborigines, has helped to father a number of negative consequences. For example:

- It has helped create monochromatic policies and programmes. While some of these have been appropriate and helpful to Aborigines who have lost their culture, they have been unhelpful to, in fact they have often been harmful to, the more traditional Aborigines. The continuing shocking statistics for Aboriginal health, educational attainments, employment etc., point to this.
- It has helped give the impression that Aborigines were/are a homogeneous people, a nation. Aborigines never were a homogeneous people, much less a nation. The small Aboriginal land-owning clans that lived scattered over the Australian continent never thought of themselves as belonging to some larger federation of Aboriginal states, or constituting a nation. The clans did not even have single authority figures like chiefs.
• It has helped to gloss over the fact that there are fundamental cultural differences between Aborigines whose attitudes, lifestyles, and values have been fundamentally shaped by their traditional culture, and those who have lost their traditional language and culture, and whose attitudes, lifestyles and values have been shaped, either by their experience of living among other Australians as Australians, or by their experience of living on the fringes of Australian society, and not being accepted by Australians.

• It has helped gloss over the fact that while both the more traditional and some non-traditional Aborigines have needs, these needs differ greatly. Both need to be addressed. But the answers in each case need to be different, because the causes of disadvantage are different.

• It has helped to silence the voice of the more traditional Aborigines. In traditional Aboriginal societies, only designated leaders could speak on behalf of their group, and these leaders always represented only themselves. This is still the case in most, if not all, of the Northern Territory. Yet the government chose to ignore this cultural fact when it established ATSIC (Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander Commission),\(^2\) and gave it the role of advising it on Aboriginal issues. ATSIC was an elected body, which in no way corresponded to the way more traditional people need to be consulted, or to the only way they can advise Government. The result was that the more traditional people had no voice in the formulation of Government policy and programmes, which affected them. Rather, a small group of Aborigines, who by and large had no knowledge of traditional Aboriginal culture and didn't speak an Aboriginal language, but who had learnt to manipulate the system established by Parliament, succeeded in influencing policy and effectively setting the whole agenda for Australian and Aboriginal relations.

• It has resulted in Land Rights legislation, and laws of incorporation, which cut across traditional Aboriginal 'law', making a mockery of the government policy of self-determination and self-management. But more on this later.

The more traditional Aborigines have their own definition of ‘Who is an Aborigine?’ According to them:

An Aborigine is someone who knows the customs and laws of his/her own group, and lives by them.

For them, Aboriginality is not a matter of race, but of culture.

The more traditional Aborigines’ definition of who is an Aborigine points to what differentiates Aborigines from other Australians. It is not race, but culture. By focusing on culture, the definition provides some clues to understanding continuing Aboriginal social disadvantage. I believe it can be shown both empirically and statistically, that the Aborigines who have benefited most from current Government programmes are the Aborigines who have lost their traditional culture, and whose values and lifestyle approximate those of other Australians. The Aborigines whose deplorable health, education, employment and housing statistics haven't really changed for decades are the more traditionally oriented Aborigines, whose life is largely governed by their culture.

Bearing all these factors in mind, I am of the opinion that any special assistance
needed to overcome Aboriginal disadvantage should be uncoupled from the racial
definition of who is an Aborigine.

- This would have the immediate effect of freeing Aboriginal policies and programmes
  from their racial base and making it possible to develop policies and programmes
  based on the cultural differences that need to be addressed. (Apart from that, it
  would also benefit Aboriginal–Australian race relations.)
- It would make the definition of Aborigine non-contentious, because no special
  benefits would be attached to being an Aborigine. It would place Aborigines on
  the same par as Australians who refer to their racial origins, for example, by calling
  themselves Greek-Australians.
- It would put an end to the resentment felt by Australians who find themselves as
  impecunious as Aborigines, but unable to access the kind of benefits available to
  Aborigines.
- It would stop Aborigines who have similar incomes to those of Australians from
  accessing funds meant to assist less advantaged Aborigines improve their standard of
  living.

There may have been some initial value in basing Aboriginal policies and programmes
on race. For example, many Aborigines who had lost their culture, but were socially
disadvantaged, benefited from the funds made available. However, this initial value is
now overshadowed by the failure of the current policies and programmes to improve
the standard of living of the more traditional Aborigines. The indices on Aboriginal
health, employment, domestic violence, substance abuse, have not improved in the past
30 years—if anything, they have become worse.

Instead of basing Aboriginal policies and programmes on race, which have
demonstrably failed, I would suggest the following approach. First, State and Territory
governments must again assume the same degree of responsibility for the provision of
physical infrastructure (roads, water, sewerage, electricity) for Aboriginal towns, as they
do for other towns. The same applies to the provision of police, health and educational
services. These are normal State and Territory functions and must not be palmed
off to so-called Aboriginal organisations in the name of self-management and self-
determination. The only result of this policy has been to provide Aborigines living in
their own communities with second-rate services.

Second, the Commonwealth and State governments need to put in place culturally
appropriate structures and mechanisms through which to consult the more traditional
Aboriginal people, and be advised by them.

Third, the Commonwealth and State governments need to establish culturally appropriate
organisations of their own to dialogue talk with genuine Aboriginal leaders and work with
them on cultural factors which are at the root of their continuing social disadvantage.

To give an example. I believe the single most important reason why the culturally diverse
people who have come to Australia have been able to fit into the mosaic of Australian
society and make a home for themselves and their children, has been their ability to plug
into their adopted country’s economy and economic institutions. By the same token, the
primary reason why Aborigines have remained on the margins of Australian society, from
the very beginning, is that they haven’t been able to plug into the economy.
The broad outlines of the Aboriginal economy, as it existed at the time of European settlement, is known. The correct performance of certain rituals, was the means of production. It was the ritual which produced what the various clans needed to live on. This was then gathered, and the kinship system provided the mechanism through which this production was allocated and distributed to individual clan members. In this respect the kinship system in Aboriginal societies served the same purpose as the old Australian arbitration system. This understanding of economy is still a part of the culture of the more traditional Aborigines.

As Australians perceive and interpret Aborigines and the functioning of their social system through their own cultural eyes, so Aborigines perceive the Australian social system through their cultural eyes. As a consequence, few Australians have understood the Aboriginal economic system. Similarly, few Aborigines have understood how the Australian economy works. Hence Aborigines have a ‘Cargo Cult’ understanding of the Australian economy. What we call work is what they understand as collecting what has been produced by ritual. They maintain that it is the ritual we use to produce our wealth (food, cars etc., etc.) which we do not, and will not, share with them. This they see as the major reason for their poverty and marginalisation.

I believe it’s their inability to understand the workings of the Australian economy that is at the heart of more traditional Aborigines remaining on the margins of Australian society. Our history shows that, providing ethnic groups enter our economy, they become a part of the mosaic of Australian society. Whether, and to what extent they intermingle with others on the social level is not crucial to their well being. However, the ethnic groups who do not enter the economy, don’t become a part of the mosaic of Australian society either. They remain on the margin. Unless Aborigines enter the Australian economy, they will continue to live on the margins of Australian society.

However, for change to occur in this area, the traditional Aborigines’ perception of how a modern economy works will have to undergo quite fundamental changes. And then they will also have to make a commitment to enter this economy to the degree that they wish to share in its material benefits. By this I mean that if an Aborigine wants no more than a pair of trousers and a shirt each year, then he can probably get them by making a couple of spears or boomerangs and selling them. But if he wants a four-bedroom house with wall-to-wall carpeting, and all modern conveniences, his commitment to the economy will have to be much greater, and will require trade-offs with his cultural values.

I have found it useful when thinking about, and analysing Aboriginal issues, to think of Aborigines within the traditional–modern continuum. The terms ‘traditional’ and ‘modern,’ as used by sociologists, are neither pejorative, nor are they value judgements—that is, they don’t imply that one is better than the other. They are terms which characterise states and stages of human social development. For example:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional societies</th>
<th>Modern societies</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Hunting/gathering</td>
<td>Market economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subsistence agriculture</td>
<td>Weak kin structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong kin structure</td>
<td>Highly differentiated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of differentiation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Aborigines can be found all along such a traditional–modern continuum. The place presently occupied by individuals and groups on this continuum will have been
determined by such things as their contact history—that is, were they dispossessed of their land; length of contact with other Australians; degree of racial admixture; where they live in Australia, etc. Where Aborigines are found on this continuum must determine the type of policies and programmes that governments formulate and institute to help them overcome their social disadvantage.

In raising the question of who is an Aborigine I have had no desire to question the right of any person whose genealogy includes an Aborigine, or Aborigines, to identify as an Aborigine. To identify as such is an entirely personal matter and should be of no concern to anyone else. However, because the definition of an Aborigine carries with it legal and pecuniary privileges, this question is not simply a personal matter, but also a matter of legitimate public debate.

There are people interested in Aboriginal issues who consider it counter-productive to raise this question, let alone debate it. They are of the opinion that behind this question is an attempt to drive a wedge between the traditional or tribal Aborigines and urbanised Aborigines.

My interest in the question arises from the indisputable fact that there are vast social differences between Aborigines whose lifestyle is still significantly influenced by their indigenous culture, and those whose lifestyle is largely, if not completely, indistinguishable from that of other Australians. And to these two groups of Aborigines must be added the many Aborigines whose lifestyle lies on the continuum between these two groups of Aborigines. These differences have vast implications for legislation and programmes designed to deal with Aboriginal rights and to ameliorate Aboriginal disadvantage. It is my contention that one of the fundamental reasons for the present failure to deal effectively with Aboriginal disadvantage stems from not taking seriously the differences between the more traditional and the non-traditional Aborigines.

### 1.3 THE NATURE OF ABORIGINALITY

*(What Constitutes the Aboriginal Identity?)*

I have stated previously that it is the Aboriginal culture, more than anything else, which stands in the way of the more traditional Aborigines achieving a similar standard of living as that enjoyed by other Australians. Later we will look at six aspects of Aboriginal culture in some detail and ascertain the ways in which they are impeding the more traditional Aborigines from improving their health outcomes, employment opportunities and the like. But first, by way of introduction, I want to look at those aspects of the Aboriginal culture which form the core of what I call Aboriginality, or make up the Aborigines’ identity.

In pre-settlement times, an Aborigine’s identity was in no way predicated on being a member of a particular race. Nor was it predicated on being a member of an Aboriginal nation, since the people living on the Australia continent never thought of themselves as being one nation. Nor did the small Aboriginal land-owning clans which spread over the Australian continent ever think of themselves as belonging to some larger federation. (All these facts still apply to the more traditional Aborigines.)

In fact, if the Arrarntic and Western Desert languages are anything to go by, it is
doubtful that the various groups which spread over the Australian continent even had a generic word for ‘people’. In the Western Arrarnta dialect, for example, the Arrarnnta word *relha* is used now as a word for people collectively—that is, men, women, children, youths, etc. But this usage of the word seems to have resulted from contact with missionaries and other Australians. I was alerted to this possibility when doing some translation work in another Arrarntic dialect. The people speaking this dialect had had less contact with other Australians, and had no word for people. They had words for children, men, women, old men, grandchildren, etc., but no inclusive word for people.

Again, if the Western Arrarnta are anything to go by, then the people belonging to the various land-owning clans appear to have identified themselves collectively by the major totemic site on their land. For example, the major totemic site of a land-owning clan to the west of Hermannsburg is called *Lthalalthuma*. The people belonging to this clan would in the past have referred to themselves as *Lthalalthumarinya*. *Lthalalthuma* being the name of the major totemic site, and the suffix–*rinya* denoting belonging to.

However, while there does not appear to have been an inclusive word for people, the Western Arrarnta language, for example, is rich in personal pronouns, which indicate social relationships and social distinctions. For example, if I wanted to say ‘my wife and I’, to be correct I would have to use the dual form *ilantha* which not only means the two of us, but also indicates, at the same time, that she is of a different class, of a different moiety, and belonging to a different land-owning clan from my own. I would also use this form if I wanted to say ‘my mother and I’. (I will have more to say about the Western Arrarnta classificatory system later when we look at kinship.) But if I wanted to say ‘my brother/sister and I’, to be correct I would have to use the dual form *ilirna*. I would also use this form if I wanted to say ‘my cross cousin’ and I. Then again, if I wanted to say ‘my father and I’, to be correct, I would have to use the dual form *ilaaka*, which not only means the two of us, but also indicates that we are from two classes which stand in a father–son relationship, i.e., we are *nyinhanga*. Similar distinctions apply to the use of the plurals—we, you (pl), them. The younger generation of Arrarnta speakers rarely use all these pronouns as the older generations did. However, the existence of these pronouns, and their use by the older generation, point to the fact that, in the past, speakers were, or had to be, aware of their relationship with each individual member of the audience, or with the people of whom they were speaking.

The matter of personal relationships also receives continual emphasis in discussion. Personal names are rarely used. People will either address others, or speak of others, using their class name (for example, *Ngala*), or use a relationship term (for example, *Mparna*, brother-in-law). In both cases, the terms define the relationship of the speaker and the person spoken to, and the attendant rights and responsibilities of that relationship.

The foregoing identifies one of the factors that helped shape Aboriginality and form the Aboriginal identity, namely kin and kinship. There are two others, and these are land and *tjurrunga*. *Tjurrunga* is a generic Arrarnta word which, depending on its context, refers to the objects representing the supernatural beings; the objects being inhabited by supernatural beings; the rituals these ancestral beings instituted to maintain the orderly functioning of the world and the increase of its flora and fauna; the rituals commemorating the pre-history travels and activities of these supernatural beings, etc. These three then, the land, the *tjurrunga*, and kinship, are the foundation blocks of the individual and corporate
Aboriginal identity. These three are indivisible, and in a sense form a larger single entity. Common to all three are the supernatural beings who shaped and now ‘sleep’ in this world, who via their totemic offspring maintain the flora and fauna and human beings, and who gave to men the rules concerning kinship and social organisation.

The more traditional Aborigines’ definition of who is an Aborigine reflects this. As mentioned earlier, they define an Aborigine as a person who knows his ‘law’ and lives according to it. (‘Law’ is the generic English term many Aborigines now use to denote the totality of their culture, including land, tjurrunga, and kin, actual and classificatory.) Whether a person is an Aborigine, or of dual Aboriginal/Australian descent, is considered irrelevant. Crucial is whether that person knows the ‘law’ or not, and in the case of males, whether the male has been initiated. Traditional Aborigines consider uninitiated Aboriginal males as worra, that is, boys. As they have not been educated in the ‘laws’ of their group, they are considered ignorant and excluded from any discussions relating to land and ritual. However, for more traditional Aborigines, if one or another of their relatives has lost his language and his culture, this in no way invalidates their relationship.

This ‘law’ of which Aborigines speak establishes and defines their corporate identity vis-à-vis other groups. The culture of any discrete group of people (society) contains the customs, values, institutions, etc., of that group of people. So if we are seeking to establish the Aboriginal identity, it is in their culture that we must seek this corporate identity. This is not to suggest that the Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal identity are identical. Rather it is the recognition that the Aboriginal culture is the only means by which we can access their corporate identity.

While the various Aboriginal land-owning clans in central Australia have established and maintained their own identities vis-à-vis other Aboriginal land-owning clans, by such things as subtle changes to what may otherwise be a common language, by small changes to the way they cook kangaroos, etc., yet one can speak of an Aboriginal identity because of a shared worldview and lifestyle which pre-dated any human efforts to domesticate animals and engage in even subsistence agriculture.

Australian Aboriginal societies, except for those along the northern Australian seacoast, were physically isolated from other societies, and appear to have changed very little over the centuries. Elsewhere, societies which lived in close proximity to each other, appear to have changed and developed at a fairly even rate, as new ideas and technology flowed from one to the other. When European settlers came to Australia, they arrived with a form of social organisation, economic system, and technology utterly different from that of the local hunting and gathering societies. Not only that, but the ideological presuppositions undergirding their different life styles were so diverse as to make meaningful communication impossible. Little has changed in the intervening years. The conceptual divide between the more traditional Aborigines and other Australians remains and continues to impede meaningful communication.

I previously said that land, tjurrunga, and kinship determine and provide the core content of Aboriginal identity. And I also said that they are indivisible, so that discussion of one necessarily leads to discussion of the others. However, since I have to begin somewhere, I begin with land and tjurrunga, since to speak of the one is of necessity to speak of the other. The two are so closely intertwined.
Much is made of the Aborigines’ attachment to their land, and of their need to be on their land for their wellbeing. There can be no doubt of the importance that the more traditional Aborigines still attach to their land. However, much of what is said on this subject gives the impression that the Aborigines’ attachment to their land is genetic—something they were born with, something they have even when they are brought up in an Australian urban setting, without any knowledge of their own language, and without any in-depth knowledge of the mythology relating to their land.

The Aborigines’ attachment to their land has nothing to do with genetics, but everything to do with learning, and the subsequent internalisation of the knowledge that has been passed on. Aborigines were/are animists, believing that the supernatural beings (also known as totemic ancestors) who were active at the dawn of time are still to be found in the land they shaped and fashioned. They also reside in its flora and fauna, in the natural phenomena such as thunder and lightning, in the sun, moon and stars, and in the humans to whom they gave birth. It is these same supernatural beings residing in the land and in the people of that land that gives the Aborigines their unique attachment to their land and their sense of oneness with the land. While our relationship with land can be described as an I–It relationship, theirs is an I–Thou relationship. This relationship is taught by the adults and initially learnt informally by the children. Then, after initiation, comes the more formal and in-depth instruction. Men who are prepared to apply themselves to the rigours of learning, and I might add, are prepared to accept the physical pain which is often inflicted as a part of the teaching process, are eventually taught all the knowledge pertaining to their personal totem, and to the totems of their land.

The individual’s identification with his own supernatural being (totem) is complete, even transcending the time frame between the pre-historical creative period when the ancestral spirit beings were active and the present. I remember a man telling me the story of his supernatural being, a certain snake. ‘He came from this place and travelled north,’ he said. ‘Then I went under ground and came up at this place. Here he saw this high hill and named it. Then I travelled on.’ This person’s identification with his supernatural being was complete in every sense.

Knowledge of, and access to the creative power of these ancestral spirit beings, is via the *tjurrunga*. As mentioned earlier, *tjurrunga* is an Arrarnta generic term which covers the objects representing the supernatural beings, and said to be inhabited by the supernatural beings; the rituals instituted by these supernatural beings; the words the supernatural beings used to create, shape, and heal; the engravings and ground paintings representing the supernatural beings; the stories and songs of the supernatural beings.

Knowing the creative words used by their supernatural beings is the most important knowledge each land-owning clan has. For the use of these words within the prescribed ritual, at the right place, guarantees the continuance of that particular species of flora or fauna or natural phenomena. It is this that maintains the universe and its flora and fauna. This is why the *tjurrunga* are said ‘to hold’ (*erkuma*) the world. It is not surprising, then, that these words were closely guarded by the old men, the guardians of this knowledge, and only passed on to men when they were considered ready and worthy.

However, not all the supernatural beings were good. There were also supernatural evil beings which caused sickness and death. The words (chants) they used to cause sickness
and death in the pre-historical period of this world's history are included in the genre known as *tjurrunga*. As such, these words (chants) are known to men who own these *tjurrunga* and have been instructed in their knowledge. They are therefore able to use these words to cause people to become ill, and also to die. In Aboriginal eyes, there is no such thing as someone becoming ill for no known reason. When someone becomes ill, the question that comes to the Aborigines' mind is this: Who was responsible? Who caused this person to be affected by *arrangkultha*, by the occult? Aborigines will sometimes ask for the medical cause of sickness or death. They will accept this as something the doctor has discovered, but their prior question still remains: Who caused this person to become sick or die with this illness?

However, the supernatural beings also had words (chants) that they used to heal themselves when they had been injured or had become sick as a result of having had *arrangkultha* worked on them. These words (chants) are also *tjurrunga*, and are known to those who own these words, or who have been taught these words. The people in possession of these words are the *ngangkara* (traditional healers). Even today, any sickness which is assumed to have been caused by *arrangkultha* can only be treated successfully by a man or woman *ngangkara*. These people are therefore in great demand and their services continually used, often in parallel with western medicine, and I might add, prayer.

These supernatural beings, active at the beginning of time, also laid down the rules by which the people they created, and to whom they had given life, were to live and regulate their interpersonal relationships. We can only briefly touch on some of these all-pervasive and important rules. For the Arrarnta, and the land-owning clans extending as far north as the Northern Territory coastline, many of the rules detailing relationships, personal rights and obligations, marriage partners, etc. are encompassed in the class system of social organisation. (In the Western Arrarnta system, there are eight classes, divided into two moieties, which are exogamous, that is the members of one moiety marry a member of the other moiety.) The people who have this class system, called *arnparntintja* by the Western Arrarnta, are said to be living in the light, whereas those without it—for example, the Pitjantjatjara, who live to the south of the Arrarnta—are said to be living in darkness. The reason why some live in the light and others live in the darkness is also explained by means of the relevant *tjurrunga*.

We will be looking at the Western Arrarnta classificatory system in some detail when we look at kinship, so there is no need to elaborate on it here. Suffice it to say that it encompasses all the people we call kin—father, mother, brother, sister, uncle, aunt, cousin, etc.—but then goes on to include everybody in the Western Arrarnta person's kinship network. This has the effect of determining the rights and responsibilities that an Arrarnta person has with any other Arrarnta person he/she should meet. It is also used to work out personal relationships with other people who have a class system of social organisation.

This has implications, not only for the way in which Aborigines adapt to today's world, but also for the way they relate to other Australians. Australians don't have a class. Hence, an Aborigine really has no idea how to relate to an Australian. What is their relationship? What are their mutual rights and responsibilities? Since he does not know, and therefore cannot fit him into his social landscape, he is for all intents and purposes
simply a part of the environment, and often treated as such—at least until such time as he/she is given a class.

The authoritative nature of the rules laid down by the supernatural beings, can be gauged also from the language. No Aboriginal language that I know of has words for either/or. Aboriginal societies were not about personal choice for their individual members. They were all about living according to the rules laid down by the supernatural beings.

Again, as far as I know, no Aboriginal language has words for please and thank you. Things were done for another person, not as a personal favour, but because the ‘law’ demanded it. So there was no need for words like please or thank you. Individuals did what they had to do, or another demanded from them what under the ‘law’ they had a right to demand. This is not to suggest that no favour or gratitude was ever involved in transactions. Just that, normally, actions were not rooted in favour or gratitude.

All the rules by which Aboriginal people lived are found in the *tjurrunga*, so it can be said that the *tjurrunga* played and still play, the same role in more traditional Aboriginal societies that constitutions do in our society. While we have mechanisms to change our constitutions, their constitutions cannot be changed or amended by men, because they were given to men by the supernatural beings. Hence they are eternal. Men may abandon them in part or whole, but they cannot change them.

The reverse side of this is that, for matters not covered by the *tjurrunga*, there are no laws. The implications of this are not difficult to see for Aboriginal societies confronted with adapting to new situations, and dealing with things such as alcohol, for which there are no traditional rules.

The presence of the supernatural beings in the land, in the flora and fauna and people, created an indivisible relationship between the land and its flora and fauna, the *tjurrunga* and people who belonged to the land. The supernatural beings were deemed to have given discrete tracts of land to the patriclans who presently lay claim to these areas. The boundaries of the respective areas of land were determined by the points at which one clan handed the story of the wanderings of these ancestral spirit beings to another clan. Seniority in these clans, rules for succession, principles of land management, all were determined at the beginning of time by these supernatural beings. These patriclans had responsibility to care for this land which had been deeded to them, and also for the performance of the rituals needed to guarantee the well being of the land, the functioning of the universe, as well as the continuance of the species.

These patriclans (local descent groups), with certain provisos such as the requirement to invite neighbouring clans to rituals celebrating the deeds of common supernatural beings; kinship obligations etc., had complete authority on and over their own land, and any visitors, even on ceremonial occasions, had to abide by the rules of the host group. This authority of the patriclans did not extend beyond their own land boundaries.

When disputes about land arose among Aboriginal patriclans, their common commitment to ‘laws’ laid down by their supernatural beings, for example, that respective land boundaries coincided with the points at which they handed over the story (and its associated rituals) to the neighbouring patriclan, provided them with the ‘legal’ framework within which to settle these disputes. No doubt disputes were also settled by other means, but the ‘laws’ laid down by the supernatural beings provided a ‘legal’ framework.
The objective of the foregoing has been to highlight the way in which Aborigines saw the world, understood cause and effect, related to their land, and the way in which they organised themselves. It is these that fundamentally influenced and shaped their identity.

The culture which formed the Aborigines’ unique identity, i.e., their association with the land and its *tjurrunga*, their form of social organisation, has taken something of a battering since European settlement. To give a couple of examples. Before the arrival of European settlers, fully initiated Aboriginal men would have seen themselves as not only maintaining the flora and fauna of their own estate, but in co-operation with other patrilineal groups, in jointly maintaining this world, and providing the food their group and other groups needed to survive.

Then the Europeans came. They performed no rituals that they, the Aborigines, were aware of, and yet they appeared to have a constant and abundant food supply, unaffected by drought. From discussions I have had, the inability of the Aborigines’ philosophy/economy to validate itself in the face of the settlers’ philosophy/economy impacted very powerfully over time.

Before the Northern Territory Land Rights Act became law, Aboriginal patriclans in the Northern Territory did not feel that their land was under challenge from other Aborigines. They did not ‘own’ their land in Australian legal terms. They may not even have been living on the land. But their Aboriginal rights to ownership and all this entailed in Aboriginal terms was not challenged by other Aborigines.

The Land Rights Act changed all that. As senior Aboriginal traditional owners are want to put it, the Act put the Land Council between them and their land. Further, the Act amalgamated discrete parcels of land into single Land Trusts—an absolute no-no in Aboriginal terms. And as none of the patriclans received title to their own estate, they felt as though they did not own their own land in Australian legal terms either. This perception was reinforced as they discovered that negotiations with another party in relation to use of their land were conducted by the Land Councils, often without reference to themselves. And so the people who in Aboriginal terms had responsibility for their land, found they were unable to exercise it. For all intents and purposes, they had been reduced to nobodies.

The change in lifestyle from hunting and gathering to living in one location, impacted on the mechanisms for passing on knowledge. Some important knowledge about the supernatural beings and rituals to commemorate their travels and exploits could only be taught at the sites where these events were originally deemed to have taken place. As Aboriginal people ceased wandering over their land, either because they were forbidden to, had abandoned their home land, or had simply become sedentary, some of this knowledge ceased being passed on, as it could not be passed on in an alien setting. As well, many of the young men showed a lack of interest in learning, because they could no longer see the value of the knowledge the old men wanted to pass on.

Missions and the Christian message also affected the Aboriginal culture. However, as this will be dealt with when we look at Christianity and the Aboriginal culture later, I will say no more now.

In more recent years, alcohol, more than any other single factor, has had a deleterious effect on Aboriginal societies, by insidiously eating away at the very fabric of Aboriginal
societies. There are two major reasons why alcohol has such a detrimental effect. First, since there are no traditional rules regarding its use, and only rules instituted by the ancestral spirit beings have binding force, it has so far proved difficult, if not impossible, for Aboriginal societies to establish new rules which its members consider binding. The second is that, as yet, there are no traditional or learned mechanisms for different land-owning clans to work together on social issues. And as most Aboriginal 'communities' are made up of different land-owning clans or remnants of clans, they have no mechanisms for arriving at an acceptable consensus for dealing with their alcohol problem.

With all that has happened, what then remains of the Aboriginal identity? Interestingly, despite the impact of Australian technology/economy against which traditional beliefs have been unable to validate themselves, despite laws like the Land Rights Act, despite increasing social dislocation and breakdown, the basic world view of the more traditional Aborigines remains, and with it their identity as Aborigines. Their relationship to the land, their understanding of economy, their understanding of the causes of morbidity and mortality, are still fundamentally influenced and shaped by their traditional beliefs.

This has fundamental and far-reaching implications for all programmes devised to ameliorate Aboriginal disadvantage. Programs based on an Australian understanding of Aboriginal needs are going to continue to have some success among people whose Aboriginal identity is based primarily on race, and not culture. However, these programmes are going to continue to be spectacularly unsuccessful among Aborigines who still have an Aboriginal world view. The truth of this should by now be evident for all to see.
2.1 CULTURE

This section on culture is not meant as an in-depth treatment of the subject. I intend to highlight only those aspects which can help us in understanding the Aboriginal culture, and the part that this culture plays in the current depressed socio/economic situation of the more traditional Aborigines.

What is Culture?¹

Australia is spoken of as being a multi-cultural society. By that we mean the people now living here came from many different countries, which have cultures other than the culture Australians had fashioned for themselves. Furthermore, these people still hold to many of their cultural practices, as evidenced in the foods they eat (haggis, hot curries) and the way they prepared their food, perhaps in the way they dress (saris), the music they like (umpa bands), their national dances, etc.

Culture, however, is much more than that. According to Tylor, it is ‘…that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society.’² Johnson says, ‘Culture is abstract in the sense that it is manifested in behaviour and in the results of behaviour, but is neither the behaviour itself nor the tangible results.’³ Davis defines it this way: ‘Culture embraces all modes of thought and behaviour that are handed down by communicative interaction—i.e. symbolic transmission—rather than by genetic inheritance. It is what we learn from others through speech, gesture, and example, as opposed to what we acquire through heredity. The pattern of nest building among birds, for instance, is hereditarily determined, the pattern of house building among men is culturally determined.’⁴

Culture and Environment

Some people believe their culture had a ‘divine’ origin. Among these people would be Aborigines who believe their culture was given to them by their supernatural beings. In point of fact, however, cultures have very prosaic origins. They evolved and developed over centuries as groups of people learnt to survive in their particular environment. Except for the cautions I will mention below, the environment in which a group found itself presented it with a variety of possible responses. That is to say that the culture they developed over time was not the only one which they could have developed. At the same time, it should be noted that the culture which they developed was their answer to the environment.

However, both the environment and a group’s technology impose limits on the culture that may develop at any particular time. For example, the snow and ice of the Arctic precluded the Eskimos from ever developing an agricultural based culture. Similarly, before the advent of European settlement, the Aborigines’ rudimentary technology, among other things, forced them into developing a hunting and gathering culture.

At the same time, the impact the environment can have upon a culture at any given time depends in part upon the state of the group’s technology. For example, a people whose culture gives them the ability to create and store surplus is not as subject to the vagaries of nature as a people whose culture only makes possible subsistence agriculture.
In turn, the state of a group’s technology depends on a number of factors, for example, its prior scientific knowledge and technological base, its openness to new ideas, its proximity to other cultures which allow for diffusion—that is, the borrowing of ‘cultural items’ from other groups.

We will look at some of the factors which cause change or precipitate change in cultures when we look at social change in the next section.

**Culture and Race**

‘...almost all genes are the same for all human beings. Differences in physical type are due to differences in a few genes only, in so far as they are due to genetic differences at all.’

When analysing the problems facing Aborigines, and the continuing marginalisation of the more traditional Aborigines, race is an ineffectual, ineffective and unproductive concept. It is not race that creates the divide between Aborigines and Australians, it is culture.

Race and culture more often than not coincide, because it was different races which developed different cultures. However, to use the Australian experience as an example, when people with different cultures settled in Australia, their children began adopting the Australian culture, even if their parents didn’t. In other words, while certain cultures are identified with certain races, no culture is race-specific.

**Culture and Ethnocentrism**

All cultures determine what is legitimate and normative for the people who share that culture. As these cultural standards are internalised, they are taken for granted and regarded as ‘natural/normal’ by the people belonging to that culture. This gives rise to the phenomenon known as ethnocentrism—that is, our way of doing things is the right way. In every human situation there are two elements—the facts and the attitude or sentiment towards the facts. The latter are conveyed as a part of the cultural heritage.

Everybody is ethnocentric. The only difference is the degree of ethnocentricity evidenced by an individual or group. Ethnocentricity is simply a part of belonging to a particular culture. However, ethnocentrism becomes racism when people belonging to another race are condemned, damned, or denounced simply because they belong to that race.

**People and Culture**

Viewed from a purely biological point of view, people are animals, belonging to the mammalian family. Viewed from the perspective of the Scriptures, people are mammals who have been created in the Image of God and therefore are human beings. Culture is the product of being human. It is not the other way around. People are not human because of their culture, but people have culture because they are human beings, and not simply mammals.

While culture is common to all humankind, that is, all humankind has a culture; all humankind does not have the same culture. However, all cultures concern themselves with basically the same questions—for example, the meaning of life, what is reality, survival, group living, etc. All cultures offer answers to these questions. The differences
between cultures are not to be found in the questions they attempt to answer, but how they perceive the reality behind the questions, and then how they answer the questions. Put another way, cultures differ not at the ‘what’ level, but at the ‘how’ level. For example: while all societies recognise that social control is necessary, each answers how this is to be carried out differently.

A particular culture is shared by a group of people, which for convenience we will call a society. For the society which shares it, its culture does certain things:

- It makes predictable human interaction possible. It therefore contributes to orderly group living, cuts down on tensions, and provides stability and security for the individual. By the same token, cultural differences make cross-cultural communication and interaction unpredictable and uncertain.
- It makes it possible for a group of people to speak of ‘us’ (those who share the culture), and ‘them’ (those who do not have the same culture). While this aspect of culture makes for group security, it is at the same time divisive, in that it divides humankind into blocks.
- It determines (because culture is internalised) for the individual in the society the right and wrong way of perceiving things and doing things.

Looked at from the point of view of the human race as a whole, and particularly since, in the modern world, people of varying cultures are required to live in close proximity to each other, it can be said that cultural differences create immense difficulties for the human race. They limit co-operation, create fear, mistrust and tensions. I mention these aspects because it is possible to look at only the positive aspects of culture, and forget its negative aspects, which are as real as the positive ones.

As history illustrates, cultures are not static, but change. Cultures both act upon societies to form them and give them their distinct identity, and societies, in turn, act upon their cultures to give them their particular form.

**God’s Attitude to Culture**

As far as I know, the Scriptures nowhere use the term ‘culture’, but in a very real and actual sense the whole of God’s speaking to people is also a speaking to their culture. As we understand more clearly than ever before, people and their culture are barely divisible. What people are, is not only hereditarily determined, but also culturally determined. When God addresses people, He does not address them stripped of their culture (an impossibility) but people formed by their culture; people with their ideologies, values, and the institutions they have created. He speaks to and judges them in their culture according to His own absolute claim: ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your mind and with all your strength; and your neighbour as yourself.’ God claims them in the totality of their thinking, being and doing. To the extent that people and their culture do not yield to God’s absolute claim, people and their culture are under the judgement and wrath of God. And since no people and no culture meet God’s claim, it would have to be said, from a theological point of view, that all men and all cultures are equally under the wrath and judgement of God.

While accepting and bearing this in mind, but without in anyway detracting from it, several other factors emerge from a study of the Scriptures.
• Despite people having rejected God, God has not abandoned people. This is an aspect of God's mercy. The power of evil which is at work in the world and in people has the objective of completely de-humanising life. God will not permit this, and so sets limits on the total evil He will tolerate. Note, for example, the reasons given in the Old Testament for the extermination of the tribes living in Canaan by the Israelites at the time of the Conquest; the reasons for Israel's exile and the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. But God is actively intervening in human societies long before this stage is reached, by working through people's own social control institutions, particularly government in its various forms, to punish those who do wrong, to protect life, and to protect the basic orders of creation—family, life, marriage, property. This is why, for example, the social control institution, government, is called the servant of God in the New Testament. God's use of people's cultural institutions to serve His over-riding goal occurs in all societies. However, when human cultural institutions themselves become corrupt, that is, no longer hold evil in check but multiply it, history shows that God either destroys that government, or that entire culture.

• When God began His gracious work with the family of Abraham (Israelites), He accepted them and their culture even where their culture did not meet His ideal. This acceptance did not necessarily mean approval. Rather it was an acceptance by God of the fact that His once perfect creation was riddled with sin and under the dominion of the evil one, and would remain this way until He brought this world's history to an end and created a new heaven and a new earth in which only righteous people lived. We could say that His acceptance was a gracious accommodation and acceptance of the possible, given people's fallen nature. The only point at which God made no accommodation and no compromise was when it came to loyalty and allegiance to Him—'I am your God. You shall have no other!'

It seems to me this point is well illustrated by what Jesus said when discussing the matter of divorce with the religious leaders of his day. Divorce was permitted he said, not because it coincided with God's ideal for marriage, but because of the hardness of people's hearts, that is, because of what people are.

The practice of polygamy can also be looked at under this heading. While it fell far short of God's ideal, yet given the situation of those times, it was preferable to having unattached females living in the group.

However, by laying total claim to the people, even while accepting their culture, God opened the way for Himself to bring about changes in the culture from within, but without causing the problems inherent in cultural discontinuity and cultural vacuums which arise when change is imposed by command from without. To give some examples. As was the case in neighbouring cultures, Israelites were allowed to own slaves. However, after seven years, a slave had to be offered his freedom. Christians in New Testament times owned slaves, as did non-Christians. However, the instructions given to masters about the treatment of their slaves brought a new element into the situation. As was the practice among ancient people, Israelite soldiers could take for themselves girls they captured in war. But they were not allowed to simply discard them after using them for their own sexual gratification.
God does not allow people to hide behind culturally sanctioned behaviour for the purpose of bypassing His absolute demand for love. The parable of the Good Samaritan is relevant at this point. The Levite and Priest did not help the man who had been attacked by robbers, and could culturally justify their behaviour. (Touching him would have made them ritually unclean and so stopped them from carrying out their Temple duties). The Samaritan helped, despite the cultural taboo to have nothing to do with Jews. According to Jesus, he acted correctly, because he showed love. Love being a relevant response to the needs of another.

Conversely God does not allow people to use so-called service and worship of Him to by-pass human, that is, cultural obligations. In Matthew 15:3ff, Jesus reprimands those who say that a person can by-pass their obligations to their parents by saying that what they could use to help them has been dedicated to God.

At no time does God bind Himself to act within the cultural constraints of the people with whom He is dealing. We need only think of the establishment of the OT Priesthood and Temple workers, and Jesus’ choice of the Twelve Apostles outside the framework of the religious institutions of his day.

Jesus himself, while accepting the culture of his day and operating within it—he goes to the synagogue; tells the lepers he has healed to show themselves to the priest—also evidences a freedom from the culture. This can be seen, for example, in his attitude to the Sabbath. Jesus’ attitude might be summed up in this way: all people’s cultural forms are acceptable, provided they do not deflect them from giving themselves to God and their fellow human beings in love.

With the coming of Christ and the universal gift of the Holy Spirit, God injected a new element into people’s cultural situation by the creation of the *ecclesia* (church). While the Old Testament people of God were ethnically and culturally one, the new people of God, the church, the Body of Christ, was made up of people the Holy Spirit had called from all races, languages and cultures. It was a body which transcended all human divisions—and this included the divisions of race, culture, social status, colour and language. According to the New Testament, the church is a future reality, which is now present in time and space. The church belongs to the new age but is already present in this age. This church is present wherever the Gospel is taught in its truth and purity and the Sacraments are rightly administered, for these are the means of grace by which God takes men from the kingdom of this world and places them into His church, and into His everlasting kingdom.

Tensions exist in this situation because this new people of God, which transcends all human divisions, is not taken out of this world with its divisions, but is called upon to live its new life in the old world, with all that this implies for the body corporate, as well as for the individual Christian. This dual nature of the church’s existence cannot be ignored. Nor can unequal emphasis be given to any one aspect. The first attempt to ignore this dual existence of the church, and to live as if only the future reality existed—the communal sharing of possessions by the church which came into being immediately after Pentecost—probably contributed to this church becoming dependent on the charity of other churches, as evidenced by Paul’s collections for the church in Jerusalem. The ‘now but not yet’ nature of the church created further problems wherever the church took root in cultural situations other than the one in which it had been established. This
happened as soon as the church spread from Judea into neighbouring countries with different cultures. The question which then emerged was this: To what extent should the culture of the sending church be imposed on the recipient church? This was debated at the first Jerusalem synod. Although we may not agree with all the conclusions at which they arrived, yet the principle they agreed on was valid—that is, that purely cultural matters should not be exported and imposed.

From my understanding of the NT, what emerged from the church’s wrestling with the nature of its existence in this world, is the following:

- Sensitivity for the cultural feelings of others. We need think only of Paul’s comment about being all things to all men and his decision to circumcise Timothy before sending him as a missionary to the Jews.
- Freedom to develop forms of church government and ministry suited to the culture in which the church lived. The New Testament gives no directions on church polity.
- All cultural practices were judged from the point of view of God’s demands, as these were understood at that time. So sexual immorality although culturally sanctioned, was forbidden, as was the worship of idols. Governments, even when they persecuted Christians, were to be obeyed.
- When people met or assembled as the *ecclesia* (church) of God, all human distinctions became irrelevant, and could not be tolerated. Consider Paul’s comments on the excesses occurring during the agape feasts in Corinth, and James’ condemnation of preferential treatment being given to rich persons when attending church. It is my understanding that, in the context of worship, slaves who were elders of a church held precedence over their masters, if they were members of the same congregation.
- In the daily work or living situation, many of the ‘this world’ distinctions continued to apply. Slaves, for example, were told not to take advantage of their masters who were also Christians, but to work even more diligently.

For me, what emerges from a study of the Scriptures is this.

- The people of God, the church, lives in a dynamic, not static relationship with the culture in which it finds itself. It both acts upon its culture to modify it according to God’s absolute demand for love, and at the same time uses its culture to express itself, and to carry out its mission.
- The interaction of the church with its culture is an on-going process. This means that the answers the church gives to its culture may change from time to time as it applies the unaltering demand for love to an altering situation.

In concluding this section, I would simply make the observation that the above points apply equally to Aboriginal Christians in their cultural context as it does to other Australians in our cultural context.

### 2.2 SOCIAL CHANGE

I have previously said that a society’s culture is its response to its physical and social environment. It stands to reason, therefore, that if a society is confronted with changes
to its physical and social environment, it faces the need to make changes to its culture in order to cope with, and survive in, the changed environment. The degree of change required will depend largely on the degree of change that had occurred to its original environment.

In this section, we will be looking at social change—what it is, what causes it, and other related questions. Before doing so we need to be clear on the distinction between social change and cultural change. Social change looks only at changes to the social organisation of a society, and therefore has a narrower focus than cultural change, which includes changes to a society’s ideology, arts, technology and the like. ‘Of course, no part of culture is totally unrelated to the social order, but it remains true that changes may occur in these branches without noticeably affecting the social system.”

Acculturation should not be confused with social change. Acculturation is the transfer of a cultural item from one culture to another, but without social change i.e., without change in the structure of a social system. The terms are not synonymous. However, acculturation can lead to social change, although it need not.

The reason for studying social change in the context of a study on Aboriginal issues should be obvious. The European settlement of Australia has dramatically changed the physical and social environment of the indigenous people, leaving them no viable option but to adjust, if they wish to survive—unless they choose to live, or are able to live, in an enclave isolated from the rest of Australia.

**What is Social Change?**

Before proceeding to a definition of the term social change, a word regarding the social theory on which it is based seems in place.

Every human society—be it simple and unspecialised or highly specialised and industrialised—faces certain problems; or we could say, it has certain needs which it must fulfil if it is to survive and continue as a viable society. These have been referred to as societal needs or prerequisites. Sociologists have grouped them under four headings: (1) pattern maintenance and tension management, (2) adaption, (3) goal attainment, and (4) integration. Briefly,

- **Pattern maintenance** refers to the need for members recruited into the society to be inculcated with, and to internalise, the norms, values, patterns of interaction, etc., peculiar to that society. **Tension management** refers to the need for the emotional disturbances, tensions, distractions, etc., of the members of the society to be ‘managed’ so that they can function effectively. The family, for example, would play a major role in meeting this need.
- **Adaption** refers to the need for a society to adapt and adjust to its social and non-social environment. It includes, in particular, the economic system. In the Aboriginal hunting and gathering economy, this included rules for sharing via kin obligations; sanctions for those who refused to share and take part in hunting and gathering; the allocation of young girls to the old men as a means of providing for their food needs.
- **Goal attainment** refers to the need to meet certain group goals, such as national security. In Aboriginal society this would have included the need for the performance
of the rituals required to guarantee the continuance of the physical universe and the plants and animals needed for survival.

- **Integration** refers to the need to maintain cohesion between the different units of a society, and the need to have individuals and groups co-operate for the common good. This would have included things like status allocation to guarantee cooperation between individuals.

A society, a group of people sharing a common culture, can be compared to a human body with its different structures, systems and their function. It is possible to differentiate the structures and systems of the human body, and their respective functions, for analytical purposes. However, it is important never to lose sight of the fact that the body is a whole, and that the various structures, systems and functions are all interconnected. The same applies to a society. Its various structures, systems and functions form a whole, and they are differentiated for analytical purposes only.

The sub-groups, the patterns of interaction, the values, the norms, the social institutions and the organisations, which a society has evolved in the process of meeting its needs, and still maintains, are known as social structures. They are the stable parts of the social system. They remain relatively unchanged in spite of changes in personnel holding the various positions or individual role performance.

To speak of social change, means to speak of changes in those structural parts of the social system, in those relatively stable parts, which dictate how and in what manner society meets its basic requirements. The Encyclopedia of Social Sciences defines it in these words:

> Social change is the significant alteration of social structures (that is, of patterns of social action and interaction), including consequences and manifestations of such structures embodied in norms (rules of conduct) values, and cultural products and symbols.13

**Factors Predisposing a Society to Social Change**

Whether a particular society is ‘ready’ for social change or not, depends very largely on the way in which the factors (variables) inherent in the situation, combine. Some combinations of the factors will predispose it to change, while others will predispose it to maintain the status quo.

I begin by detailing these factors. They are: (1) the inherent tendencies of the system itself, both to maintain the status quo and to change, (2) the social environment of the system, and (3) the non-social environment of the system.

1. **The inherent tendencies of the system**

I said earlier that the structural part of any social system represents the society’s answer to the functional problems with which it is faced in its particular, social and non-social environment. As such, the structure—as far as the members of the society are concerned—represents their best answer to their functional problems. (Whether this is objectively the case or not does not really matter, for it is the society’s subjective view which is determinative). Hence the particular system comes to be invested with a sanctity, which increases with time. It is passed on and inculcated into the members recruited into the society in such a way that they, too, come to see this as the only right and proper way of acting.14
This not only explains why social systems perpetuate themselves, but also why systems manifest such a strong tendency to maintain their current state. This latter fact, at times bemoaned by change agents, reformers and the like, is actually a very necessary part of social systems. For without the norms, values, institutions, etc., remaining relatively constant and stable, social interaction among members would become chaotic and end in the disintegration of the society itself. This is one characteristic of social systems.

The other characteristic is the very opposite—the inherent tendency towards change. It stems from factors such as: incomplete socialisation of new recruits, continuing changes of role occupants due to death and replacement, idiosyncrasies of individual role occupants, spatial and vertical mobility, competition, tensions resulting from disparity between ideal and actual performance, disequilibrium stemming from technological changes, strain and tension resulting from intra-group conflict, multiplicity of subcultures, ideological base, etc. Singly, or in combinations, they can predispose a society towards change by generating tensions and dissatisfaction with the current situation.

It should be noted that all these factors are not present and/or operating in all societies; some systemic tendencies are themselves the product of previous changes. Even when they are present in different societies, they do not always have the same ‘strength.’

2. The social environment of the system
In this age of rapid and pervasive communications, there are no totally isolated societies. They all have some contact, with other societies, resulting in exposure to new and different ideas, different methods of meeting functional problems, new cultural artefacts and the like. This exposure to, and impact of, the social environment can be influential in predisposing a society to change.

3. The non-social environment of the system
Each society lives in a non-social, as well as a social environment. The very nature of this environment or changes in this environment (whether caused by climatic variations, natural disasters or through the society’s own mismanagement of its natural resources) can cause dysfunction in the adaptive subsystem and help predispose a society to change.

As a general statement, it may be said that societies lying closer to the modern extreme of the traditional–modern continuum, are more predisposed towards change than societies lying towards the other extreme. The major reason for this is that these societies—as a result of prior changes—manifest a social structure whose very nature facilitates change. To name but a few of these structural characteristics: less tightly integrated partial structures; more rationally based; stress on individual rather than group rights; broader technological base; larger percentage of population with an urban mentality. Looked at from another angle—one to which we will pay more attention in a moment—it means that new innovations encounter less resistance in modern than in traditional societies.

In this connection, it is worth noting La Piere’s theory. He says that societies can be categorised as being either in a state of stable congruence, static incongruence or dynamic incongruence, depending on which conditions predominate.

Stable congruence is that state in which the various parts of the social system are functionally congruent and the internal forces are in balance. In this condition there
would be no motivation to change and the system therefore would continue to perpetuate itself.

Static incongruence is that state in which incongruencies exist within a social system as a result of dysfunctional change in one or more elements of the society. Change is precluded or doesn’t take place because the social system fails to produce individuals who are motivated to work such change or because the organisational and ideological components of the society as a whole operate to discourage change, or as is usually the case, because of both. Another factor, which often helps such a condition to persist, is that members of the society, out of apathy or greed, exploit the existing social conditions for personal gain. They are able to do this because the social disorganisation which characterises this state means that the normal social controls and sanctions are either not operating or are ineffective.

In a state of dynamic incongruence, the characteristics of the social system are such that the psychological tensions generated by incongruence between functionally interdependent social elements tend to be directed towards a modification of those elements, rather than an exploitation of them. La Piere further points out that it is only under a state of dynamic incongruence that functional changes occur. In this state the organisational and ideological components of the society do not operate to discourage change, rather by being relatively open, they encourage it.\textsuperscript{15}

What Causes Social Change?

Some sociologists regard the factors just listed as predisposing a society to social changes, as being the causes of social change. There is an element of truth in this because these factors are necessary if social change is to take place. In fact, it could be argued that without them there would be no change, because there would be no motivation for change.

But I prefer not to call them causes, because in the final analysis they do not bring about change. They only provide the necessary conditions, it could be said, the climate in which change can or is likely to take place. However, it is individuals who cause or bring about social change when it does take place. Here I agree with La Piere who holds that it is individuals working as innovators, advocates and adaptors who bring about social change.\textsuperscript{16}

The relationship between the factors predisposing a society to change and the individuals who ultimately cause change is a very intimate one. It is only when these two variables synchronise that change takes place. If a society is not ‘ready’ for change—for whatever reason—change will not take place, even if individuals are interested in and working to bring about change. The reverse is also true. If individuals are not motivated to work at bringing about change, then even if the society from a sociological point of view is ‘ready’ for change, change will not take place.

Often, of course, the situation is not as neat and tidy as the above may suggest. Instead of either the systemic factors or the personal factor blocking changes, it is both which are for and against change. For example:

Traditional Aboriginal societies were hunters and gatherers surviving by collecting what nature provided in their defined estates. Since the hunting and gathering of food, especially in the more arid parts of Australia, was often at best a precarious and uncertain means
of survival, the group evolved certain norms, which aided survival and at the same time provided a measure of economic security. One of these norms made it mandatory for members who stood in a certain relationship to each other to share their food. This meant, for example, that if an individual was successful in the hunt when the others were not, all would share in the spoil. Because of its obvious survival value, not only was this norm strongly inculcated into the new recruits, but it also carried heavy sanctions. On numerous occasions I have witnessed mothers inculcating children with this norm, even before they could talk. I have also had Aborigines tell me how they could not refuse food to a relation for fear of being ostracised.

In the context of the non-social environment in which the group traditionally lived, as well as the context of their entire social structure, this partial structure can be said to have been functional.

However, in the context of the present setting—the new environment and the need to adapt to it; 'working' for a living, etc.—this partial structure has become dysfunctional. It makes it possible for those who do not want to work to live off their relatives. This, in turn, means that many workers who wish to increase their standard of living cannot. It also removes economic pressures from youth who should be entering the labour market.

The dysfunction of this partial structure can be directly traced to the 'loss' of another partial structure, which in the past checked the kind of exploitation which is now taking place. This norm made it mandatory for everybody—men, women and children—to work at collecting food. Only aged or sick numbers were exempted.

Many members of the society are unhappy and frustrated with this situation. But, although they complain about it, they take no action to bring about a change. Why? Because this partial structure is dysfunctional in relation to its sub-system (adaptive), and yet it is still functional in relation to other parts of the system.

Looked at through the eyes of the Aborigines, the social and non-social environment into which they have been catapulted by the coming of the Europeans is to a large extent still an unknown and strange environment. The values and norms of the dominant culture are different from their own. Its technology is so much more advanced than theirs ever was, that there is no resemblance. Its economic system is complex and they understand it only in part. They are only beginning to learn the social and economic skills necessary to operate in this new environment. The sense of uncertainty and insecurity engendered by these and other related factors is often heightened by not being accepted by the dominant culture.

Given these circumstances, they need the support of their group. For only here are they fully accepted, only here can they find security. So they do not seek to change a dysfunctional partial structure, fearing that any change will rob them of the support of the group without which they feel they cannot survive. From their point of view, the benefits outweigh the disadvantages and so they continue to support their group despite the frustrations it causes them from time to time.

There is one other matter we should note before proceeding. It concerns the means or methods of bringing about social change. Without going into detail, the various methods can be categorised as either peaceful or violent. Which of these methods individuals and groups would be likely to use depends very largely on the following factors:
• The machinery the society possesses to deal with dysfunctional structures. A traditional society, which has been relatively isolated and static, may possess very ‘weak’ or even no machinery for this purpose, simply because it had no reason to develop any. On the other hand, a modern society is continuously confronted with change, and may possess well-developed machinery.

• The basic orientation of the society—whether it is democratic or autocratic.

• The strength of the individuals and groups who have a vested interest in maintaining the current situation, to block efforts at change.

• The strength of the individuals and groups aiming to bring about change.

By way of a general statement, it could be said that the more democratic a society is, the more developed will be its machinery for dealing with dysfunction. Therefore, there is a greater likelihood that change when it takes place, will be by peaceful means. Conversely, the more autocratic a society’s orientation, the greater will be the power of its vested interests and the weaker will be its machinery for dealing with dysfunction. Therefore, there is a greater likelihood that change, when it comes, will be by violent methods.

Rates and Degrees of Social Change

It will be obvious now that in the area of social change it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to make absolute and accurate predictions, because of the large number of dependent and independent variables operative in any situation. And what applies to social change in general applies equally to the question of rates and degrees of change. Furthermore, even when all the variables in a given situation are known, it is still not possible to make an absolute prediction, because the exact strength of the different variables or the precise nature of their interaction with each other is not known.

This is not to suggest that nothing of predictive value can be said; it is merely a reminder of the limitations of sociology. On the basis of the known variables, it is possible to make general predictions which hold true, because certain combinations or configurations of factors, invariably produce only certain results and not others. Bearing this in mind, it can be said that the rates and degrees of change in any given situation will be determined by the stage or position of the particular society on the traditional–modern continuum, that is, by the peculiar combination and interaction of the variables present in the situation.

To elaborate: It has been found that societies at different stages of their development manifest certain combinations of variables which hold fairly constant for all societies at that stage. This fact has made it possible to broadly classify societies in accordance with their major characteristics. So, societies that are religious based, possess a minimum of differentiation and specialisation of labour, possess a simple technology, survive on hunting and collecting and/or subsistence agriculture, live in smaller communities in some form of extended family, allocate status largely by ascription, have extremely limited spatial and vertical mobility, are either pre-literate or largely illiterate, and are largely rural, are classified as traditional. On the other hand, societies manifesting characteristics which are largely the opposite—rational based, industrialised, urbanised, etc.—are classified as modern.
The concepts traditional and modern should be seen as points at the two extremes of a continuum. They are useful as descriptive and analytical tools, but should not be thought of as absolutes when applied to a particular society. They spell out the major characteristics and biases of a society, not the minute details, or the variations between societies at roughly the same stage of development. For example, when we say a modern society allocates status by achievement, we do not mean that ascription of status is lacking completely. Rather, that it is strongly biased in that direction. Achievement is its major means of allocation, ascription playing a relatively minor role.

The use of the term continuum in connection with the concepts traditional and modern not only permits the placement of societies at intervals along this line (in accordance with their major characteristics) but also allows for the idea of movement—an important aspect in any study of social change. It is with this aspect that we are concerned here.

The rates and degrees of social change refer to the overall ‘pace’ of change in general and the extent of any particular change. These, as we have said, depend on the stage reached by the society on the traditional–modern continuum. In general, the more traditional a society, the slower will be both the rates and degrees of change, and conversely, the more modern a society, the faster will be the rates and degrees of change. The reasons for this are not hard to find.

Earlier attention was drawn to two inherent characteristics of social systems: the constellation of factors operating to maintain the current situation, and the forces working to bring about change. In traditional societies, the former are stronger than the latter, because the very factors which can predispose or prepare a society for change (and are more in evidence in modern societies) are either embryonic or entirely lacking. For example, phenomena are more likely to be accepted without question if a society has a religious base, than if it has a rational base. The use of ascription instead of achievement as a means of status allocation works against the growth of individual initiative and freedom—essential prerequisites for social change. Isolation, illiteracy and lack of spatial mobility act as barriers to the diffusion of new ideas. We could take up, one by one, all the characteristics of a traditional society, and show how these work against change, but the above examples will suffice for this purpose. On the other hand, the inherent processes working to bring about change are stronger and more developed in modern societies, and therefore rates and degrees of change in these societies will be greater.

There is one other reason why rates and degrees of change will be slower and of less magnitude in traditional societies: the various components of the social system are more tightly integrated and interdependent. This means that the impetus to change in one partial structure, will meet stronger opposition from the other structural components, thereby effecting the rates and degrees of change. Modern societies, with their more ‘loose-fit’ (Moore) structure, their more heterogeneous character, do not face this problem to the same extent. Furthermore, in traditional societies, there is, relatively speaking, a greater need for complementary changes to accompany any specific change, if a change is to be successful, or even to take place at all.

However, this does not mean that no change can or will take place in a partial structure without complementary changes in other structures. What was said was merely a reminder that the interlocking nature of structures can and does act as a brake on changes, not that they stop them entirely.
This ‘systemic resistance’ of which mention has been made has one other effect noticeable in situations of social change: rates and degrees of change throughout the system will tend to be uneven. Changes in some structural parts will take place at a faster rate than in others. The disequilibrium this causes can itself create momentum towards further changes. The likelihood of this has been suggested by Ogburn’s theory of ‘social lag’. What has been suggested here extends his theory beyond leads caused by technological changes and social lags, to leads and lags between different parts of the social structure for whatever reason.

In concluding this section, I want to draw attention to a hypothesis put forward by Moore. He says that aesthetic forms and super-empirical beliefs are two components of social systems which are relatively autonomous. By this he does not mean that they ‘have no connections with their social settings, but only that their autonomy is greater than is true of most common structural features of societies.’ He goes on to say ‘such relative autonomy would have two implications for the analysis of social change: relatively high and long insulation from the effects of other systemic changes, but, correlative, fairly ‘easy’ autonomous changes, including those of external origins, owing to the meagre links to the balance of the system.’

I have found this hypothesis very interesting, because it helps to explain phenomena I have observed in my association with Aborigines, and could not otherwise account for. To give an example: The acceptance of the Christian faith did not affect other societal values, some of which appeared—at least to me—to be incongruent with it, for example, living off your relatives.

Moore believes ‘that their relative immunity to intricate systemic linkage derives from the circumstance that neither aesthetic canons nor supernatural beliefs are subject to rational calculation in the ordinary sense nor to scientific or experimental modification.’

**Planned Change and Social Change**

Planned change has been defined as ‘change which derives from a purposeful decision to effect improvements in a personality system or social system and which is achieved with the help of professional guidance.’ It is in this sense that the term will be used.

The interest and ‘faith’ in planned change has grown considerably with the establishment of independent national states following the comparatively rapid dissolution of colonial empires after the end of World War II. These newly independent nations, often after centuries of being exploited as sources of raw material for the more industrially advanced nations, themselves now opted for change and development as a means of raising their standard of living to levels comparable to those found in the more affluent countries. But how was this to be done in the shortest possible time and without causing the kind of social dislocation, disorganisation and human suffering, which accompanied industrialisation and modernisation in the West?

At least part of the answer to this question was deemed to lie in comprehensive and purposeful planning for change: that is, in planning which focused on the whole spectrum of what had to be changed—health, education, primary and secondary industries and the like—rather than on individual problems in isolation. In planning which rationally analysed situations, set priorities and allocated resources (human and material) to meet...
these problems. Through this kind of planning it was hoped to bring about rapid change and development which would also be orderly and coordinated and least costly in terms of human suffering.

The more advanced nations, too, became increasingly interested in the idea of planned change as a means of uplifting and advancing socially and economically disadvantaged sections of their own communities. In a nutshell, this is also what Australia attempted with its Aboriginal communities, with the assimilation policy.

It is a matter of history that efforts at planned change have not always been successful. It seems that one of the prime reasons for this failure can be traced to a lack of appreciation and understanding of how societies function and how social change takes place. Therefore, what I intend to do in this section is draw attention to those aspects of social theory—especially as they relate to change and social change—which can decisively influence the outcome of any programme of planned change, and which should be born in mind when planning.

1. Structure and Function

Structure and function are as intimately related as the two sides of a coin and can be separated only for analytical purposes. For the particular way in which a society meets its functional problems not only reflects its structure, but is rooted in its structure, and is supported by its structure. The ramifications of this for planned change are clear: any attempt to change the way in which a society meets a functional problem, must simultaneously seek to change the structure in which it is rooted and which it reflects. Otherwise, the attempted change is likely to fail completely.

Looked at from a different angle, it can be said that the ways in which a society meets its functional problems are like the parts of an iceberg which protrude above the water. They are highly visible, and for that very reason became the target of planned change. The structure of a society, on the other hand, is like the submerged parts of an iceberg: invisible, and for that reason often forgotten or ignored in planning. However, as the captain of a ship who ignores the submerged part of the iceberg when charting his course is likely to wreck his ship, so planned change which ignores the structure of a society when planning, is likely to fail disastrously in its objective.

What I have called the structural aspect is sometimes referred to as the ‘human element’ or ‘human factor’ in programmes of planned change. However, whatever it is called, it is without a doubt one of the most crucial aspects of any planned change.

The fact that planned change invariably involves structural change of a greater or lesser degree should alert planners to the relationship between planned change and social change. Social change has been defined as significant alteration in the structural part of a social system. Consequently, where planned change involves the significant alteration of structures, it can also be defined as planned social change.

2. Structural Interlocking

It is not without good reason that societies are sometimes referred to as social systems. This use of the word system underlines several characteristic features of any society, namely that it has individual units (parts), that these units are interconnected, that they interact with each other according to definite patterns, and that together they form a complete unit, a whole.
These characteristics—especially the inter-relatedness of parts—pose two problems of which a planner must be cognisant. The first is that any attempt to effect a change in one part is more than likely to meet resistance from related parts. Furthermore, this resistance can be expected to increase in proportion to the degree of incongruence of the contemplated change with the existing related parts. The second is that any change taking place in one part can either cause changes to take place in related parts, or set up pressures for change to take place, by causing disequilibrium in the sub-system.

Planners can in part neutralise these tendencies by:

• Developing a multi-pronged rather than consecutive approach to planned change, that is an approach which simultaneously aims at changes in all the related parts, rather than change in one part after the other. This is of particular importance in traditional societies which have a more ‘tight knit’ structure than modern societies.

• Seeking to graft the desired change onto the existing structure by showing its continuity with what is sought to be changed. In this way the proposed change can be legitimised by the existing value base. This in turn would minimise resistance.

• Planning not only for the initial change, but also for the secondary and tertiary changes, which can occur as a result of the primary change.

3. Change is brought about by individuals
Since, as mentioned earlier, it is individuals and groups who in the final analysis cause social change, it is of paramount importance that any programme of planned change seeks the co-operation of those among whom the change is contemplated. Ways in which this co-operation can be gained include:

• Actively engaging the client system in the process from its very inception—not imposing on it a completed plan.

• Beginning the change process at the point of the client’s felt needs.

• Recognising and working through the existing leadership structure.

4. The ‘climate’ of change:
Earlier attention was drawn to the factors which predispose or prepare a social system for change. Some of these are relevant to planned change and can be utilised in the process by creating a climate conductive for change, for example, exposing the client system to new ways of meeting functional problems.

Modernisation as Social Change
While it is not necessary for our purposes to go into all the aspects of modernisation—the preconditions, concomitants and the like—it will be useful to have a definition of the concept and sketch its relationship to social change.

Modernisation has been defined as ‘a “total” transformation of a traditional or pre-modern society into the type of technology and associated social organisation that characterise the “advanced”, economically prosperous and relatively politically stable nations of the Western World.’ Given this definition, what is its relationship to social change?

First, modernisation is a type of social change—in fact the most common type on the contemporary scene. Most, if not all, societies undergoing change today are
modernising. They are transforming their traditional technologies into types found in the more advanced countries: subsistence to market oriented agriculture, increasing use of inanimate sources of power, and as a concomitant are also undergoing change in their social organization, for example, moving from consanguinal to nuclear type families. So when this type of social change is implied, modernisation can be used as a synonym for social change.

Second, modernisation implies a certain direction of change, change toward those types already found in the more developed countries. The term ‘social change’, of itself, does not carry this connotation. As a concept it only defines what change is, without implying any direction. Therefore, when implying this direction of social change, the term modernisation or modernising is useful.

Third, the term social change is more exclusive and at the same time more inclusive, than modernisation. More exclusive, in the sense that it can rightly be used only when structural change is involved, and yet also more inclusive, in that it can be used for structural change in a modern or traditional direction.

Finally, modernisation as a process, even when it is not social change, can be the means of stimulating social change. For example, a traditional society embarking on a programme of industrialisation or literacy can be said to be modernising. This in itself is not social change, but it can stimulate and lead to social change.
3.1 SUPER-EMPIRICAL BELIEFS

In the chapter devoted to the nature of the Aboriginal identity, I touched on the three foundational aspects of the Aboriginal culture—viz., super-empirical beliefs, land, and kinship. We will now take a more detailed look at those aspects, as well as authority, cooperation and socialisation. As we do this, two things need to be born in mind. The first is that the totality of the Aboriginal culture is grounded in what has been called ‘The Dreamtime’. The second, that while we look at the various cultural items separately, this is for analytical purposes only. They are tightly integrated, and as seen earlier, to speak of one often means to speak of the others.

The methodology I intend to follow is as follows. First, to describe the specific cultural item/system/process. Second, to show the impact that contact with Australian society has had on it. And third, to tease out the implications for Aborigines today as they face a physical and social environment different from that for which their culture was a response.

‘The Dreamtime’

TGH Strehlow, an authority on the Arrarnta, gives this description of the Arrarnta’s beliefs about the earth and the beginning of time.

The earth, so the Aranda and the other inland tribes used to say, was uncreated and eternal. In the beginning it had been a bare plain, devoid of all physical features and all forms of life. Then came the time when the great multitude of supernatural beings known as totemic ancestors emerged from their eternal sleep under the surface of the plain. The sacred sites where they emerged turned into soaks, waterholes, claypans, caves, and so forth. Each of these supernatural beings was normally, though not invariably, linked invisibly with one particular animal or plant. Thus a native cat ancestor generally moved about in human form, but could turn at will into a native cat; and from him the native cats of his original district were believed to have descended, as well as the human beings conceived there. The latter were regarded as reincarnations of his ancestor, or his supernatural children… hence any native belonging, say, to the kangaroo totem would not, except as a last resort, kill or eat kangaroos, since he believed that both he and they were descended from the same supernatural being. This, then, was the link between any man and the animal or plant he regarded as his totem; he shared the same life with this animal or plant… These totemic ancestors were also believed to have created all the prominent physical features of the present-day landscape—its ranges, hills, rocks, plains, sand hills, rivers, springs, and so on. At the end of their labours and their wandering these supernatural personages either returned to the earth whence they had first sprung, or changed into sacred rocks, tree, or tjurrunga slabs. They slept again in eternal sleep, as they had done at the beginning of time. But they retained their power to send down rain, and to fill the earth with plants and animals of their own totem, whenever they were summoned by the magic increase rites, in which their human reincarnations intoned the sacred verses that they themselves had first sung during their own labours of creation.

Spencer and Gillen called the period of time when these supernatural spirit beings were active, ‘The Dreamtime’. (As misleading as this term is, it is now generally used
even by Aborigines, to refer to this period of time. Simply because it is so widely used, I too have taken to using it rather than coining a new term.) The sites where these supernatural beings emerged from the earth, where they returned to earth, sites associated with significant events in their travels and activity, sites where the *tjurrunga* are stored, are often referred to as ‘sacred’ sites by Australians. Sites of significance or taboo places would be more correct, since there are no Aboriginal words having the meaning that we associate with the word sacred.

The concept of ‘The Dreamtime’ is foundational and determinative for all aspects of Aboriginal culture—for the forms of social organization, for the means of food production, for rules governing land ownership and land management, to name but a few.

As Strehlow pointed out, these supernatural beings, (also called mythical beings, ancestral spirit beings, totemic ancestors) who were active at the beginning of time, could and did appear in both human form and in the form of an animal or a vegetable or natural phenomenon. So, for example, a supernatural being having the essence of a kangaroo could, and did, appear as a human, but then also as a kangaroo. Similarly a supernatural being with the essence of mulga seed, could, and did, appear as a human being, and then also as mulga seed.

Wherever these supernatural beings wandered, they left behind life cells. According to the Western Arrarnta, these were believed to enter pregnant women and become reincarnated in their children. The moment when a woman first became aware of her pregnancy was deemed to be the moment the supernatural being had entered her. Her husband and the elders would question the woman, and having ascertained the place where she first became aware of her pregnancy, determine which of the supernatural beings had become incarnated in her. They would do this by comparing the location where she became aware of her pregnancy with the trails the various supernatural beings had travelled. The child was then said to have the altjirra of the supernatural being who had become reincarnated in it. In English the reincarnated altjirra is referred to as a person’s totem. It is this belief that creates the close bond between an Aborigine and his land, not just any land, but the land of his conception and birth—the land with which he is linked through a common *altjirra*.

**Totemism**

This basic Aboriginal belief, which underlies their whole religious structure, has been called totemism. Elkin has defined this as:

> … a view of nature and life, of the universe and man, which colours and influences the Aborigines’ social groupings and mythologies, inspires their rituals and links them to the past. It unites them with nature’s activities and species in a bond of mutual life giving, and imparts confidence amidst the vicissitudes of life.28

The Berndts accept this definition and add:

> Even broadly, it has to do with a view of the world in which man is an integral part of nature, not sharply distinct or differing in quality from other natural species but sharing with them the same life essence. In the formative period, the various species had not finally
adopted the shapes in which we see them today. Their physical manifestations were a little more fluid than they are now. Many mythical beings, all through Aboriginal Australia, were either more or less than human, according to the way in which we look at it. The life force which they embodied was not limited to a human manifestation, but could find expression also in the shape of some other species. A goanna ancestor may have looked like an ordinary human being, but at the same time he was potentially capable of changing his shape and taking the form of a goanna. This identification in the mythological past has continuing consequences to-day. Because of it, there is said to be a special relationship between certain human beings and, for instance, that particular kind of goanna.

Totemism, meant that Aborigines viewed the world in which they lived (to use Buber's terminology), not as an 'It', but as a 'Thou'. They responded to their world, as they responded to other people in terms of an 'I–Thou' relationship. What the Frankforts et alii have said, aptly fits the worldview of the Aborigines.

The ancients like the modern savages, saw man always as part of society and society as imbedded in nature and dependent upon cosmic forces. For them nature and man did not stand in opposition and did not therefore, have to be apprehended by different modes of cognition. The fundamental difference between the attitudes of modern and ancient man as regards the surrounding world is this: for modern, scientific man the phenomenal world is primarily an 'It'; for ancient and also for primitive man it is a 'Thou.'

Increase Ceremonies
Related to this totemic worldview and flowing from it, are other key beliefs. The most important of these is the belief that the words used by the supernatural beings at the beginning of time to fashion and create their own species/natural phenomena are known to the fully initiated men of their respective totemic brotherhoods. Furthermore, they believed that when they intoned these words, using the correct ritual, they guaranteed the continuance of their own species/natural phenomenon. In this way, with each totemic group performing its creation ceremonies, they collectively maintained the orderly functioning of the universe and their own survival. As Strehlow has stated:

... each Aranda local group was believed to perform an indispensable economic service not only for itself but for the population around its borders as well. Thus, the Eastern Aranda Purula-Kamara local group of Ujitja was believed to have the responsibility of creating rain for the whole of the surrounding countryside by the performance of the Ujitja rain ceremonies... In the same way, the members of the kangaroo, euro, emu, carpet snake, grass seed, and other totemic clans were regarded as having the power of bringing about the increase of their totemic plants or animals not only within their local group areas, but throughout the adjoining regions as well.

It should come as no surprise, then, that the creative words first used by the supernatural beings were the most prized, and closely guarded, by the senior members of their respective brotherhoods. They taught these words only to men who were fully initiated and deemed to be totally trustworthy. To divulge these words to women, children, the uninitiated or strangers, carried the death penalty. Writing about creation/increase ceremonies Strehlow states:
... the efficacy of all sacred or magical ritual was believed to depend upon all actions being performed in the traditional pattern, as instituted by the super-natural beings themselves, and upon all appropriate secret verses being intoned correctly as composed by the supernatural beings: these were regarded, in fact, as the original words of creation which had been uttered by these beings. Then again many increase ceremonies centred around the ground paintings, being the circles and other forms put upon the ground after the ground had been saturated with blood from the veins of men believed to be of the same substance as the supernatural beings celebrated in the increase rites. The ground painting was accordingly believed to be capable of yielding forth new life because it had been thus quickened, as if by the beings who had instituted the rituals and with the same creative words first spoken by them.32

This belief was of fundamental significance for the Aborigines. Their technology gave them no control over their physical environment. They were entirely at the mercy of the whims of nature. Given this setting, the faith that they continued the creative work of the supernatural spirit beings, gave them a sense of power over their environment. From this they gained strength, and a perspective which enabled them to face up to the contingencies of life. As the Berndts have said:

The here-and-now aspects of getting food, having water to drink, surviving hazards of one kind or another, are set in wider perspective. There is reassurance from the past, and hope for the future, an affirmation that man is not entirely helpless, whatever hardships he may suffer at times. There is the conviction that he can intervene to some degree, do something to influence the forces which impinge on him … In other words, people are not entirely at the mercy of events: they are less vulnerable than they may seem.33

For the Arrarnta, the creative words used by the supernatural beings to fashion and create the present universe, are known as tjurrunga rretnya, and are included in the category known as tjurrunga. Because of their alleged potency, they are sometimes referred to by Aborigines as their bank. They see them as the source of their wealth, in the same way as they see the banks with their money as the source of other Australian's wealth.

The Tjurrunga, the Constitutional Documents of Aboriginal Societies
The stories of the lives and actions of the supernatural beings were enshrined in the myths and traditions owned by the various patriclans. These stories too were known as tjurrunga by the Arrarnta. They were handed down orally from generation to generation. They were said to contain the essential 'blueprints' of life on which the people who were the reincarnations of their respective supernatural beings were to model their lives. In this sense the tjurrunga can be called the constitutional documents of Aboriginal societies. They served, and in more traditional societies still serve, the same function that the Australian constitution does in Australian society. Consensus, both inter and intra Aboriginal societies, was, and is, obtained by 'legal' argument based on the tjurrunga. Since these 'blueprints' carried the implied command of the supernatural beings, they cannot be substantially changed by men. Today, Aborigines often refer to the contents of these tjurrunga by the generic English term 'law.'
Sickness and Health
As could be expected, sickness in Aboriginal societies is also linked to ‘The Dreamtime’. Sickness is said to result, primarily, from one of two things. Either a person has had contact with a ‘sickness’ site, or some other person or persons have cast an evil spell on him/her using an incantation(s) that one of the supernatural beings had used to harm another of the supernatural beings during the creation period. Healing is accessed through the ngangkara (traditional healers) who have knowledge of the healing words that the supernatural beings used to heal themselves. These ngangkara also have the power to remove foreign objects from the body of a sick person and/or restore their kurruna (soul) if their kurruna has wandered away and become lost, or been accidentally displaced from their body.

Major Sociological Differences between Traditional and Modern Religions
Differentiation, the factor which more than any other distinguishes a modern society from a traditional society, also accounts for what is, from a sociological point of view, one, if not the most important, difference between a traditional and modern religious system. In traditional societies, religion is a diffuse phenomenon, whereas in modern societies it has become a separate institution with its own organisation. O’Dea has summed this up very well.

In primitive and archaic societies, religion is a diffuse phenomenon; many forms of human association, from the family to the work group, have in some important respects a religious character. In these societies, religion is one aspect of the life of all social groups. However, religious and magical specialists appear early in societal development, and religious individualism may be found in contemporary non-literate societies. In time, organisations whose main function is religious make their appearance. These specifically religious organisations are found generally in societies in which an internal differentiation of function and consequent stratification have developed. The appearance of such specifically religious organisations represents one aspect of the increasing division of labour and specificity of function which is an important attribute of urban societies. In traditional societies the same social groups provide satisfaction for both expressive and adaptive needs; in modern societies, organisations which meet adaptive needs tend to be separated out from those which provide an outlet for expressive needs.34

The above description of religion in traditional societies aptly fits the religion of the Aborigines. It was diffuse, and penetrated all aspects of the group’s life. As R.M. Berndt has said:

The religion of an indigenous native group which has had little or no alien contact is a living faith, something quite inseparable from the pattern of every day life and thought. …. There is no sharp demarcation between secular and sacred life.35

Effects of European Settlement
It is fashionable to blame Christian missions for destroying Aboriginal culture by destroying the Aboriginal religious belief system—the very foundation undergirding the culture. I will be dealing with this accusation in greater detail later. Suffice it to say here that his accusation cannot withstand rigorous analysis. The most serious blow to
the religious belief system was not delivered by Christian missions but by Aborigines eating non-indigenous foods—damper and beef—and drinking tea. Put another way, it was the inability of the belief system to validate itself in the face of the different adaptive system introduced by the European settlers that ‘white-anted’ the Aboriginal culture. The Aborigines believed they had food and water because of the primary creative activity of the supernatural beings, and because they also were able to enter into, and continue, this creative activity. In their increase rituals, they created the rain, they created the seeds from which the various plant foods grew, they were able to create and increase the number of kangaroos and other game they needed to survive. And if the kangaroos became thin, they could fatten them up!

The settlers, who came and took their land, appeared to have no ceremonies. They neither acknowledged the ancestral spirit beings of ‘The Dreamtime’, nor did they live by the rules laid down by them. And yet they had an unlimited supply of food—and much of it tastier than their own! They appeared to perform no increase ceremonies, and yet their cattle increased and provided them with a continuous supply of meat.

The Aborigines did note this fact, but drew the wrong conclusions. From their cultural perspective they assumed that the settlers must have had their own ‘increase rituals’, but were unwilling to share the ‘rituals’ with them. (Sometimes referred to by Aborigines as the ‘whiteman’s secret’.) The first generations of Aborigines ate European food and continued, wherever possible, to perform their ancient rituals, all the while wondering what might be the settlers superior ‘increase rituals’. However, as time went by the rituals seem to have become less and less meaningful, and to the younger generation appeared more and more incongruent.

I was reminded of this latter, after spending an afternoon with a group of older men on a pastoral property to the north-east of Alice Springs. I had enjoyed the afternoon listening and recording various chants. (These chants were connected with the wanderings and activities of certain supernatural beings.) As we were returning to the main camp, I asked one of the older men whether he too had enjoyed the afternoon and especially the chanting. Rubbing his chest, he said, ‘Makes me feel proper good inside’. I then asked him whether he and the other older men still taught these chants to the younger men. With obvious sadness he replied: “They don’t want to learn. When we call them they ask us: “Are you going to give us money?”” In other words, what’s in it for us? You aren't going to pay us money for learning these songs, and we are not going to get any money by learning these songs, and yet money is what we need if we are to live! For many of the younger generation, the old beliefs and religious practices no longer have the meaning they had for the older generation. And yet the idea that what is, is the result of ritual, is still quite strong and influences their understanding of the Australian economy.

The Challenges Posed by the Traditional Belief System
For the more traditional Aborigines who aspire to a standard of living similar to that enjoyed by Australians generally, their traditional belief system poses challenges, particularly in relation to the Australian economy and their health.

To take the economy first. While the basic orientation formed by their religious beliefs remain a part of the more traditional Aboriginal people's outlook, it will constitute a barrier to their full participation in the Australian economy—a prerequisite if they
want to enjoy a standard of living similar to that enjoyed by Australians. It will have become clear when we considered increase ceremonies, that the Aborigines’ religious beliefs injected a large element of ‘outside magical’ intervention into the working of their economic system. This perspective has carried over into the more traditional Aborigines’ attitude towards the workings of the Australian economy and finds expression in the thought that Australians too have ‘increase ceremonies’ through which they produce their wealth, but they will not share it with them. This is ‘Cargo Cult’ thinking—a somewhat logical attitude for people from a traditional culture, where religion is a part of the ‘technology’ of production.

Even when more traditional Aborigines are involved in the Australian economy, that is, being employed and working for a wage, they don’t really understand the connection between work and wealth. There are a variety of reasons for this. One is that Aborigines still equate employment (work) with collecting—hunting game and collecting bush foods, and do not see work as the means through which wealth (money, house, car, etc.) can be acquired/created. Wealth, to their way of thinking, is the result of prior activity by Australians, corresponding to their increase ceremonies. From their cultural perspective, this is quite logical and the proof, for them, can be seen in the disparity in the living standard enjoyed by themselves and Australians.

The ramifications of this cultural perspective result in the more traditional Aborigines:

• showing little interest in education and/or learning skills which would provide them with entry into better paying jobs, or even any jobs at all.
• showing little interest in seeking a job and/or keeping a job.
• showing little interest in the Western education of their children. Without a good Western education the children are excluded from the economy.

The Aborigines’ traditional beliefs as they relate to the economy are entirely incompatible with the workings of a modern economy. Hence, if the more traditional Aborigines genuinely want to participate in the Australian economy, they will need to differentiate their traditional beliefs from the adaptive sub-system (economy). In the increase ceremonies, the adaptive and expressive sub-systems are fused. In fact they are so entwined, and so mutually interdependent, that they really cannot be separated. The economy supported the religious beliefs: the religious beliefs supported the economy. Unless the more traditional Aborigines manage to break this nexus, they will lack the ideological motivation needed for genuine participation in the Australian economy—the situation that currently pertains.

Second, the matter of health or rather the lack of it. As stated previously, Aborigines viewed sickness as resulting primarily from contact with (sickness) places or evil incantations. While the more traditional Aborigines remain committed to this understanding of the causes of sickness, it is difficult to see any substantial improvement in Aboriginal health, irrespective of how much money is poured into Aboriginal health services. The more traditional Aborigines need to appreciate that health problems like cirrhosis of the liver, diabetes, kidney failure and the like are not the result of arrangkultha (evil incantations) but more often than not result from excessive alcohol consumption, bad diet, lack of exercise, etc.
The challenge for government and non-government agencies committed to improving the social and economic condition of Aborigines is to help Aborigines tackle the cultural issues which are blocking their way to an improved lifestyle.

The challenge to the Christian faith posed by the traditional belief system will be taken up when we look at Aboriginal culture and the Christianity, and compare their differing understanding of the origins of the world, creation, preservation and the like.

3.2 LAND

The Aboriginal land-owning clans (local patrilineal descent groups) believed that their land—that is, the land they claimed as their own—had been deeded to them by their totemic ancestors. They did this on the basis of the indivisible bond which existed between themselves and their land, that is, the same altjirra (totems) at ‘rest’ in their land were reincarnated in them.

In this section we will look at various themes associated with land—the title deeds to land, determination of land boundaries, land management, land care and the like. We will begin by looking at the basic principles by which the ownership of land was determined.

Together with other senior Finke River Mission staff, I learnt these principles—as well as other matters associated with land—from senior Aboriginal men as they explained these principles to us in the course of responding to the Commonwealth government’s proposals contained in the Northern Territory Land Rights Bill 1975. The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, when tabling the Bill, had requested feedback from interested parties on what the government was proposing.37 We, the senior Finke River Mission staff, then undertook the task of explaining the Bill to the traditional landowners with whom the Mission was in contact, using the Western Arrarnta language, and when necessary Western Arrarnta speakers who also knew other Aboriginal languages. We then taped the responses of these men in their language, translated them into English, and wherever possible, read them back to the men concerned, and had them sign the transcripts when they were satisfied that the translations accurately reflected their earlier statements. The Finke River Mission then forwarded these responses to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and all other Commonwealth Parliamentarians.38

The senior Finke River Mission staff incorporated the major points made by the traditional landowners into a Summary Statement. This was attached to the traditional landowners’ submissions and forwarded to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and the members of the Commonwealth Parliament in 1976, to provide the Minister and other Parliamentarians with a succinct overview of the material contained in the individual submissions. The following, outlining the basic principles of traditional land ownership in central Australia, is quoted from this Summary Statement.

Basic principles of traditional land ownership in central Australia

Traditional land ownership in central Australia cannot be understood except in relation to principles of kinship on the one hand and tjurrunga on the other. The most important kin grouping in relation to land ownership is the patrilineal descent group, made up of people descended from a common male ancestor through the male line. Each patrilineal descent
group belongs to a particular tract of land and its members are called "pmarakurtwia" (people belonging to the land, land owners) for that particular area of land. A clearly defined system of leadership, and one recognised leader, exists within each of these groups. The female descendants from the male line are part of the patrilineal land-owning group, but only fully initiated males are taught the secret knowledge relating to the land and its "tjurrunga." The children from the females in the group belong to different land-owning groups, following descent through their respective male lines. However, male descendants from women belonging to the land-owning group are "kurtungurla" (custodians or managers of the "tjurrunga," and so also of the land) for that group. People have links with other tracts of land through other descent lines (for example, mother’s mother or father’s mother), but it is only in relation to father’s and father’s father’s country, that traditional ownership rightly exists.

Inextricably linked with each particular tract of land are particular "tjurrunga." They are linked in such a way that ownership of the "tjurrunga" necessarily means ownership of the land and vice versa. The "tjurrunga" are not merely the sacred objects but are also, more importantly, the sites, myths, songs, designs and ceremonies connected with particular totemic ancestors whose travels, actions, and places of abode are related in the myths and song-cycles. The travel routes followed by the totemic ancestors and recorded in the "tjurrunga" pass through successive tracts of land owned by various distinct land-owning groups. The points at which the "tjurrunga" pass from one tract of country to another are recorded in the "tjurrunga as "pmara arrkngarta" (boundary points), and in this way the areas of land are defined. The songs, myths and ceremonies within these areas are the exclusive property of the people of that land.

Aborigines assert that the principles applying to land and "tjurrunga" ownership are fundamental to Aboriginal 'law' and are rigorously adhered to still today. The penalties for infringement in relation to land and "tjurrunga" are very severe, including the death penalty. Only actual landowners, together with their "kurtungurla" (custodians or managers) are regarded as having legitimate authority and control in relation to their particular tract of land and the "tjurrunga" associated with it. Any failure to acknowledge this authority, or any attempt to supplant it, is regarded as a serious offence, and if persisted in can become a capital offence.39

Implications Flowing from the Principles
Before proceeding to other matters associated with land, it is important to draw out the implications of the above principles, for two reasons. First, it will throw additional light on the Aboriginal land-owning and land management system—a system quite unlike the Australian system. Second, it will highlight the problems that the more traditional Aborigines had, and still have, with the form of land rights granted to Territory Aborigines under the Northern Territory Land Rights Act (1976).40 I will proceed by highlighting the principles and then drawing out the implications.

- The patrilineal descent group’s title to its discrete parcel of land was, and is, its "tjurrunga." These are held jointly by the "Pmarakurtwia" and "Kurtungurla,"41 and cannot legitimately be held by any one else. The "tjurrunga" are jealously guarded and even the unauthorised singing of the "tjurrunga retnya" (chants) is severely punished.
• Only the senior *pmarakurtwia* together, with his *kurtungurla*, can legitimately speak, or negotiate, about matters relating to his country.

The Northern Territory land rights legislation was intended to serve as a legal carapace, providing traditional owners with security of tenure and safeguards against exploitation by other Australians, while, at the same time allowing them to use and manage their land according to their traditions. That was the intention. However, because of the structures and institutions established by the legislation, the effects have been quite different. The legislation created land trusts to hold the titles to discrete parcels of Aboriginal land on behalf of the traditional owners and gave land councils the sole authority to speak and negotiate on behalf of the traditional owners, so contravening the two most important principles of traditional land ownership. As a result, while the legislation may have stopped Australian exploitation and expropriation of Aboriginal land, it has actually facilitated the exploitation of the traditional owners by the land councils and other Aborigines. The legislation has effectively robbed the many *pmarakurtwia* and *kurtungurla* of effective control of their land.42

**Authority in Aboriginal Societies is Land Based**

However, it isn’t only loss of control over their land that the *pmarakurtwia* and *kurtungurla* have suffered through the legislation, but also a loss of their authority. In Aboriginal societies authority is indivisibly linked to land. Not any land, but the land with which the *pmarakurtwia* are linked through their common *altjirra*. The government by not granting the *pmarakurtwia* and *kurtungurla* direct title to their land has effectively ‘white-anted’ the whole traditional authority structure. This has had, and continues to have, disastrous consequences for Aborigines, for no society can function without an effective authority structure. The evidence for this can be seen in the shocking statistics on domestic violence, substance abuse, rape, incest and the like.

By undermining the traditional authority structure, the legislation has also destroyed the one effective channel that governments would have had for meaningful interaction with Aboriginal societies—viz., the traditional authorities. The *pmarakurtwia* and his *kurtungurla*, as the authority for the country, are the only ones who can legitimately speak about their country, legitimately enter into agreements and contracts relating to their country, legitimately control ingress and egress to and from country, legitimately make arrangements with governments regarding health, education, employment, law and order and the like, on their land. It is not as if the *pmarakurtwia* and *kurtungurla* are directly involved in all these matters, but their effective control makes it possible for the kin to carry out their duties.

Having neutered the traditional Aboriginal authority structure through its form of land rights, the government has further compounded the problem facing Aboriginal authorities by forcing Aboriginal ‘communities’ to incorporate themselves under Australian laws in order to qualify for government assistance. This has made it possible for people without legitimate authority—in Aboriginal eyes—to take on positions of authority in Aboriginal ‘communities’. These people, because they are not encompassed in the traditional authority structure, do not consider themselves accountable to the Aboriginal leaders or the Aboriginal people, nor are the leaders or the people able to
hold them accountable. Consequently, they act very much as a law unto themselves, and the government for fear of being accused of acting paternalistically, and interfering in Aboriginal self-determination, don’t hold them accountable either. The results can be seen in the breakdown of law and order—a situation bordering on anarchy in many Aboriginal ‘communities’, the misuse of funds, and the destruction of housing and other infrastructure on Aboriginal settlements.

**Minerals and Mining**
Minerals, including gas and oil, are seen by the more traditional Aborigines as having been deposited in the ground by their supernatural ancestors during the ‘Dreamtime.’ Hence the *pmarakurtwia* and their *kurtungurla* believe they belong to them, and any discussions or negotiations regarding exploration and/or mining must take place directly with them and the mining company wishing to explore, or mine for minerals, on their land. They also believe that a fair proportion of the royalties collected by government on behalf of Aborigines rightly belong to them, and should be paid directly to them.

The Northern Territory Land Rights Act forbids mining companies from directly discussing or negotiating exploration or mining with the *pmarakurtwia* and their *kurtungurla*. All negotiations must go through the relevant Land Council. Many traditional Aboriginal authorities resent this for two basic reasons. First, it denigrates them and their position in Aboriginal society. Second, the Land Councils, many of whose members are ignorant of traditional Aboriginal ‘law’, and whose advisors often have an agenda of their own, ignore their wishes. It is true that some traditional owners oppose mining and exploration on their land. But it is also true that others would welcome it.

**Land Care**
To place Aboriginal land care its correct perspective, it is necessary to briefly reiterate the ‘Dreamtime’ beliefs. At the beginning of time, the supernatural beings, who had been ‘asleep’ in the flat and featureless earth since eternity, awoke and emerged from their places of rest, and began their creative activities. In the course of these they created a world very much as we know it now. The creative words they used to shape the earth and create its flora and fauna, are known by their fully initiated totemic progeny, and can be used—through the correct ritual—to maintain the universe and its flora and fauna. The Aborigines’ principles of land care flowed quite logically from these ‘Dreamtime’ beliefs.

As stated earlier, the supernatural beings are incarnate in their totemic progeny, as well as the land from which they emerged and to which they returned at the completion of their labours. Because of this connection, Aborigines saw themselves as living in an I–Thou relationship with the land in which their supernatural ancestors were at rest. So for them to care for the land was to care for their supernatural ancestors, and to care for their supernatural ancestors was to care for the land. In a very real sense, land care was a ‘spiritual’ exercise. Only as they honoured the supernatural ancestors through the correct rituals, would their supernatural ancestors send the necessary rains and cause the flora and fauna to grow and increase and so guarantee their survival.

Land care could therefore be summarised as:
• guarding the sites of significance i.e., seeing that no women, children, uninitiated males or other unauthorised persons encroached on these sites.
• caring for the tjurrunga objects and seeing that they were not harmed or destroyed. The flip side of this meant punishing anyone who infringed the laws pertaining to the tjurrunga.
• using the tjurrunga only according to the ritual laid down by the supernatural ancestral spirit beings, since behaviour in the religious area which offended against the precepts laid down by these ancestors affected the fruitfulness of the earth.

For Aborigines, land care did not encompass care for the environment, as we understand the term, for example, not denuding scrubland, not polluting the environment, and the like. The rudimentary state of their technology (for example, stone axes) and the peripatetic nature of their existence (for example, frequent moves from one site to another) meant that they did not evolve any rules regarding appropriate land care, as this is understood today. This has become glaringly obvious when Aborigines live in one location and have access to modern technology. They are often very destructive of their environment, denuding and fouling the immediate environs of their camping/township areas.

Fire
Peter Latz has drawn attention to the use which Aborigines made of fire in the care of their land—including how their use of fire may have turned the centre of Australia into a desert—and anyone interested in this subject are referred to his book. The only point I want to make here is their use of fire as an aid to hunting. Latz says:

Fire was an important aid in hunting, even if it was rarely used to actually kill the animal directly. Instead, Spinifex areas were burnt in such a way as to direct animals to where they could be easily speared or, in rare cases, killed as they fell off a cliff…. Other animals could be caught on the day following a fire because they could be tracked easily on the cleared earth. Certain areas were also burnt with the express aim of attracting animals to the new growth which followed…. Fire can also be used to bare the ground in such a way as to increase run-off and ensure a greater water storage in claypans and small lakes…. [It had an] important role … in increasing the yield of plant food. Although it appears that Aboriginal people rarely burnt the country with this express purpose in mind, they are well aware of the need to do so.  

Resource Utilisation
When considering resource utilisation, Strehlow makes a point which is worth noting. Many of the great ceremonial centres in central Australia were situated in areas where their respective ceremonial festivals could only be staged in good seasons. Some of them could not even be visited during periods of drought because of the lack of permanent water both at the site as well as on the route to the site. The location of these centres in arid country had important implications for the utilisation of resources. These centres had to be visited for ceremonial purposes, as ceremonies attached to these sites had to be staged at these sites, and not anywhere else. This was a religious imperative which forced people to move to these areas whenever the season permitted. This in turn had
the effect of utilising those resources when available and at the same time giving the
country around the permanent waters a chance to recover.46

Fauna Conservation
Strehlow has also drawn attention to the place of the pmara kutatha (eternal home) in
the scheme of fauna conservation. Each local land-owning clan had a pmara kutatha—a
major site of significance where it stored its sacred objects. No hunting or gathering of
food was permitted within its precincts. So the pmara kutatha in effect became wildlife
sanctuaries:

The prohibition guarding the pmara kutatha prevented the Aranda even in drought times
from using many of the best permanent waters in their territory… many of the finest
waterholes in the MacDonnell Ranges provide inviolable sanctuaries for kangaroos, emus,
and native animals of every kind. In drought times the animals and birds from thousands
of square miles of drought-stricken country found refuge in the pmara kutatha; and when
the drought broke, the surrounding countryside was restocked with game as quickly as it
became covered with plant food.47

Visiting Rights and Sanctuary During Periods of Drought
I said at the beginning that ‘traditional land ownership in central Australia cannot be
understood except in relation to principles of kinship on the one hand and tjurrunga
on the other.’ These two principles also applied both to visiting rights and to sanctuary
during drought periods. Different land-owning groups would have regularly visited
their kin whenever the seasons permitted it. And during periods of drought—a not
unknown phenomenon in central Australia—people were assured of a welcome from
their kin if they were having a better season than they were, and also from other land-
owning groups sharing a common totemic affiliation. Once the drought had broken and
it was possible to return home, these visiting groups would quickly return home, drawn
by their totemic affiliation with their land.

Effects of European Settlement
European settlement, wherever it took place in Australia, had a dramatic and destructive
effect on Aboriginal societies, on various counts. To list a few:

• First, it deprived the local land-owning groups of their economic base and means of
  livelihood. Since sheep and cattle competed with hunting and gathering societies for
  the same finite resources, it was impossible for the two to co-exist, without Aborigines
  being compensated for the loss of game and bush foods. As pastoral and farming
  activity expanded from the coast to the interior, the Aboriginal land-owning groups
  were dispossessed—forced to vacate their land. The reservation written into many
  leases guaranteeing Aborigines the right to hunt and gather and use their traditional
  waters was largely meaningless.
• Second, it confronted Aboriginal groups with their powerlessness. The rudimentary
  state of their technology and their diffuse authority structure—they had no chiefs—
  meant they were unable to mount any effective defence against the advance of
  European settlement.
• Third, it often brought the disposed land-owning groups into conflict with the groups on whose land they were forced to take up residence. Aborigines didn’t simply roam around willy-nilly hunting and gathering. Rather, each local group had its own clearly defined estate—whose resource would have matched their needs—and they resented Aboriginal encroachment onto their land as much a European encroachment.

• Fourth, since the various aspects of Aboriginal culture—ritual, authority, kinship, socialisation and the like—were all built around a hunting and gathering economy located on one’s own estate, the loss of the land ‘white-anted’ the whole of the culture.

The Challenges Facing Governments
As the Commonwealth Government, and to a lesser extent State Governments, seek to respond to various Aboriginal demands relating to land—viz., righting past wrongs, land rights, reparations for land taken in the course of settlement, a treaty and the like—it seems to me that the following needs to be borne in mind so that the grant of land does not create divisions in Australian society and lead Aborigines into cul-de-sacs.

• Governments need to distinguish between actual needs and the purely political wishes of the activists. From the foregoing it should be obvious that the land needs of the more traditional Aborigines, and Aborigines who have adopted Australian values and an Australian life style, are vastly different. Many of the demands being put forward by the activists—viz., treaty, reparations and the like—fall into the category of political wishes, and should be treated as political issues, and not as social issues.

• The more traditional Aborigines’ need for land should be viewed as a social issue and the kind of tenure granted should bear this in mind. The more traditional Aborigines still need the security of living on their own land—if this is at all possible—as they adjust to the changed social and physical environment created by European settlement. However, since the more traditional Aborigines rarely make economic use of their land it should not be granted for spurious economic reasons.

• Any attempt to wind back the clock of history is futile, and should not be attempted. It is impossible to reverse the European settlement of this continent or undo the negative aspects that occurred in the course of this settlement, for example, the destruction of Aboriginal culture and the tragic loss of life.

• Today, Aborigines and other Australians form one nation, the Commonwealth of Australia. Any attempt to create a separate Aboriginal state, or give Aborigines a special status within the Commonwealth must be resisted, since it would in no way solve any of the social problems currently besetting Aboriginal societies. Only the Aborigines’ entry into the Australian economy will answer many of their social problems.

• The fact that no Aboriginal land-owning clans have chosen to return to a traditional life of hunting and gathering—a situation made possible for a number of clans in the Northern Territory with the passage of the Northern Territory Land Rights Act 1976—would indicate that no Aborigines want to return to a traditional way of life.
• Aborigines living on their traditional lands today do so largely, if not exclusively, for cultural reasons, and not for economic reasons. They are only able to do this because of government handouts of one kind (CEDP) and another (pensions) and/or royalty payments from mining on their land. Unless groups living on their traditional lands have an economic base—other than welfare benefits of one kind or another—they should not be developed beyond basic services.

• As previously mentioned, today Aborigines can be found all along the Traditional–Modern Continuum. There are those still living on their traditional lands and following many of their cultural practices. Then there are those with University degrees, earning a living in the Australian economy, and generally living lives indistinguishable from those of other Australians. The land needs of these disparate groups are quite different and this should be recognised by governments when dealing with questions of land.

There is one other matter relating to land that governments need to look at, and this concerns Aboriginal townships built on Aboriginal land. What has either been forgotten or ignored is that all these townships are located on land, which—in traditional Aboriginal terms—still belongs to one distinct patrilineal descent group. These townships were originally established by churches and governments to fulfil a variety of purposes—for example, mission activity, welfare, education, training and the like—and Aboriginal people from many distinct groups were attracted to these centres in order to survive. This created all kinds of problems for Aboriginal groups who have never developed mechanisms for long-term living together in one location. The tensions this created were ‘managed’ while the missions or government ran these settlements, since they were seen as independent outside authorities, not allied with any Aboriginal group. However, as these authorities withdrew under the policy of self-management, and Aboriginal councils took over the management and running of these townships, the tensions generated by different groups living together in one location surfaced and created unmanageable social problems. These were highlighted by the Northern Territory Minister for Local Government in 2002, in a Ministerial Statement in the NT Legislative Council. In his statement Mr Ah Kit, the Minister, said that there was not one functioning Aboriginal township/community in the whole of the Northern Territory.

It seems to me that the government has only two options when it comes to meeting the challenge of dysfunctional Aboriginal townships. One is to recognise the traditional owners of the land on which the township is situated and then allow them to determine who will live in the township and on what terms. The other is to resume the land on which the township is situated, and take over the management of the town and its services on behalf of all Aborigines living in that location.

3.3 KINSHIP

Introduction
Kin may be defined as ‘a group of persons of the same stock, race or family’ (Webster’s Dictionary) and kinship, as referring to the web of relationship between the various
members of the kin group. The kin group is composed of consanguinal relatives—relatives related biologically and by social fiction (having a common mythical ancestor); and affinal relatives—relatives by marriage. The primary kin group is the family.

Primary kin groups are found in all societies—traditional as well as modern—and they form one of the society’s most important structural sub-systems. However, societies differ:

- in the extent to which the primary kin group is ‘free-standing’ or incorporated into and merged with a wider kin group, such as a clan. (‘A clan consists of families bound to one another by three things: (1) unilocal rule of residence … (2) a unilinear rule of descent … (3) a sense of solidarity and some common activities.’) The clan ‘includes consanguinal and affinal relatives,’ ‘owns land’ and is ‘exogamous.’

- in the extent to which they entrust functions, such as placement and socialisation of their recruits, either to the primary kin group or to the wider kin group.

- in the extent to which this kin group grants autonomy to, or requires subordination of, individual group members.

- in the extent to which various functional problems (social control, social security, cohesion, etc.) are entrusted to the wider kin group or to differentiated social institutions.

At a comparatively high level of generalisation, it can be said that the power and influence of the wider kin group vis-à-vis the primary kin group and the individual is most pervasive in traditional societies—circumscribing virtually all facets of life. This superordination of the wider kin group results from:

- the Gemeinschaft character of traditional societies, which makes possible very close surveillance and therefore control of primary kin groups, and individual behaviour;

- the undifferentiated and unspecialised nature of traditional social and economic organisation, which results in the fusion of functions with the same group acting in various capacities;

- the dependence of the individual on the wider kin group for the satisfaction of his physical and social needs.

In modern societies, themselves the product of preceding social changes arising from, and concomitant with, technological changes, the wider kin group is either extremely weak or non-existent. In large measure, its place has been taken by other secondary type social institutions and bureaucratic organisations. In this setting, the nuclear family has gained greater identity and importance in the life of the individual, but it does not have the same dominating influence on its individual members that the wider kin group had. This is because the modern family is itself committed to the values of a modern society (achievement, individualism) and this guarantees the individual a large measure of autonomy.

The Western Arrarnta Kinship System
After those few introductory remarks about kin and kinship, we will look at the Western Arrarnta kinship system by way of an example of Aboriginal kinship systems. The Western Arrarnta system is known as anparntintja.
The word anparnintja comes from the Western Arrarnta verb anparnama meaning to address, to touch. Anparnintja is the word Western Arrarnta speakers use to describe the way people ‘address’ or relate to each other. Among Australians it is often referred to as the class, or classificatory system, and the names of the various classes as ‘skin names’.

The anparnintja system places everyone at birth into one of 8 classes of people. It is not possible to move from one class into another. The class you are born into is the class of person you will remain for the whole of life. These classes are not hierarchically arranged, as for example, in the Indian caste system, where Brahmins are at the top of the social scale, and Untouchables at the bottom. Rather, each class in the Western Arrarnta system has equal value. It is never used to allocate status.

The eight classes are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Panangka</th>
<th>Purrurla</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pangarta</td>
<td>Kamarra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kngwarrea</td>
<td>Ngala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paltharra</td>
<td>Mpitjana</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These eight classes are divided into two groups of four. The four on the left of the page form one group, and the four on the right of the page form another group. Anthropologists call them moieties, which is derived from the French word for half.

The two moieties are exogamous which is another way of saying they do not marry inside their own group. They marry in the following manner:

- Panangka marries Purrurla.
- Pangarta marries Mpitjana.
- Kngwarrea marries Ngala.
- Paltharra marries Kamarra.

The class of the children born to a married couple is determined by the class of the father. As indicated above, Panangka marries Purrurla. Now if the male is Panangka, and the female Purrurla, then the child will be Pangarta. However, if the male is Purrurla and the female Panangka, then the child’s class is Kamarra.

The reason for this is the Western Arrarnta nyinhanga principle. The word nyinhanga means father and son, and it operates in such a way that where a father holds the class of Panangka his son will be Pangarta and his son in turn will be Panangka. Similarly the son of the Purrurla man is Kamarra and that of the Kamarra man is Purrurla.

So the eight classes of people form four nyinhanga groups. They are:

- Panangka
- Pangarta
- Kngwarrea
- Paltharra
- Purrurla
- Kamarra
- Ngala
- Mpitjana

These nyinhanga groups are very important, because these are the Western Arrarnta land-owning patrilineal clans. In certain contexts, land is spoken of as Panangka/Pangarta land or Ngala/Mpitjana land or Purrurla/Kamarra land or Kngwarrea/Paltharra land. The nyinhanga are the equivalent of Australia’s incorporated bodies. They continue to exist and function even when and while the personnel holding the positions change.

The class system fits over the top of what Australians understand by kin i.e., father, mother, brother, sister, uncle, aunt, cousin, etc. But the class system goes beyond what
Australians call kin because it defines for a person their social relationship with all other persons, if and when they meet. In this way it determines the rights and responsibilities that each has. For example, say a Panangka man meets a Panangka man of about the same age. Since the other man is of the same class, then, if they are on the same generational level, he would relate to him as a brother, and they would behave towards each other as actual brothers. However, if the Panangka man he meets is two generations below him, he would relate to him as he would to his grandson, on his father's side. On the other hand, if the Panangka man is two generations above him, he would relate to him as he would to his grandfather, on his father's side. In each case he would behave towards him according to the appropriate relationship, with its in-built rights and responsibilities. In this way, the Arrarnta people socially encompassed all the people they met. If a person—as would be the case with an Australian—had no ‘class’ then they did not know how to relate to him/her, and are unable to include them in their social landscape.

The ‘classificatory’ system also impacts on kinship terms. It might seem that when it comes to kinship terms, there would be direct equivalence between the Western Arrarnta and Australian terms, and so that each would be able to understand the other without difficulty. After all, a father is a father is a father, and a mother is a mother is a mother, and a grand child is a grand child is a grand child. In one sense this is quite true, but in another sense it is quite misleading.

To give a couple of examples. The Western Arrarnta term for father is kaarta. However, a Western Arrarnta person will not only call his/her actual or biological father kaarta, but also his/her father's brothers. (Father's sisters, known as wunha, also share some of the authority attaching to kaarta.) This can lead to situations Australians find difficult to comprehend, as happens when the child of an older brother is about the same age or even older than his father's younger brother. He would still call his fathers younger brother kaarta and behave towards him as he would to his own kaarta. And it will be clear from what was said above, when a Western Arrarnta person deals with another male belonging to the same class as his father, he is required to treat him much like his own father. Put another way, the rights and obligations which belong to what we would call an actual relationship, can and do at times transfer to other people in the same class. Obviously then, the term kaarta, besides signifying what we mean by the term father, can also have a different content and meaning. Father and kaarta are not necessarily synonymous terms.

The Western Arrarnta have two terms for what we call grandfather and grandchild—arranga and tjimia. A man calls the children born to his son, irrespective of sex, his arranga. And he calls the children born to his daughter, again irrespective of sex, his tjimia. The terms arranga and tjimia are reciprocal. The children he calls arranga, call him arranga, and the children he calls tjimia, call him tjimia. Again we have a situation where the terms arranga and tjimia have some of the content of what we call grandfather and grandchild, but obviously these terms also indicate that the relationships are not the same as ours, and have different rights and obligations attached to them.

One more example. The Western Arrarnta term for the person Australians call mother is mia. The term mia includes within it what we understand by the term mother. However, like kaarta, it is broader. Mia's sisters are also seen by a child as its mia. (A mother's brothers, known as kamurna, also share some of the nurturing aspects attaching
to mia.) Again because of the classification or anparnintja system, a Western Arrarnta man's daughters-in-law are also like mia to him.

The children of a marriage are katjia—that is children. By way of sex, they are worra—that is boy, or kwarra—that is girl. But in relationship terms, the boys and girls are a father's lira and a mother's ampa.

The foregoing has been a somewhat cursory treatment of some aspects of the Western Arrarnta classification and kinship system. However, even these few remarks will indicate that the Western Arrarnta have organised their social world and social interaction in a way that is very different from the Australian way.

The Context of the Kinship System

The importance of this system of social organisation cannot be overstressed. As the Berndts have observed:

In Aboriginal Australia kinship is the articulating force for all social interaction. The kinship system of a particular tribe or language unit is in effect a shorthand statement about the network of interpersonal relations within that unit—a blue print to guide its members. It does not reflect, except in ideal terms, the actuality of that situation: but it does provide a code of action which those members cannot ignore if they are to live in relative harmony with one another. And kinship, in this situation, pervades all aspects of social living. We cannot understand or appreciate traditional life in Aboriginal Australia without knowing something, at least of its social organisation and structure—of which kinship is the major integrating element, or, to put it another way, the fine mesh which holds the society together.50

What is of particular importance is to understand something of:

1. the setting and 'fit' of the Aboriginal kinship structure with its environment,
2. the effects of the wider kin group (clan) on the other structures, processes and functional sub-systems of the group, and
3. the effects of the superordination of the clan on the individual.

Bearing in mind the above brief sketch of the kinship system, the following are the most important phenomena in relation to these three points.

1. The setting and 'fit' of the Aboriginal kinship structure with its environment. The social organisation, as well as the values and norms of a group or society, do not evolve and develop in a vacuum. They are shaped and then moulded in the course of, and as a result of, a group's interaction with its particular environment.

Operating as a very important independent variable in this process of interaction, and influencing the ultimate accommodation that the group achieves with its environment, is the technology that it possesses. For the sophistication of its technology largely determines whether the group will be able to manipulate the environment to gain its own ends—that is, 'free' itself of the limitations its environment imposes—or whether it will itself largely be 'shaped' by its environment. Put another way, a group's technology determines the options available to it in working out its adjustment to its natural environment.

Aboriginal technology gave the group no mastery over its environment.31 Consequently its adjustment yielded little more than a precarious subsistence economy—a living from
‘hand to mouth’. In times of drought, for example, it had no means of guaranteeing its members’ livelihood. Many would have died during these periods. In this setting, the primary and overshadowing functional problem was group survival—a fact reflected in the entire Aboriginal social structure. This was the focal point of all organisations and activities. This was the criterion which determined its values.

The place and the ‘fit’ of the clan must be seen in relation to this functional problem which dominated all others. Since it was not possible to provide any measure of security through ‘surplus production,’ the only other alternative, apart from moving out of the area was to provide a measure of security through some form of highly integrated and cohesive group living. This was provided through the wider kin group or clan. (To me it doesn’t appear as an accidental fact that strong wider kin groups of one type or another are features of all traditional societies with subsistence economies).

The above has not been intended to prove that what is, must be, but rather to show the ‘fit’ of the clan structure to the setting of the people, and to show the rationale behind many of its norms and values, as well as the reasons behind the major ‘thrust’ and emphasis of the society on cohesion and integration.

2. The effects of the wider kin group (clan) on the other structures, processes and functional sub-systems of the group. The superordinate position of the wider kin group also had its effects on the other structures, processes and sub-systems of the group. For example:

- The primary kin group, the immediate family, became a relatively ‘weak’ unit because the clan assumed the function of status ascription, and as we will see, a large measure of responsibility for the socialisation of children. It also transcended the immediate family as the economic unit.
- It tended to strengthen the undifferentiated and unspecialised nature of Aboriginal society. (The clan, as a group, acted in various functional capacities, rather than detailing different individuals to perform different functions.) By and large, the same members were involved in social control, group security, ‘polity’, performance of religious rituals, ‘economic production’, etc.
- It left its imprint on camp layouts and other domiciliary arrangements for example, where visitors could and would camp.
- It determined who could talk to whom about what matters.
- It left its imprint on the patterns of co-operation.

3. The effects of the superordination of the clan on the individual. The superordination of the clan also had its effects on the individual. As some of these will be discussed in the section on socialisation, it is not necessary to go into them here. However, several effects need to be noted here.

- Aboriginal social organisation, of which the kinship system was the ‘articulating force for all social interaction’, was such that the individual experienced few ambiguities, uncertainties or conflicts in regard to his role configuration. Rights and duties (responsibilities) were clearly defined according to his sex and age, and in terms of actual and classificatory kin. Rites of passage clearly marked transitions from one stage to another. Status relating to one role carried over into other roles.
Aboriginal society evaluated and ranked its members in accordance with its main ‘thrust’—integration and cohesion. The resulting stratification, whilst according major prestige and power to the elders of the clan, did not lead to any differential distribution of scarce valuables. There were no materially rich and poor in Aboriginal society.

This common economic standard, enforced and maintained by the clan, had the effect of ‘playing down’ the already minimum degree of stratification and producing something of an egalitarian society.

The individual lived out his life in a ‘face-to-face’, primary group setting. This had two major effects. It provided him with the maximum in the way of emotional support and security, and demanded from him, in return, the maximum by way of conformity.

**Effects of European Settlement**

In the traditional setting, the possible exploitation of the individual by the group or the group by the individual (both distinct possibilities in this system as it is in other systems also) was counteracted and limited by the social norms which made it obligatory not only to share, but also for all able-bodied members to engage in productive activity, that is, the collection of food. At the back of these norms, enforcing them, stood the authority of the group. This meant that, in the traditional setting, the needs of the group and the needs of the individual were balanced, providing not only an equitable distribution of scarce valuables (food), but also the maximum by way of security for the individual and the group. There was no exploitation of the one by the other. The system can be said to have been functional.

European settlement, by causing the spatial relocation of groups and by drawing certain members of the group into a different economic system—without making provision for the other members of the group—destroyed the fit between the clan and the environment, and between the kinship organisation and economic activity. European settlement and the introduction of Australian law also provided escape routes for those who wanted to opt out of their social responsibility while insisting on their social rights.

In relation to the aspect of traditional life that we are considering, this meant the group was faced with the problem of finding a new pattern of distribution, more suited to the ‘new’ means of ‘production’ and the changed setting. This in itself was a formidable task, especially considering the suddenness with which it was asked to make this change.

However, other factors operating in the situation exacerbated the problem: we mention only the most crucial—the rapid collapse of the authority structure. With the loss of authority came the loss of social control, and in the area of group–individual economic relations, this resulted in the exploitation of the individual by the group, and of the group, by individuals. This situation continues to the present time. The group still has not solved its distribution problem.

**Comparison**

In conceptualising the Aboriginal kinship system (social organisation) and comparing it with the Australian equivalent, I have endeavoured at the same time to sketch the environment and adaptive sub-system in which each is embedded. I have done this
because it seems important, especially when attempting to identify the challenges to modernisation inherent in the kinship system, to see the interrelatedness between the integrative and adaptive sub-systems. For, as the immediately preceding analysis will have shown, some of the challenges to modernisation do not lie in the kinship system as such, but in its fusion with the adaptive system. It goes without saying that an awareness of this fact is also important in any programme of planned change.

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<td>(c) Individual</td>
<td>Subordinated/Kin obligations</td>
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<td>Type</td>
<td>Gemeinschaft (Primary)</td>
<td>Gesellschaft (Secondary)</td>
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The Barriers to Modernisation Presented by the Kinship System

These barriers may be summarised as follows:

1. The wider kin group by continuing to insist on an equal distribution of scarce valuables among its members—without demanding an equal productive effort—penalises the members who have entered and wish to establish themselves in the new economic system. By not allowing them the full benefit of their efforts, it inhibits the growth of achievement motivation among its members. Looked at from a different angle, it means that the kin group, by stressing kin obligations, blocks the development of one of the core values of a modern economic system (and society)—the distribution of rewards (scarce valuables) according to individual achievement.

2. The wider kin group’s continuing demand for prior loyalty to itself—its customs, values and activities—often inhibits the growth of work commitment and loyalty to the employing organisation on the part of members who enter the new economic system. The result is that many Aborigines remain marginal members of the now economic system, and by the same token marginal members of Australian society—neither sharing fully its responsibilities nor its benefits. To give a couple of examples:

It happens quite often that when an Aborigine is hospitalised, his next of kin and other relatives accompany him and stay in close proximity to the hospital until he is discharged. In these situations, as in others like the death of a relative, the performance of traditional ceremonies and the demands of wider kin take precedence over work commitments. Whether the person accompanying a relative can financially afford to take time off from work; whether he is entitled to leave; whether his absence will cause dislocation on the job where he is working; whether he will lose his job as a result of his absence; or whether
the sickness is serious enough for him to be ‘needed’ near the hospital, are all matters of secondary importance. Customary kinship demands take preference.

At various times in the past, the organisation for which I worked employed Aborigines in the position of shop ‘manager’. All the men so employed were competent to carry out the functions required of them—selling articles at set prices, making correct change, buying other articles at set prices. The experience, repeated in each instance, was that after a period of quite satisfactory operation, a stocktake would reveal substantial discrepancies between sales (as represented by cash on hand) and remaining stock. What had happened was that kin had brought such pressure to bear on their relative, that he simply had to part with stock to fulfil his obligations as a kinsman, or lose his standing. We were convinced that there was never any intentional dishonesty involved. Similar problems arise today with the employment of checkout operators. The demands of kin often force them not to charge for goods taken from the shop.

3. The wider kin group’s continuing use of the traditional method of evaluating its members—sex, age, rites of passage, fulfilment of kin obligations—also stifles the growth of achievement motivation. An example of this can be seen in boys’ loss of interest in school and academic achievement as the time for their initiation approaches.

4. By making the individual psychologically dependent on the group—tying the satisfaction of his need for emotional support and security to the group—it discourages spatial mobility. This dependency also discourages individuals from forming and joining extra clan special interest (task or experience) groups.

5. By continuing to stress functional diffusion within the group, it makes it difficult for members to understand and adjust to the highly differentiated and specialised functions and institutions found in the Australian community.

In a nutshell, it can be said that the values and attitudes stressed by the Aboriginal wider kin group are the exact opposite of those needed by individuals—and the group as a whole—to function in the Australian society.  

The Challenge the Kinship Systems Pose for Aborigines
The kinship systems that the Aborigines devised made it possible for them to survive, often in very marginal country. These same systems have become dysfunctional and exploitative with individuals exploiting the system for their own gains, and groups exploiting individuals for their gain. The challenge facing Aborigines is to keep the benefits of their kinship system—that is, providing them with support and measure of security in their current socio/economic situation—while stopping the exploitation which is taking place.

The Challenge the Kinship Systems Pose for Governments
Currently government legislation and programmes aimed to assist Aborigines improve their socio/economic status—for example, Land Rights Acts, Incorporation of Associations Acts, Housing programmes, Health Workers and the like—ignore the realities of kinship which strictly circumscribe who can do what, to whom and when. The current approach may/can work and help Aborigines who have lost their culture and live like other Australians. However, it creates an unworkable situation for Aborigines who are still significantly influenced by their culture. The evidence for this seems overwhelming.
What governments need to do is take the realities of kinship seriously and build the programmes and funding regimes meant to help Aborigines around their kinship system. This would help Aborigines to own the programme and accept responsibility for them.

Note on Aboriginal Organisations Established under Australian Law
The government policy rationale behind the establishment of Aboriginal organisations under Australian law was, and still is, to provide Aborigines with legal entities which can receive government funding, and then also become the vehicles through which they can exercise self determination—managing their own affairs and setting their own pace for change. Has this policy been successful? Has it provided a genuine mechanism for self-determination?

In attempting an answer to this question, I begin with two quotations. The first is from the Berndts. I have quoted this passage previously. However, since it highlights the overwhelming importance of kinship for traditional Aboriginal societies, I do so again, for it is against this background that Aboriginal organisations established under Australian law need to be evaluated.

In Aboriginal Australia kinship is the articulating force for all social interaction. The kinship system of a particular tribe or language unit is in effect a short hand statement about the network of interpersonal relationships within the unit—a blue print to guide its members. It does not reflect, except in ideal terms, the actuality of that situation; but it does provide a code of action which those members cannot ignore if they are to live in relative harmony with one another. And kinship, in this situation, pervades all aspects of social living. We cannot understand or appreciate traditional life in Aboriginal Australia without knowing something, at least of its social organisation and structure—of which kinship is the major integrating element, or, to put it another way, the fine mesh which holds the society together.

My second quotation is from Eisenstadt. It highlights the effects of modernisation on the traditional kinship system. In particular, the growth of secondary social units around specific goals and tasks.

Such separation of roles meant, first, that the occupation of any given role within one institutional sphere—for example, the occupational sphere—does not automatically entail the incumbency of a particular role in the political or cultural spheres. Second, within each institutional sphere (in the economy, polity, in the sphere of social organisation, etc.) there developed distinctive units that were organised around goals specific to each such sphere and that were not fused, as in more traditional societies, with other groups in a network based on family, kinship or territorial bases.

As previously pointed out, among the Arrarnta, for example, all children are born into one of eight classes of people. These classes are not hierarchically arranged. Each is of equal importance. Except in cases where individuals have not married a person from the right class, a child’s class is always determined by the father’s class. The effect of this system of social ordering, is to establish each individual’s relationship with other members of his group, and so his rights and responsibilities vis-à-vis other members
of his group. An individual's class cannot be changed, nor does it change during his lifetime.

All 'modern,' that is, non-traditional forms of social organisation, established for the purposes of achieving a specific goal, presuppose for their effective operation 'the separation between the different roles held by an individual—especially among the occupational and political roles, and between them and the family and kinship roles' (Eisenstadt).

As the more traditional Aborigines maintain, non-traditional Aborigines might be able to operate these 'modern' structures such as ATSIC, Aboriginal Legal Aid services, Aboriginal Health services, etc., but this is not possible for traditional people for whom the kinship structure is the vehicle for all the social action in which they are involved, the mundane as well as the sacred.

Among the more pronounced effects of the Government's decision to 'impose' on more traditional Aborigines these 'modern' structures for purposes of funding, decision-making, etc., are the following:

- A very high failure rate.
- A lack of accountability and responsibility by office holders, and the lack of effective control by the people the office holders are meant to serve. This results from the traditional and the modern forms of social organisation being incompatible.
- The inability of the more traditional Aborigines to operate these 'modern' structures has opened the way for whites and non-traditional Aborigines to infiltrate, manipulate and dominate these Aboriginal organisations. As a result, many of these organisations do not reflect the wishes and aspirations of the more traditional Aboriginal people they are meant to serve.

The point the more traditional Aborigines continually make is this. They have their own 'law,' so why can't governments deal with them on the basis of their own 'law.'

### 3.4 SOCIALIZATION

Goode has said, 'Socialisation is the process by which the young human being acquires the values and knowledge of his group and learns the social roles appropriate to his position in it.' As defined, the fact or process of socialisation is common to all societies: simple or complex, traditional or modern. In a broad sense it might be said that the process is never complete. The roles of an individual change with age, and altered status, and in each case the appropriate roles have to be learnt. But in the more restricted sense in which the term is normally used, socialisation refers to the training of new recruits, children and youths. Generally, it extends up to the time that their group considers them fit for the responsibilities of adult life, especially that of maintaining themselves independently of their family of orientation.

While socialisation of the young is common to all societies, the methods and specific objectives of the process differ from society to society. Within the more heterogeneous societies, it also differs among the various classes and sub-cultures.

It is inherent in the very concept of socialisation that the group inculcates in its recruits its values, norms and knowledge. The result is, that while 'within broad limits, the same
human infant is capable of growing into different kinds of adult’ (Johnson) he, in fact, does not. He will more or less mirror the norms and values of his own culture. Actually more than mirror, for in the process he internalises them and makes them his own. As Goode points out, ‘the crucial result of the socialisation process is that individuals come to want to do the tasks that must be done.’

Largely through socialisation, then, the individual comes to be equipped for social functioning in his own group and/or society. This very fact means however, that because of the differences in cultures, an individual socialised in one culture, finds it difficult to operate in another culture. As Johnson has rightly observed: ‘His adult personality, formed in one society, will be more or less unfitted for participation in many others.’

In all societies, the family, irrespective of the type, is the social unit entrusted with the care, and therefore the socialisation of the child especially during its early years. However, the extent to which a family shares this responsibility with others and with social institutions, as well as the age of the child at which others take part and assist in the process of socialisation varies from society to society.

**Traditional Aboriginal**

Bearing in mind the introductory remarks on socialisation as it applies to all societies, I move on to a consideration of socialisation in traditional Aboriginal societies. What are its main features? Especially, what are the features which distinguish it from socialisation in a modern society? How do these characteristics act as barriers to modernisation?

1. The first feature to note is that socialisation was both simple and informal. ‘… up to a certain age the training of children is quite informal. A child learns by actually participating in the life of the community… It is an active practical process. And he becomes familiar with his natural environment at the same time as his social environment.’ In this respect, the form of socialisation in Aboriginal societies is similar to that found in other simple traditional societies. As Davis has observed:

A small stable society, which utilises ascribed status more than does a changing one, has a simple form of socialisation. ‘Training in the universal features of the culture is accomplished in the day-to-day association with adults. Training for specialised statuses is accomplished through informal instructions given by persons already in those statuses, often members of the family. Certain rituals, fetishes, and emblems help emphasise changes of status, and the pattern of life for each individual is rather well defined from the start. The culture changes so slowly that the entire older generation forms a suitable agency for socialising the young.’

2. The second feature is that of group involvement in, and group responsibility for, the care and socialisation of the child. This is not to deny the primary responsibility of the parents—but neither the parents nor the group ever saw this as a responsibility to be carried by the parents alone. In the area of child-care, for example, the Berndts make the following observation:

Although his mother is especially important at this time, he is not expected to concentrate his affection on her to the exclusion of others. He learns almost as soon as he is born that there are likely to be substitutes who will nurse him and even feed him—for example women whom his mother calls sister, perhaps her co-wives.
This pattern continues as the child grows older, not only in the sense that kin are prepared to help look after his physical wants, but also in that they take a very active part in instructing him in the knowledge, skills, values and norms of the group. In fact, in the culminating stage of the socialisation process (in the case of boys, the initiation process) socialisation is completely taken out of the hands of the parents, and vests in the hands of the relevant kin. They, in turn, act through those who have the responsibility for this final stage: the elders and men already initiated.

This emphasis on group involvement and group responsibility, as we will see in a moment, ties in with the overriding values and norms inculcated throughout the entire socialisation process—viz., the group is more important than the individual, or the individual’s personal (as distinct from group-defined) relationship with any other individual. The rationale behind this is not hard to find. Only a strongly cohesive group in which the individual had learnt to submerge his personal interest in favour of the group at all times could hope to survive in the physical environment in which it had to live.

3. The third feature of traditional Aboriginal socialisation concerns the content of socialisation. As Johnson has pointed out: ‘From a sociological point of view, social roles are among the most important “objects” that are internalised in the course of socialisation… the child internalises the roles he will be expected to perform himself, and also the roles of the other persons with whom he will interact.’ In the context of human social organisation, this stress on roles is understandable and most necessary. For knowing his own role and the role of others in relation to his own, gives the individual a sense of identity and makes possible harmonious and co-operative human interaction and endeavour.

However, to this emphasis which a society places on role performance must be added the equal stress which it places on role content—that is, on the values which ‘support’, give meaning and specific content to what the individual is expected to do. Before specifying this content, it is worth noting a point made by Johnson in another connection, as it has a bearing on the subject. He says: ‘It is unlikely that any society can stress all four sub-systems equally at the same time. The values most characteristic of one sub-system (or perhaps two) must therefore predominate in any particular society.’

The implications of this for socialisation in role content seem clear. In the process of socialisation, the group stresses not just all or any values, but those values which it considers most important. In Aboriginal societies, this resulted in stress being placed on group values—the integrative sub-system. A quotation from the Berndts will help make clear the double stress in Aboriginal socialisation.

Especially, they will tell him what he should call them, what is his relationship to them, and to the other people who are coming and going around him … However, a child learns not simply the terms associated with various people, but the kind of behaviour he can generally expect from them, and the way in which he must behave towards them. He may be told, ‘This is your sister, you call her so and so, you should look after her. When you get older you must give her some of the meat you catch and she will give you vegetable foods … You must not call her name, but when she gets married, her husband will give you gifts and if her husband treats her badly, you must take her part.’ Or he may be shown a little girl going
past, and told, ‘She is your mother-in-law. You mustn’t look at her face to face, or speak to her: but later when she is married you will send her gifts of meat, and if she makes a daughter, she may give her to you for a wife’.

4. The fourth feature is that up until the age of puberty, both the parents and the group were quite permissive, and few restrictions were placed on the behaviour of children. As the Berndts have observed ‘Parents on the whole, are very indulgent … toilet training is casual’.

5. The fifth feature concerns initiation. Although girls also underwent an initiation, our concern here will be with male initiation. ‘Initiation’, as the Berndts point out, ‘is the core of Aboriginal social and cultural life’. Generally speaking, a boy could expect his initiation to take place at or around the time he reached puberty. In central Australia it involved two main operations—circumcision and sub-incision—and extended over a period of several years. During this time the youth was gradually led into the ‘secret-sacred and esoteric life of the men of the community’, and was permitted to take part in the sacred rituals.

Viewed from the angle of socialisation, initiation was an important part of the whole process.

- It was the culmination of the process, as well as the rite of passage from boyhood to manhood.
- It provided the necessary disciplinary balance to earlier permissiveness.
- It caused the final merging of the individual into the group.

6. The final feature to be noted concerns the orientation of socialisation. The Berndts have stated this very well.

Husband and wife are expected, ordinarily, to become parents, and to rear sons and daughters who will repeat in all essential features their own progress from childhood to adulthood. The whole emphasis in this process, through the initiation rites, for example, is not on being different from previous generations, but on being the same … Even so, these Aboriginal societies are, or were, tradition oriented. They stress the value of keeping to the forms laid down in the past, rather than building on them with a view to creating something different, or new.

Effects of European Settlement
What effects did European settlement and the subsequent interaction between the two cultures have on the traditional socialisation process? Unfortunately, there are no extant studies in this area that I know of, and so the conclusions I have drawn are largely based on my own experiences and observations.

It appears to me that, to date, the net result of the interaction between the two cultures has resulted in:

- the loss of certain parts of the process, causing related parts to become dysfunctional;
- the retention of the basic content of socialisation; but
- without the addition of new structures to replace the lost parts, or to cope with the functional problems posed by the altered social and non-social environment.
To substantiate my contention, I take as an example of loss and dysfunction, the pre-pubescent permissiveness of parents towards the behaviour of their children. This partial structure in the traditional socialisation process was specifically related to two other partial structures—group involvement and responsibility, and initiation, which was the apex of the socialisation process. It can also be said to have ‘fitted’ the traditional way of life. For example, there was no need for any emphasis on toilet training, not with the group moving about as much as it did. Nor was there need for training in delayed want gratification. If food was available, it often had to be eaten. If it wasn’t available, it simply wasn’t available, and the child soon learnt that nothing was gained by asking. Seen in this perspective, permissiveness within the traditional environment (intra and extra systemic) was functional. In fact it helped to ‘create’ self-reliant people.

In the course of interaction with the settlers, certain changes took place. The group gradually settled in one locality, instead of moving about in its territory. Adult members began to ‘work’, and in return received money and/or food. New consumer items appeared in the group and created new wants. Thus, the environmental ‘fit’ came to be lost.

At the same time, the authority structure of the group came under strong attack, and began to break down. The resulting social disorganisation effected group involvement and responsibility in the socialisation process. It also had far-reaching effects on the initiation process. The result was that these two structures no longer helped to balance and correct the indiscipline—with all its short and long-term social ramifications—to which permissiveness alone could, and has led. Permissiveness within the altered environment had become dysfunctional.

It is possible to further illustrate this point. The Berndts have given a good description of the principle of permissiveness operating on its own. I personally have often witnessed similar scenes.

Aboriginal parents are, on the whole, very indulgent. They pet and spoil their children and stand a great deal from them in the way of bad behaviour, or even disobedience … In north-eastern Arnhem Land, a child who does not get his own way throws himself down on the ground in tantrums, writhing and kicking, crying and whimpering for hours at a time … When they do punish, it is likely to be severe—a sudden slap or blow, when mother or father loses patience: but punishment is rarely carried out in cold blood.

However, while the traditional pattern was permissive, I don’t know how widespread tantrums would have been before the coming of the settlers. While the throwing of tantrums often occurs today, I believe this has resulted from the developments we outlined earlier. I have come to this view by earlier observing Aboriginal life on two cattle stations—Utopia and McDonald Downs—which lie to the north-east of Alice Springs. At these stations—especially the latter—the owner had been at pains to encourage the Aborigines to maintain their traditional customs and patterns of life. Traditional authority was respected, and no attempt is made to undermine it. Although many of the group worked for the owner and his family—shepherding and caring for the sheep, mustering and branding cattle, building yards—the work was arranged in such a way that the Aborigines had time to perform their initiation and other ceremonies without interference. I visited both these stations regularly for some 10 years and never witnessed the kind of behaviour mentioned by the Berndts. Parents are permissive, in the sense that
few restrictions are placed on the children. Yet this did not lead to tantrums, because the partial structures to which permissiveness was related were still intact and functioning.

The more traditional Aborigines have retained the basic content and emphasis of the traditional socialisation process. Children are still taught that their responsibility to group-defined relationships takes precedence over personal considerations. The strongest evidence for this lies in the ubiquitous practice of this value. It can be seen in operation when a mother tells her child to share his biscuits with another child or adult because they stand in such and such a relationship to each other; when gifts are sent simply because of relationship; when in the course of shopping, money or goods are given to others because of relationship; when others are maintained (even if it strains the budget to breaking point) because they are relations.

**Comparison**

Bearing in mind the preceding discussion, the following is an attempt to conceptualise and compare the Aboriginal and Australian processes of socialisation.

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<td>(a) Individual Autonomy</td>
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<td>(b) Tradition Oriented/Status Quo</td>
<td>(b) Achievement Oriented/Change</td>
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<td><strong>Effect</strong></td>
<td>Group Control</td>
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**Barriers**

The above comparison of the two socialisation processes clearly show that the major barrier to modernisation lies not so much in the methods, but in the values which it emphasises and stresses, namely the primacy of the group as expressed in the individual's subordination to the group. Put another way, kinship obligations (social and economic) take precedence over individual considerations and advancement. These values, as well as their ramifications, are the very antithesis of the values needed for 'operating' and 'getting on' in a modern society, which stresses individual freedom and 'blesses' individual achievement. It is these values which are stressed in the Australian process.

Tradition, and the implicit intention to maintain what is, act as barriers to social change, especially in the Australian setting where change has been 'institutionalised' and members of the society are oriented to expect and even 'welcome' change.

And finally a word on the permissive/immediate want gratification/group control aspects of Aboriginal socialisation. An important consequence of permissiveness in child training is immediate want gratification. In a complex society in which it is essential to delay the gratification of many wants in order to succeed later in life, this aspect acts as a barrier. But more than this, it helps to strengthen the emphasis on the group—itself a
major barrier to change—by failing to teach the child self-discipline in the area of group living. Since there must be some form of control—otherwise group life is not possible—the group itself takes on this function.

**The Challenge the Traditional Socialisation Process Poses for Aborigines Now**

As will be appreciated, there was a definite ‘fit’ between the physical and social environment in which Aborigines lived and the methodology and content of their socialization process. With the changes that have occurred in their physical and social environment, Aborigines are faced with the need to adapt, and if need be, change the method, and in particular, the content of their socialisation process if they want their children to move beyond welfare dependency. The traditional socialisation process no longer prepares their children for responsible adult life in the current physical and social environment.

In Australian society, there is a broad congruence between the non-religious values and knowledge taught in the homes, and the knowledge and values taught in the schools. In many ways the home and the school support each other and contribute to the socialisation of children and so prepare them to be responsible, contributing members of society. This congruence does not exist between the values and knowledge taught in the more traditional Aboriginal homes and the values and knowledge taught in schools. Consequently, schools in Aboriginal ‘communities’ have been unable to assist in preparing Aboriginal children to become responsible, contributing members of society.

The challenge facing Aboriginal people is to utilise fully what the Australian education system offers by way of helping to prepare their children to enter and participate in the Australian economy so that their children can move out of the welfare dependency syndrome in which much of more traditional Aboriginal society is stuck.

Similarly, governments and other agencies involved in ameliorating Aboriginal disadvantage, face the challenge of helping Aborigines incorporate schools and the learning of the skills needed to be part of the Australian economy, into their socialisation process. To do this will require a different mind-set on the part of governments and these agencies. It will entail a different education delivery system. It will need to start with the Aboriginal cultural realities and operate within them.

**Note on an Approach the Hermannsburg Schools took in the ’70s to Incorporate ‘Western’ Education into the Aboriginal Socialisation Process**

Before Hermannsburg was handed back to Aboriginal management, the Finke River Mission undertook just such a different approach to education among Aboriginal children. While the approach was not a panacea for all the problems besetting Aboriginal socialisation or the incorporation of ‘western’ education into the socialisation process, it did provide a direction. Some years ago, I wrote a paper which included some background to the approach taken, what was actually done, and the results as far as student achievement was concerned. What follows is a quotation from this paper.

No society, small or big, holds its members responsible, or accountable for functions allocated to one of its members, or a group of its members, by people outside their system. Say for example someone from the Victorian education department visited your school.
and said, ‘I want you to teach your children Chinese before they go home every day.’ You would in no way feel responsible for teaching your children Chinese, nor would you be held accountable for your refusal, because the orders did not come to you through the system through which you are made responsible, and then held accountable.

In Western societies we have mechanisms whereby primary social units, i.e., families, allocate responsibility to secondary social units, e.g., schools, to teach their children certain specified knowledge and skills. These schools then, that is their staff, become responsible for these functions, and are held accountable. Aboriginal societies had no mechanisms whereby the primary social unit, i.e., the kin group, allocated its responsibilities for the teaching of certain knowledge and skills to a secondary social unit especially set up for that purpose. Nor did Aboriginal societies have mechanisms where distinct autonomous clans could jointly undertake day-to-day activities. (Co-operative ritual activities operated under their own rules, and in any case, cannot really be labelled joint activities in the sense in which I am using the term here.)

In an endeavour to ‘Aboriginalise’ programmes like education and health, governments have fostered the establishment of Aboriginal organisations. However these organisations, while they might have people of Aboriginal descent on their staff, are ‘Western’ type organisations, which are outside the Aboriginal social systems. So these government funded and established Aboriginal organisations are beyond the control of Aborigines, and are not accountable to the Aborigines who supposedly control them. They are as much outside the Aboriginal system of control and accountability as any non-Aboriginal organisation.

If we want to introduce ‘Western’ education to Aborigines so that they can become responsible, and see themselves as accountable, for their children’s ‘Western’ education, then it has to be introduced into their system and way of doing things, so that it becomes a part of their socialisation and education process, and not ours. To the extent it remains ours, it is outside their system, and cannot be under their control, nor will they be responsible for it. Hence, during the latter years when the Finke River Mission ran the primary schools at Hermannsburg, the Finke River Mission established family schools—schools and teachers became a part of the families’ own socialisation and education process. Teachers became part of the ‘family’ and taught the subjects which the family wanted their children taught—that is the traditional 3 R’s. Quite explicitly the family reserved for itself the teaching of traditional knowledge and skills. In other words, cultural education remained the preserve of the family.

It is hardly surprising that this approach to ‘Western’ education in the Aboriginal context was viewed with scepticism by many Australian educators, and Aborigines who had largely lost their own culture.

Because many of these ‘family’ schools at Hermannsburg were small, and teacher numbers determined by pupil/teacher ratios, teachers in many instances had to teach more than one family group. Consequently, teaching time was often measured in hours per week, rather than hours per day. Also, because the decentralised families often had no schoolrooms, teaching took place under a shady tree, or in wintertime, behind a windbreak.

Confidential testing by the NT Education Department showed that these children attained the same scholastic standards as pupils in the so called ‘normal’ Aboriginal schools, attending ‘normal’ school hours. The factor which more than any other influenced the standards achieved by these children, as with Aboriginal children in normal schooling,
were the educational aspirations of their parents. In other words, the standards achieved by the children were not significantly influenced by factors like a school building, or the lack thereof.

The other thing we learnt out of what we tried at Hermannsburg, is that while ‘families’ would accept responsibility for things like the ‘Western’ education of their children, and see themselves as in control, the Hermannsburg ‘community’ could not, because the ‘community’ was made up of different families. They are unable to take responsibility, or take control, because Aboriginal societies do not have mechanisms for day-to-day joint activities.78

3.5 AUTHORITY

‘The social order depends on the regular and adequate fulfilment of the role obligations incurred by the incumbents of the major status positions in a social system. It follows that the most important process in society is that which insures that people do indeed meet their role obligations.’79 This section will mainly deal with the place and importance of authority within this process.

There are two principle means by which a society seeks to ensure conformity to its norms. These are socialisation and sanctions.

Socialisation, as we have seen, is the process by which a society inculcates in its recruits its norms and values, as well as the roles which the members will be called upon to play in their society. Through this process, the new members come to internalise many of the norms and values of their society as these apply to themselves in their positions. Internalisation also has the further effect of motivating members to act in accordance with the norms of their society.

However, the process of socialisation is never completely successful. Roles are rarely completely internalised. Individuals do not always ‘automatically’ conform, nor do they always adequately perform their roles. When role requirements and societal norms clash with self-interest, individuals may be, and in fact often are, motivated to act in accordance with their personal desires, rather than the demands of their society.

Therefore, although socialisation lays the basis for conformity, and reduces the amount of supervision needed to ensure conformity, it is never sufficient by itself to ensure the required conformity. A society more or less obtains this by the use of sanctions—the use of rewards and punishments.

Sanctions are ubiquitously employed in all areas of social life. They range from the smile with which a mother rewards her small boy who has washed his hands for dinner, to the death penalty (the ultimate negative sanction) with which a society may punish a member who has broken an important norm.

Sanctions, by their very nature, presuppose the existence of ultimate authority—the right and power to coerce, to give or withhold, to reward or to punish. Without this authority, there can be no sanctions, no ultimate enforcement of norms.

In every society, the use of sanctions is regulated to guard against abuse. In each case, who has what authority to impose what sanctions is normatively defined. (When sanctions are not normatively imposed, this indicates social breakdown and disorganisation.)
The twin societal needs, first to have authority to ensure the ultimate enforcement of norms, and second, to regulate the use of this authority, has led to the establishment, in all societies, of an authority structure. This defines who has authority, how much authority he/she has, and when and where he/she may use this authority.

In the context of this discussion, it is important to see both the inter-relatedness of socialisation, sanctions and authority, and in particular the crucial role that normatively defined authority plays in this configuration. Authority, by making possible the ultimate enforcement of norms, makes effective both the process of socialisation and the use of sanctions. When authority breaks down, socialisation and sanctions are no longer able to perform their proper functions with the result that roles are no longer adequately fulfilled, exploitation takes place, and the society generally becomes disorganised. This, in turn, may lead to further breakdown and dysfunction.

While all known societies use authority and have an authority structure incorporated into their social system, there are quite significant differences in the structure and patterns of authority, especially between traditional and modern societies.

In traditional societies, there is no written body of laws. Rather, norms are orally transmitted from generation to generation. (Essentially there is no difference between orally transmitted norms (laws) and written laws, but in keeping with accepted usage we will reserve the use of the word law, for written norms.) In traditional societies, there are no distinct (separate) organisations—police forces, judiciary—whose pacific task it is to see that the major norms of the society are kept, and to punish those who violate them.

Rather the whole group, or the whole kin network, is variously involved in this task—primarily through each member’s role-specific power and responsibilities. This is the case even when the ultimate authority is vested in a particular member or group of members.

In traditional societies, the authority structure is religion-based, whereas in modern societies it has, generally, a more rational, secular base.

Furthermore, in traditional societies, there is no differentiation between the legislative, executive and judicial elements of authority as there is in a modern society.

The structure and patterns of authority unique to modern societies are largely bound up with two phenomena of modernity—the growth of differentiation and specialisation generally, and the evolution of a written body of law.

**Traditional Aboriginal**

The main features of the traditional Aboriginal authority structure and its functions can be summarised as follows.

1. The authority structure was entirely religion-based. The religious ideology of the clan was not only the soil from which it grew, and in which it was rooted, but also the ground from which it drew its legitimation. Furthermore, the religious ideology also pervaded and left its imprint on all the sub-parts or the structure. (It will not be necessary to give any examples here by way of illustration, as this will be amply demonstrated in the course of our discussion.)

2. The ultimate authority (power) in the clan was in the hands of the older men, who were also the guardians and trustees of the clan’s ‘sacred’ knowledge. As Strehlow has stated, writing about various legal and political concepts among the central Australian patrilineal descent groups:
These tribes had no hereditary chieftains, no police force, no lawyers and no judges appointed by a central government. Yet strict norms of behaviour were enforced among them, and offenders could even be put to death by local councils of elders. These derived their power from the guardianship of the sacred ceremonial sites and their knowledge of the ancient traditions. The decisions of these elders were obeyed only if they rested on the traditional norms and on what might be termed legal precedent.82

From this quotation of Strehlow's, two points in particular should be noted, since in part they explain what happened to this structure when groups came into contact with the settlers—an aspect which will be considered a little later. The first is that the ultimate authority of the elders rested on their knowledge of the 'sacred' traditions, and the second that their authority was limited to enforcement of the norms which also derived from the same sacred traditions. While this was functional in the traditional setting, it created grave problems for the group when it came into contact with the settlers, for this confrontation faced the groups with situations not covered by traditional norms.

3. The function of authority, and of those in authority in the traditional clan, was almost entirely executive and judicial. They had no legislative function. In the main there appear to be two reasons for this.

- First, the pattern of life and living had been set down by the supernatural beings, and these were not open to questioning or change. As the Berndts have so succinctly put it: 'The pattern or blue print of behaviour is everywhere in traditional Aboriginal Australia framed in terms of the past. To put it a little differently, the mythical characters instituted a way of life which they introduced to human beings: and because they themselves are viewed as eternal so are the patterns they set.' These patterns had to be maintained, and it was the function of those in authority to see that they were maintained and that group members did not deviate from them. This view of life, backed up and enforced by those in authority, left its imprint on the whole of traditional Aboriginal life. It made the group very tradition (past) oriented and gave to their conception of time a certain cyclical, endless, repetitive quality. Nothing changed. The future would be like the past, and would be interpreted in terms of the past.

- There was also a second reason—at least it appears so from our vantage point in time—which blocked the growth of any legislative branch in the authority structure. The rudimentary state of the group's technology and its isolation, seem to have precluded any changes in the group's adaptive techniques; the result was that no new situations arose requiring new norms to deal with them. Put another way, we could say that there was no need for a legislative branch, for this is only necessary when a society is 'dynamic' and facing changes and altered situations. Traditional Aboriginal societies—until the coming of European settlement—appear to have faced little change in their physical and social environment.

4. In the day-to-day life of the clan, the ultimate authority of the elders, though rarely visible or used, was nevertheless instrumental in maintaining the orderly functioning of the group.

It has already been noted that the orderly functioning of a group depends on adequate role performance by each member. When this analysis is pushed a step further, it can be
seen that there are two sides to this: one is that the incumbent adequately performs his role, and the other that the rights and responsibilities of his role are respected and accepted by other role incumbents with whom he interacts. If there is a breakdown in either of these aspects, role performance suffers, and as a consequence so does the orderly functioning of the group. By standing back of each role, the elders with their ultimate authority were able, if the need arose, to enforce the rights and responsibilities of each role.

5. A further feature of the authority structure, directly related to its religious base, is that there was no central government. Each clan was autonomous, and its authority was limited to its own members and its own territory. As we have seen in the discussion on kinship, the Arrarnta nyinhanga (father-son) each had their own land, deeded to them by their totemic ancestors. They owned the rites, stories and ceremonies connected with the travels and deeds of the ancestors who in the ‘Dreamtime’ (pre-history) inhabited that area. Since authority was derived from ‘the guardianship of the sacred ceremonial sites and knowledge of the ancient traditions,’ the boundaries of religious jurisdiction also marked the boundaries of political jurisdiction. The Berndts also note that point, but without giving the reason. ‘The maintenance of order in pre-contact time, and in the very few areas that are relatively little effected by contact, has had only local and restricted application.’

It is also interesting to note in this connection, that no clan appears to have had any desire to impose its authority on another, or to usurp its land. Both these facts also have their roots in the religious ideology of the people.

6. A few remarks on the traditional process of allocating ultimate authority must be included here. While in a large measure the process was ascriptive—it depended on family, place of birth, seniority and the like—it also entailed a measure of achievement. The process began with the initiation ceremonies through which all boys had to pass on their way to responsible manhood. Physically this entailed two operations—circumcision, and after a certain time interval, sub-incision. These were outward physical signs, and it is important to realise in this context that primarily they were signs. They were visible evidence (important among a non-literate people) that these men had undergone the ordeals which admitted them to the secret traditions of their group, that they had received basic instruction in their traditions, and that they could view ‘sacred’ objects and participate in ‘sacred’ ceremonies.

Instructions in these ‘sacred’/secret traditions continued for many years after the physical operations had been completed—that is if the man showed due respect for the traditions of his group and generously provided the elders with gifts of game in appreciation of the instruction he received. Then as his knowledge grew, so did his status and authority. In other words, his status and authority were directly linked to his knowledge of the traditions.

When a man did not obey the elders, did not show due respect for the traditions, lacked ability to learn or was more interested in women than in instruction, he was given no further instruction. He was considered unworthy. Such a man’s status and authority in his group was limited, even when he reached old age. In this way, ultimate authority came into the hands of those whom the group considered most fitted to use this authority—that is, those who would use it not for personal gain or power, but for the welfare of the entire clan.
7. Finally, a few words on the initiation process and its relationship to the functioning of ultimate authority. In the discussion on socialisation, it was pointed out that Aborigines were/are permissive in the upbringing of their children, but that this permissiveness was balanced by the rigours of initiation. In relation to the functioning of ultimate authority in the group, the initiation process also served the purpose of inculcating in the initiate the absolute authority of the elders. This was done, first, by filling him with an utter feeling of helplessness in the face of authority and those in authority. The segregation from the group, the pain of the operation, in fact, everything connected with his initiation helped to impress this on his mind. Then, second, the elders demanded absolute obedience and were prepared to be quite ruthless in order to get it.

Strehlow83 once related to me the remarks one of his informants had made to him on the punishment he and some of his fellow initiates received for disobedience. I recount this because it illustrates the quite ruthless approach of the elders to gaining obedience and thus laying the foundation for the authority they wielded.

It is a strictly enforced rule that actors in a ceremony are required to continue acting their parts as long as the singers continue chanting. On this occasion, the elders gathered the young disobedient men for the performance of an emu ceremony. As this ceremony requires the actors to dance on their knees, it is usually performed on soft ground, in the cool of the day or evening. On this occasion, the elders scheduled it to take place in the heat of the day and on rough stony ground. While they themselves sat in the shade of a tree chanting, the young men performed on their knees on the hot stony stage. As their knees became more and more lacerated, the old men merely smiled and continued chanting.

It was this blatant exercise of power, as much as anything, which reinforced in no unmistakable manner the ultimate authority of the old men. However, once this was recognised and accepted, there would have been few occasions when they would have been required to use overt force. This is why Elkin,84 for example, can speak of the authority of the elders as a 'moral' authority. But to assume that theirs was primarily a moral authority, as Elkin appears to, is wrong. It is contradicted by what is known about the authority of the elders and their use of this authority. No society has ever managed to maintain order, or to enforce norms and adequate role performance by moral authority. Traditional Aboriginal society was no exception.

Effects of European Settlement
The traditional Aboriginal authority structure had a definite 'fit', both with the kind of life their stage of technology and environment required them to live (nomadic), as well as their social system as a whole. It can be said that it was functional. It made possible—and in fact guaranteed—the orderly working of the group and the fulfilment of societal prerequisites by enforcing adequate role performance on the part of all members.

However, the structure was rigid and inflexible; it lacked adaptability. It was structured to function only in the direction of maintaining the status quo. It had no built-in provision to help the group in finding solutions to new challenges posed by changes in its social and non-social environment. This was its tragic 'weakness'—viewed from this point in time.

The advent of European settlement, besides posing new adaptive problems for the clans, struck at the very roots of the traditional authority structure.
1. As they opened up the country, the settlers took the Aborigines’ land for their own use. Besides adversely affecting the Aborigines’ economic system, this also adversely affected their religious life which was very closely linked to the ‘sacred’ sites on their land. Many of their ‘sacred’ ceremonies could only be performed at their traditional sites, and if it was not possible to perform them there, then they could not be performed at all. This disruption and partial cessation of their religious practices weakened the authority structure, which, as we have seen, was based on and rooted in their religious ideology.

2. In various ways, the ultimate authority of the elders was undermined and eroded.

   • Missionaries—with some exceptions—undermined the authority of the elders in the course of their work of evangelisation. Since there was little possibility of converting the older men, the missionaries concentrated on the younger generation. If, and when, any were baptised and became members of the church, they were, by and large, forbidden to take part in the ancient ceremonies. When the elders brought pressure to bear on the converts to conform to the traditional ways, the missionaries encouraged them to resist the pressure and conform to the new ways they had introduced. They also discouraged Christian parents from having their male children initiated.

   • Pastoralists undermined it with some of their practices connected with the employment of younger men. They actively discouraged the attendance of their workers at ceremonies when it interfered with work routine. They would also take the part of their workers when they were in trouble for breaking group norms, for example, eloping with girls who had been promised to other men, and protect them from the sanctions of group members and elders.

   • The police, sometimes helped by the settlers (or the settlers acting alone), ruthlessly dealt with any protest registered by the Aborigines against the loss of their land. Against the superior power of the settlers, the elders were quite helpless. They could not provide protection for their members—a fact which helped undermine group faith in their authority.

   • The elders who imposed the ultimate negative sanction on a person who had broken an important norm were considered to be murderers, and were often treated as such by Australian law.

   • With more and more of the younger generation gradually being drawn into the new economic system—even when this meant no more than becoming dependent on welfare—the elders found it impossible to give the initiates adequate instruction in the ancient traditions. The result was that when these men reached the age when authority would normally have passed to them, they were inadequately prepared. And from the religious angle they had little stature or status. This fact had a negative effect on their authority and their ability to enforce sanctions.

3. The loss of ultimate authority by the elders soon began to have its effects on the orderly functioning of the group. Deviance from established norms and inadequate role performance could not be controlled, because there was no ultimate authority to back up role-specific power (authority). Social breakdown and disorganisation began to take place, and continues to take place.

4. In reviewing the major effects of European settlement on the traditional authority
structure one additional factor still needs to be mentioned. The settlers who had the
greatest contact and dealing with the Aborigines—the missionaries, pastoralists, and to
a lesser degree the police—besides undermining the authority of the elders in ways we
have described, also usurped much of the authority of the elders.

Although this authority was not incorporated into the traditional structure—it always
stood outside of the group—it nevertheless had two important consequences.

• First, it partially filled the authority vacuum resulting from the elders’ loss of
authority. It succeeded in doing this and in maintaining some semblance of social
order, because the groups living in contact with the missionaries and pastoralists
were largely dependent on them for their sustenance: and the authority wielded by
these men was of a similar type to that formerly wielded by their own elders. It was
autocratic, the judicial and executive elements were combined in the same person,
and it was immediate. However, by stepping into the vacuum and partly filling it, the
‘new’ authority for a time hid the full extent to which the elders’ loss of authority had
negatively affected the orderly functioning of the group.

• The second consequence of the development we have described is that it inhibited
the growth of a new authority structure within the group to replace what was being
lost and destroyed. This is, without a doubt, the most serious effect because of the
crucial role which authority plays in the orderly functioning of any group or society.
In the final analysis, there can be no orderly functioning without final authority. We
can even go one step further and say that without ultimate authority, a social system
eventually disintegrates entirely.

It can be seen, then, that the post-contact developments which took place in other
aspects of the traditional culture which we have studied, also took place here: breakdowns
in the traditional structures, lack of replacement of lost or destroyed structures with
new ones, and the inevitable dysfunction of the system. This latter fact is most clearly
seen today in the way kin relationships are used to support rather than correct deviant
behaviour. In the past, kin were usually the first to punish those who deviated from
group norms for fear of sharing the same punishment as their kinsman. Today, if anyone
wants to take action against a deviant, the deviant’s kin will be the first to support him/
er and help him/her escape group discipline.

Comparison
The traditional Aboriginal authority structure may be conceptualised and compared
with the Australian structure in the following way:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Aboriginal</th>
<th>Australian</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basis</td>
<td>Sacred/Unwritten Norms Ascribed</td>
<td>Secular/Written Laws Achieved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Maintenance of traditional patterns in</td>
<td>Maintenance of changing patterns in a dynamic society</td>
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<td></td>
<td>a static society</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Kin obligations</td>
<td>Individual rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature</td>
<td>Diffused/Face to Face/ Autocratic</td>
<td>Differentiated/Bureaucratised/ Due process of law</td>
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Barriers to Modernisation

1. A comparison of the traditional and modern patterns reveals vast differences in all the major aspects of the two systems, both in regard to their structures as well as to their functions. It would not be going too far to say that they are completely incompatible with each other. If the more traditional Aborigines want to ameliorate their depressed socio/economic situation, then the traditional patterns which are still inculcated into the children in the process of socialisation present a major barrier to modernisation. To operate in a modern society it is not only necessary to have a rudimentary understanding of the modern structure and its functions, but even more important to have a personal commitment to the modern system. The extent to which the traditional authority structure blocks this development, to that extent it acts as a barrier.

2. However, an even more formidable barrier to modernisation is created by the policy of attempting to fill the authority vacuum in the more traditional Aboriginal societies with the imposition of the patterns of authority operating in the Australian community. It does this in two ways.

First, by placing ultimate authority in bureaucratic organisations standing outside of the group, it effectively blocks the growth of indigenous leadership. It is difficult, if not impossible, for indigenous leadership to emerge and exercise authority in a situation where all vital decisions effecting the group are made by outside organisations. Only where a group has authority to make its own meaningful decisions can the growth of leadership be expected.

Indigenous leadership having real authority is a vital necessity for the Aboriginal groups facing, as they do, a situation in which they are required to change and adjust to an altered social and non-social environment. This leadership is needed to mobilise the group to grapple with the problems it faces. It is needed to bring about consensus within the group as to how the problems are to be faced. It is needed to provide stability within the uncertainties of change. It is needed as a communication bridge between the group and the wider society.

To the extent that present policy hinders the growth of indigenous leadership and authority, to that extent it raises a major barrier to modernisation, and the Aborigines’ ability to ameliorate their socio/economic situation.

Second, the present policy of imposing a modern authority structure on a traditional structural base does not fill the existing authority vacuum in the groups, because there is no fit between these systems—a fact clearly shown by the above comparison. The one, for example, stresses individual rights, while the other stresses group responsibilities and group cohesion. The imposition of the one on the other would be comical, if its effects were not so tragic. To give one of many examples which could be given:

An Aboriginal man complains to a policeman that another man is having an affair with his wife. He does this in good faith, because he has been told that he should not take things into his own hands, but refer them to the rightful authorities for action. According to his norms what the other man is doing is a punishable offence, and he himself would be in his rights to take action. So he assumes the ‘new’ authority, seeing it doesn’t want him to act, will act and stop the affair. However, the policeman tells him that he cannot help him, because the law does not forbid such behaviour. This is too much for the Aborigine to understand. To him it is wrong, and so he takes action to stop
the affair. He attacks the man and wounds him with a knife. Then the policeman moves into action—by arresting and charging him for assault!

By being unable to fill the authority vacuum, the modern authority structure actually contributes to the further social disorganisation of the group. It also contributes, by the same token, to the apathy and lack of interest of the Aboriginal people in their own social problems. A fact very much in evidence today.

The barriers flowing from the loss of authority in the traditional structures and the imposition of a modern pattern, are in many ways the most formidable standing in the way of modernisation. There are good reasons for saying this. We have seen that, in the final analysis, social change is brought about by individuals and groups. The two factors we have been considering, by inhibiting the growth of indigenous leadership and authority and by continuing to maintain an authority vacuum in the group, are not creating the kind of climate in which individuals and groups are motivated to work for change.

Note: Should Australian Law Formally Recognise Aboriginal Customary Law?
Given the above situation, does the answer to the restoration of authority in Aboriginal societies lie in the recognition of Aboriginal customary law and its incorporation into Australian law?

At present, judges and magistrates have the discretion—when they consider this to be appropriate—to take Aboriginal customary law into account when sentencing Aborigines convicted of a crime. The current push by some to recognise Aboriginal law goes beyond this to a formal recognition of Aboriginal customary law, so that this customary law would determine the sentence. In part, the motivation for this appears to come from a belated desire to give greater recognition to Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal people. In part, it flows from a feeling that Australian law has failed to deal with the breakdown of law and order in Aboriginal ‘communities’.

Today, Aborigines are involved in a lot of activities not covered by traditional law. They therefore lack a guide to correct behaviour. Furthermore, there are no sanctions for behaviour not covered by traditional law. For Aborigines, only those customs which have been given to their group by the totemic ancestors, have the force of law—that is, that which the group as a whole accepts as having validity, and for which an individual can be punished for disobedience. So, for example, the fine detail of how a kangaroo can be cooked is determined by each group’s law. I have seen visitors to another group’s land not cook a ’roo in the presence of their hosts for fear of doing the wrong thing. On the other hand, rabbits, for example, not having any tjurrunga and therefore being outside the ‘law’, can be cooked any which way.

When Aborigines talk of ‘law’, they mean all the customs of their group—from those relating to ‘sacred’/secret objects and rituals to child rearing practices and ways of cooking kangaroos. While there are basic similarities between the corresponding customs of various Aboriginal groups, each Aboriginal group claims to have its own ‘law’, and that their ‘law’ is not subject to the ‘laws’ of any other group.

This fundamental orientation raises a multitude of questions for those advocating the formal recognition of customary law.
• If customary law is to be recognised, whose customary law is to be recognised? How would it be recognised? Would the laws be written down? Or would there simply be a blanket acceptance of Aboriginal customary law? If the latter, how could a court of law, for example, determine what was in conformity with customary law, and what was simply deviant behaviour, and the like?

• Then there are Aboriginal norms/customs which are clearly in conflict with Australian law. For example, the death penalty for divulging secret/sacred information; assault causing grievous bodily harm (as occurs when a boy is circumcised and later subincised); giving girls in marriage before marriageable age. Would recognition be given to these customary laws?

• If recognition was given to these laws, what would happen if a boy was initiated, and then as an Australian citizen filed a complaint alleging assault and actual bodily harm? If his complaint were dismissed, would this be a case of discrimination?

• In any Aboriginal group, whether defined on the basis of land or kin, there is no central authority to deal with law infringement. Law enforcement is the responsibility of the individual and his kin. Only in matters such as land and sacrilege is the whole group involved, with the lead being taken by individual(s) who have the primary responsibility for dealing with the offence. Hence, sending people who have broken the law back to their 'communities' to be dealt with by their 'elders' is simply another instance where we have not understood Aboriginal societies, and the way in which breaking of the law is dealt with.

There is no doubt that before the coming of Europeans, Aboriginal customary law played the same role in Aboriginal societies that law plays in our Australian society. Furthermore, there can be no doubt that the coming of the Europeans had a dramatic effect on Aboriginal societies and Aboriginal law, and helped to create a situation of lawlessness in Aboriginal societies. However, it is a fallacy to think that recognition of Aboriginal customary law, in itself, would change that situation, and ameliorate the Aboriginal law-and-order problem. I advance the following reasons for this.

First, as has been pointed out, Aboriginal customary law has an entirely different base to Australian law. Aboriginal customary law was instituted by the supernatural beings who were active at the beginning of time, creating the flora and fauna, shaping the landscape, and giving men the laws by which to live and regulate their lives and interpersonal and inter-group relationships. Now, since these norms were given by the supernatural beings and not instituted by men, men cannot change them, or add to them. They can only choose not to obey them. This understanding of law has certain effects.

Generally, consensus in more traditional Aboriginal societies can only be achieved around these supernaturally given norms, because they are the only absolutes in Aboriginal societies, binding on all. Everything else is personal, subject only to what one's kin will allow.

Second, matters such as alcohol and its use are not covered by customary law. Hence consensus based on traditional law appears impossible.

Third, more traditional Aboriginal societies find it difficult to formulate new laws, binding on members of their society, because there is no provision in Aboriginal law to create new laws.
As I see it, these are the major reasons why Aboriginal societies have found it so difficult to adapt to the changed situation created by the coming of the Europeans, and still cannot effectively deal with matters like alcohol, ill health caused by bad diet and unhygienic practices, and the irregular schooling of their children.

One of the ways of helping more traditional Aborigines to deal with their deteriorating law-and-order problem lies in changes to the various Aboriginal Land Acts. Giving Aboriginal land-owning groups title to their own land would give leaders authority and help them to exercise control, if they so desired, within the parameters of their own land for, as mentioned earlier, Aboriginal authority is land based.

Since a lot of current Aboriginal behaviour results from the use of introduced items—for example, alcohol, motor cars, guns, that is, items not covered by traditional law—many of the more traditional Aborigines maintain that such behaviour should be dealt with by the Australian legal system, that is, the police, courts, imprisonment. At the same time, they hold that matters like ‘sacrilege’ are their own affair. In the past ‘sacrilege’ was often punished by death. They do not, however, advocate a return to this because of the pay-back cycle it could start. For the same reason, many of the more traditional Aborigines, although not all, are against pay-back spearing.

It is worth noting that while there have been downsides to the introduction of Australian law, many Aborigines also acknowledge the benefits they have received from Australian law.

Apart from bolstering traditional authority via appropriate recognition of separate land areas, I would suggest that magistrates and judges establish relationships with the leaders of different Aboriginal groups and ‘communities’, so that when cases come before them involving people from these groups and communities, they can talk with them about what might be an appropriate sentence—prison term, fine, bond, community service order. This is not to suggest there should be one law for Aborigines and another for Australians. Rather, I see the dialogue as involving the Aborigines in the Australian legal system in such a way that they feel justice is done.

It is impossible to return to the past. The time before European settlement was not a ‘golden’ period of Aboriginal history—a period when men lived in harmony with each other and with nature. To assume this is to ignore everything we know of Aboriginal history. Traditional life was hard, harsh and in many ways, brutish. Aboriginal law did maintain Aboriginal societies before the coming of the Europeans. However, many of the ways in which it did this would be repulsive and not acceptable to Australian society today. In any case, the social and economic environment in which traditional law operated, and the ends for which it operated, have all changed.

If there is a genuine desire to help the more traditional Aborigines ameliorate their social disadvantage, then they will have to be taken seriously, and that means taking their ‘law’ seriously. Instead of dealing with them on the basis of our ideology—something we have been doing since the settlement of Australia—we need to begin dealing with them on the basis of their reality.
3.6 CO-OPERATION

To quote Inkeles:

Adaption to the conditions of collective living presents a set of problems which every society must solve. Man could conceivably survive in his physical setting without social life. The need to satisfy his bio-social or psychic needs is probably what drives him to collective living. But finding himself living in groups, he is immediately confronted by a peculiar set of problems which go beyond the individual. Men living together must co-ordinate and integrate their actions to some degree to avoid chaos and confusion. In the collective life of animals and insects, this co-ordination is assured by instinct. In human society it is almost entirely a product of social invention. Man must elaborate rules and provide orderly procedures to determine who occupies given sites, to co-ordinate movement, to control the use of force and fraud, to govern the conditions of exchange, and so on through the whole gamut of human relations. In the process of elaborating these rules, man creates the basic units of social organisation.87

In this section on co-operation, I will focus on one element of the complex of problems presented by collective living as detailed above: the need for co-operation among individuals and groups for the purpose of achieving certain societal needs and goals, especially in the economy.

Although men will co-operate ‘naturally’ with each other when their immediate self-interest is involved, no society has left the matter of co-operation at this level. The reasons for this are fairly obvious:

- Selfish co-operation on the part of individuals and groups will not always be in the interests of the total group or society.
- The need to balance the interests of individuals versus the group.
- The need to regulate the use of force and guard against fraud and exploitation.
- The need to have individuals and groups co-operate even when their immediate self-interest is not involved—but when the needs of the wider group or society are involved.

The primary means which societies use to bring about co-operation, and regulate against abuses, may be listed as follows. These means are common to all societies.

1. Differentiation of Statuses: Tumin has defined this as ‘the process by which social positions, such as father, mother, teacher and employer, are defined and distinguished from one another by assigning to each a distinctive role—a set of rights and responsibilities.’ And as he furthermore notes: ‘This process is indispensable in any society if it is to continue more than a generation, for to continue, a number of basic tasks must be performed satisfactorily, and hence in turn, responsibility for them must be assigned in such a way as to ensure their completion.’88 ‘The process of differentiation by itself, is ‘value-neutral’.

2. Division of Labour: This process is to be distinguished from status differentiation, although it goes hand in hand with the process. The division of labour common to all societies is that which is made on the basis of sex and age.

3. Ranking: Once positions have been differentiated, they can be, and are, ranked. ‘Ranking does not involve an evaluative judgement of “better” or “worse”… It is concerned
primarily with questions of “more and less” rather than “better and worse”. (Tumin) Although these two processes (ranking and evaluation) often go together, they should be distinguished because of societal variations. ‘Role-specific’ power, although connected with role (status), is influenced by, and connected with, rank.

4. **Evaluation**: Each society places a certain value on the differentiated positions, and the rank it has assigned to these positions. In a large measure, this evaluation reflects the general value base and ‘thrust’ of a particular society.

While ranking is of use primarily in the task of co-ordinating joint effort (broadly defining who can tell who what to do), evaluation by giving more value (honour, prestige) to those positions having greater social function, helps to motivate members allocated to these positions to perform their roles at required levels.

5. **Rewarding**: Is the process of allocating ‘various amounts of the good things in the life’ (Tumin) to the differentiated, ranked and evaluated statuses. These rewards are in various combinations of prestige, power, property and psychic gratification. The differential allocation of rewards also reflects, in a general way, the value structure of a given society.89

6. **Socialisation**: As we have seen, socialisation is the process whereby a society passes on and inculcates in its new members its norms, values, patterns of interaction, etc. Here it is important to note that, in this process, the accepted norms of co-operation are also inculcated and subsequently internalised by the new recruits.

Since our study is cast within the broader framework of social change, it is worth bearing in mind, that many of the inculcated norms are also ‘cathedected’ (Johnson) i.e., individuals become emotionally committed to them. Perhaps herein lies one of the reasons why rationally better ways are not necessarily found acceptable by people facing change.

7. **Social Control**: A society’s system of rewarding (and thereby reinforcing) behaviour in conformity with its norms and punishing deviant behaviour is also an integral part of the total means it employs to bring about co-operation between its members.

Summarising these seven points, it can be said that the primary means a society uses to ensure the co-operation of its members in meeting its prerequisites is by allocating them differentiated social positions with defined roles; ranking, evaluating and rewarding them according to its basic values and ‘thrust’; and by instituting means of ensuring adequate role performance—social control. Societies, however, differ in their methods and means of allocation, bases of ranking, evaluation and rewarding, as well as in their forms and methods of social control. These differences, in turn, are largely bound up with the degree of differentiation and specialisation existing in a given society.

**Traditional Aboriginal**
I will now highlight the distinctive features of the patterns and processes of ensuring co-operation in traditional Aboriginal society, relating them to the seven points I have outlined above.

1. **Differentiation of Statuses**. The means of differentiating statuses (allocation of social position) was ascriptive in the extreme. At birth, a Western Arrarnta person, for example, according to his place of conception and/or birth, sex, and family of orientation, was ‘classified’ in two senses. i) He was placed into one of the eight subsections into
which his linguistic group was divided. This defined his entire kin relationship and determined, according to sex and age, the roles he would play vis-à-vis other kin members throughout his life. ii) His place of conception and/or birth simultaneously defined his totemic affiliation, which especially in the case of males, had a direct and important bearing on the roles they would play in the religious life of the group. To a large degree, kin and totemic affiliations overlapped, re-enforcing each other and strengthening clan solidarity.

When viewing the process of status differentiation in Aboriginal societies, it is very important to see its intimate connection with the kinship structure. For all practical purposes, the two cannot be separated. Status differentiation (social position) is primarily expressed, and continues to find expression, in terms of kinship. Interaction between statuses is also determined by kinship affiliations.

A final point to be noted about status differentiation in Aboriginal societies is that social positions were in no way seen as competitive. Ascription, which precluded horizontal and vertical mobility, as well as the emphasis on kinship, helped to reinforce this. Statuses were seen as complementary.

2. Division of Labour. In keeping with the simple nature of their economy, there was a rudimentary division of labour according to sex and age. The men had responsibility primarily for hunting the bigger game—the kangaroos, the emus—while the women collected the vegetable foods and smaller animals. The children contributed food according to their age and sex.

Although some men were more proficient in spear or boomerang-throwing, or in the manufacture of different weapons, this did not lead to any specialisation of function or occupation, in the accepted sense of the term.

3. Ranking. In Aboriginal society, there was no ranking in the economic sphere. The ‘productive’ contribution of both men and women (even if they did require different skills) were seen as having equal importance.

However, ranking did take place in relation to the religious sphere of life. Here in descending order of rank stood the elders of the clan, the other initiated men in order of degrees of initiation they had passed, and lastly the women and children. (Women and children were excluded from all but the minor religious ceremonies, although women had their own ceremonies from which men were excluded.) The high rank given to the elders reflected the important ‘social function’ attached to their religious role.

Other social functions performed by ranking in more complex societies for example, ‘to facilitate the search for the right people for the right position’, (Tumin) hardly applied in the ascriptive Aboriginal society with its extremely limited differentiation and specialisation.

4. Evaluation. The pattern of evaluation closely followed that evidenced in ranking. In the economic sphere, the roles of men and women were equally valued. In the religious sphere, they were valued in order of rank: first the elders, then the other initiated men, and last the women and children. As could be anticipated, the differential evaluation of the two sexes which took place in relation to the religious sphere spilt over and coloured the general evaluation of the sexes. Women, per se, were considered inferior to men. A third criterion employed in evaluation—and a very important one—was role performance in relation to kinship obligations. Any Aborigine wishing to maintain his ‘standing’ in the
group had to discharge these faithfully.

5. **Rewarding.** The elders of the group also received rewards, largely in terms of prestige and power. The only material rewards they received—if we can call them that—were offerings of game from young men whom they were instructing in the mysteries of their faith.

Actually, the concept of reward, except in the limited sense given above, is not applicable in Aboriginal society. The feature which distinguished the distribution or allocation of scarce valuables among its members was reciprocity based on kin relationship—not unequal rewarding based on invidious distinctions. As the Berndts have observed:

> … there is in every community an arrangement of obligations which every growing child has to learn. In this network of duties and debts, rights and credits, all adults have commitments of one kind or another. Mostly, not invariably, these are based on kin relationships. All gifts and services are viewed as reciprocal. This is basic to their economy… Everything must be repaid, in kind or in equivalent …

6. **Socialisation.** Socialisation has been dealt with in a preceding section, so there is no need for us to dwell on it here.

7. **Social Control.** Social control has also been dealt with previously. Here it is sufficient to remember that while informal social control was exercised through the kin relationship, formal control was vested in the clan elders.

These structural aspects of their social organisation shaped the nature of their relationships. The fact that status differentiation coincided with kin relationship, and that there was only a primary division of labour with little differentiation and specialisation and no unequal ranking, evaluation or rewarding except in the religious sphere meant that the ‘relationship (was) non-contractual, non-economic, non-political, non-specialised. Instead it (was) personal, spontaneous, sentimental and inclusive.’ (Davis 69). It meant that all interaction, including co-operation, was of a familial, highly personal (particularistic) kind. Looked at from a different angle, we could say that persons co-operated because of an existing, ascribed relationship which provided both the basis and the pattern for co-operation, as well as defining the areas and limiting the extent.

**Effects of European Settlement**

The effects of European settlement on the pattern of co-operation were largely the same as the effects it had on the kinship structure. As these have already been noted, there is no need to reiterate them.

The dysfunction of this partial structure in a modern setting, the changes that have taken place, as well as the barriers to modernisation that it raises, will be taken up in the course of the following analysis.

**Australian**

The one single factor, which more than any other has influenced and altered both the basis and form of relationship, interaction and therefore also of co-operation in a modern society, is differentiation. Etzioni has put this point rather succinctly, and I quote:

> The main sociological characteristic of modernisation is differentiation. Differentiation is best viewed against the background of a primitive or traditional society. Small simple
societies fulfil the same basic social functions as larger complex ones, including production of goods and services (even if it only involves picking ripe bananas); allocation of products (even if only within the family); social integration (e.g., tribal rituals to keep the families together); and normative integration, which reinforces the members’ commitment to their culture and encourage its transmission from generation to generation (even if this is largely a matter of handing down folklore by the elder to the younger members). The process of modernisation is one in which old functions are more efficiently served rather than one in which new functions emerge. This gain in efficiency is largely achieved by differentiation, whereby the various functions which were carried out in one social unit, the extended family, came to be served by a number of distinct social units.93

The impact of differentiation, and specialisation, which is a concomitant, on traditional patterns of social organisation has been revolutionary, in the true sense of the word. It has changed traditional social structures beyond recognition; secondary groups and organisations replaced the various types of extended family and clan, achievement was stressed rather than ascription, and universalism took the place of particularism.

Of particular interest for our study is the fact that differentiation destroyed the traditional basis on which people co-operated—personal (kin) relationship. Once the clan or extended family no longer performed all the needed functions, new norms had to be evolved as the basis on which unrelated people could interact and co-operate. With this there came into being the contract-type relationship, which figures so prominently in modern societies. It governs most human relationships, interaction and co-operation that take place outside of the nuclear family and other primary-type groups.

Davis has defined contract as ‘essentially an agreement between two or more individuals to behave in a certain specified way for a certain specified length of time in the future’. This agreement need not be written. In fact, except in ‘formal contracts’ it never is, and yet it permeates modern human interaction. A good example is the teacher–pupil relationship in the educational system. Essential elements of a contract type relationship are that it is impersonal, rational, limited in its extent and lacking in affect.

**Comparison**
The conceptual comparison of the traditional and modern patterns of interaction and co-operations can be framed in this way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basis of interaction/co-operation</th>
<th>Aboriginal</th>
<th>Australian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Particularistic/ Personal Relationship</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Universalistic/ Contractual Relationship</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systemic environment</td>
<td>Familial/Reciprocal Obligations</td>
<td>Bureaucratic/ Unequal Rewards</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Barriers to Modernization**
Contact with the Australian society and involvement in its economy does not appear to have appreciably altered the Aborigines’ traditional patterns of interaction and co-operation. They remain substantially the same as they have for centuries. When and where they have entered the modern economic system, the basis on which they interact
and co-operate (work) is still largely a personal one. The idea of a contractual relationship appears to be only vaguely sensed—if at all. I give several examples drawn from my own experience and observation, which tend to bear this out.

1. Many Aborigines, especially in the early years of contact, took the surnames of the Europeans for whom they worked. Although there were various reasons for this phenomenon, one important one was that it expressed, at least as far as the Aborigine was concerned, a personal relationship between him and his employer. And it was largely on the basis of this relationship that he worked for him. The personal nature of this work relationship is further born out by the fact that some Aborigines even today, will only work for ‘their boss’, and no else. If for some reason he cannot provide them with work for a period of time, they will just ‘sit down’ until such time as he again has work for them. (Admittedly this is a situation which pertains more in the pastoral industry than in the urban employment context, but pertain it does.)

2. Often in the course of conversations with Aborigines, I have asked one or the other what he has been doing. Invariably the answer has been ‘helping’ so-and-so, rarely do they say ‘working’ for so-and-so. This choice of verbs (both are equally well-known) also reflects the personalistic approach of Aborigines to work. Another thought which quite often finds expression in the course of conversations, is that of ‘doing a favour’. That is by working, he is first and foremost doing the employer a favour. The thought of earning his living by this means often runs a poor second.

I do not mean to suggest by what I have said, that the Aborigine sees no connection between work and reward, or that he considers it all a matter of a one-way favour. This has not been my intention, nor would it be true. Rather, my aim has been to show that the Aborigines’ approach to work is still very largely coloured by his traditional outlook. This has certain definite results, of which I will mention the two most important.

First, it affects employer–employee relations. The Australian employer looks on work as a contractual relationship, while for the Aborigine it is more of a personal relationship. This being the case, the Aborigine cannot understand why the ‘boss’ wants to be so exact about wages, or why he is displeased if he wants some extra time off. This fact, that both look at the work relationship from a different point of view, often leads to friction. Australian employers who have ‘sensed’ and taken into consideration the Aboriginal attitude, have had far better work relations with Aborigines than those who have stuck to the more contractual type approach.94

The second and most important result from the angle of our study is that this approach to work acts as a definite barrier to the full entry and integration of the Aborigines into the new economic system. The reason for this seems clear. The incompatibility of a personalistic approach to work in a system that presupposes and operates on a contractual approach. This incompatibility has played a significant role in excluding the more traditional Aborigines from the Australian economy.

Note on Aboriginal Words and Concepts Supporting the Above
It is my contention that Aborigines did not, and that the more traditional Aborigines still do not understand the workings of the Australian economy. In part this can be seen from their own indigenous languages, and from their usage of English words to describe what we call work. The Arrarnta language didn’t have a word for work in the
sense that we use the word, and I would say neither did other indigenous languages. In saying this I am extrapolating from the Arrarnta and Western Desert languages. The Western Arrarnta have a word *urrkapuma*, which, as a result of contact, is now sometimes used by the Arrarnta for what we call work. Although it is no longer possible to substantiate this absolutely, originally the word was used primarily, perhaps even exclusively, for activity associated with ceremonial and ritual activity, in Arrarnta *tjurrungaka urrkapatjika* =lit. ‘to work’ for *tjurrunga*.

The verb *urrkapuma* is an intransitive verb. All other verbs associated with hunting and gathering activity, for example, looking for game, cooking game, digging vegetable foods, or erecting a windbreak, etc., are transitive verbs. Because of this lack of a word corresponding to our use of the word work, translators of the Scriptures into Pintupi/Loritja, for example, have used the English word ‘work’ when needed, with the relevant Pintupi/Loritja suffix.

My contention that indigenous languages had no word to describe work in our sense of the word is further born out by the English word most used by central Australian Aborigines to describe what we call work. The usual answer I have received when asking Aborigines, ‘What have you been doing?’ is ‘I have been helping so-and-so,’ or ‘the Mission,’ or ‘the Government,’ or ‘Land Council,’ or who or whatever. The English word ‘help’ is used, not because the English word ‘work’ is not known, but because the English word ‘help’ more accurately describes how the person concerned sees what he has been doing.

The Aborigine sees himself as having assisted the Mission, the Pastoralist, the Land Council or whoever in his/its activity. In Western Arrarnta, the word is *tangitjala nama*. In the past, when Aborigines helped each other in an activity, it was because of kin obligations, and then it was literally done to help the other person, and not as a means of earning economic rewards, which is how we understand work. However, such help did place the person helped under an obligation to help the one who had helped him, as, when and where he might request it.

So when an Aborigine ‘works’ for a person or organisation outside his kinship structure, he brings to his job his cultural understanding of ‘help,’ with its in-built notion of mutual/reciprocal obligation, operating within a kinship framework. All this is encompassed in the term *tangitjala nama*. This has far-reaching implications for the involvement of Aborigines in the Australian economy, since it places working for someone on a basis of personal relationship, rather than a contract.

However, the term *urrkapuma* as applied to *tjurrunga* does carry with it the concept of working (effort) for reward. As men ‘worked’ at their ritual (*tjurrungaka urrkapuka*) there was a future economic reward in the form of vegetable foods to eat, and game to catch. But it is important to remember it is ritual ‘work’ which produces rewards. I am further convinced of this understanding by the fact that the Arrarnta refer to their *tjurrunga* as their Aboriginal bank. From their observations, white fellows have their wealth (money) in a bank. Aborigines have theirs in their *tjurrunga*.

The English term that central Australian Aborigines use when speaking about activity associated with *tjurrunga*—for example, ‘Red Ochre ceremony’ ‘Man Making ceremony’ ‘Increase of Species ceremony’ ‘Rain Making ceremony’—is also very interesting. It is the word ‘business’.

Involving Aborigines in the Australian economy is usually seen in terms of teaching them skills that they can use to participate in the economy. My observations made over a
long period of time lead me to the conclusion that skills are not the problem. Aborigines learn skills as quickly as anybody. In fact, they often learn skills more quickly because mimicking is the cultural method of learning. The problem is the Aboriginal worldview. It doesn’t provide Aborigines with either the motivation or the matrix needed to function in the Australian economy. I will give some examples to illustrate this.

When my father was Superintendent of the Hermannsburg Mission, he spent a great deal of time and energy to provide meaningful employment for the local Aboriginal population, as a means of turning hunter–gathers into producers. After lands to the west of the Hermannsburg lease had been declared Aboriginal Reserves, my father had the idea of establishing Aboriginal men as pastoralists on parts of the Reserve. To that end, the Mission advanced selected men breeding stock, horses, etc., rations until such time as they could support themselves from cattle sales. The understanding was that, once they were established, they would pay back the loan from the Mission. When the scheme was first mooted, there were far more men who wanted to become independent pastoralists than the Mission’s resources could support. To their credit, all the men who had been accepted for the scheme ultimately paid back their advances. However, the scheme folded, but not from lack of skills, for all the men were accomplished stockmen, and they had adequate back-up resources. The scheme folded for cultural reasons. Among other things, there were no cultural values to support the consistent work (effort) needed to make a go of cattle-raising.

Another example. My father had started a tannery at Hermannsburg, again with the objective of providing employment. The tannery was profitable while the Mission was able to buy kangaroo skins. These were tanned by the men, and the women would then take the furs to make rugs, moccasins, etc. Later, after my father’s retirement, the Government, under pressure from the conservationists, was persuaded that kangaroos were becoming an endangered species, and so no more licences were issued to shoot kangaroos. So there were no more kangaroo fur skins for tanning and rug making. The Mission found it could not compete in the market with its bullock leather, largely because it could not guarantee regular supply. After discussion with the tannery workers, the Mission agreed to help them start a cottage industry focusing on leather artefacts—purses, belts, etc.

The cottage industry was duly established with every reason to assume it would be a successful economic enterprise. There was an operating tannery, with the necessary equipment and machinery. There were men who knew the tanning business, having worked in it for many years. A grant from the then Office of Aboriginal Affairs had enabled a person skilled in making leather artefacts to be brought to Hermannsburg to teach the necessary skills. These were quickly learnt. An exhibition of work had established that there would be a market for the output. The Government had also given a grant to enable the workers to be paid a wage until the business was self-supporting. However, the business folded, not because of a lack of skills, but largely because there were no cultural values to support consistent effort in this context.

One final example. My experience is that the more traditional Aborigines have no difficulty learning to count money, add a profit margin to the cost price of an item, give change, work a cash register, etc. Yet, they inevitably fail as store assistants or manager, for cultural reasons, one of which is that they are unable to deal with the demands of their kinship system.
4. GUIDELINES FOR SOCIO/ECONOMIC POLICY AND PROGRAMMES

In the sections 3.1 to 3.6, I sketched the major Aboriginal cultural realities, past and present, and highlighted some of the challenges these present not only for the Aboriginal people who wish to improve their socio/economic condition, but also for governments and other agencies dedicated to the same goal. In this chapter, drawing on my previous analysis and on the challenges faced by Aboriginal people and governments, I want to present some guidelines which, in my opinion, need to be borne in mind by governments as they frame Aboriginal policy, and by social agencies working with Aborigines.

The foregoing analysis will have demonstrated that the greatest impediment to the more traditional Aborigines improving their socio/economic condition is actually their culture. They continue to apply and use the cultural responses they evolved over many centuries as hunter–gatherers, to survive in an Australia that now has a modern market/contract economy. This approach to life lies at the core of Aboriginal disadvantage, a situation compounded by government policies and programmes, many of which are exacerbating the very problems they are meant to alleviate.

When framing policies to help the more traditional Aborigines meet the challenges posed by the modern Australian market/contract economy, planners need to balance, and constantly keep in mind two things. The first is the need to give due weight to the continuing Aboriginal cultural realities. The second is the need for Aborigines to plug into the Australian market/contract economy if they want to improve their socio/economic situation. These two factors provide the parameters within which policies to help the more traditional Aborigines improve their socio/economic situation must be developed, if they are to have a realistic chance of success. However, before moving on to the imperatives these factors impose on the guidelines, I will expand on both these ‘realities’ so as to make it quite clear why I consider them to be of such crucial importance.

Originally, many policies aimed at helping Aborigines survive and find a place in modern Australia, sought to eradicate their traditional culture, as a prelude to them adopting the Australian culture. This was attempted by suppressing the influence of parents and elders by sidelining them, and concentrating on the children, seeking to inculcate in them new values and a new way of life. In some cases, in pursuit of this policy, children were forbidden, on the pain of punishment, to even speak their indigenous language. The attempt to change the Aborigines’ way of life through sidelining the parents and elders and concentrating on the education of their children, in its various guises, continued until the early 1970s. Then a different policy, one of self-management and self-determination was introduced.

This latter policy, while seemingly taking Aboriginal culture seriously, was in fact even more destructive of the Aboriginal culture than the previous policy. For example, by requiring Aboriginal groups wanting to access government funds, to incorporate under Australian law, the government destroyed the traditional method of apportioning responsibility and requiring accountability. The Australian law didn’t fit the way in which Aborigines organised themselves socially and held their leaders accountable for
their actions. Consequently, the people elected to positions under this law were not accountable to the people who had elected them, nor could the people who had elected them exercise any control over them. They virtually did what they wanted. This usually meant distributing the funds the association received to benefit their own kin, and not the members of their association.

Another example. The manner in which governments granted land to Aborigines cut right across traditional patterns of ownership and management. I have already highlighted how this occurred and will not reiterate it here, except to say that it seriously undermined the Aboriginal leaders and their authority. In fact, together with the associations legislation, the various land rights legislation sidelined legitimate authority in Aboriginal groups.

One of the most deleterious results of past—and current—government policies has been to leave the more traditional Aboriginal groups without effective legitimate leadership. This has not only impacted negatively on these Aboriginal groups, but has also robbed governments of the only legitimate avenue of dialogue with these Aboriginal groups. As a result, governments are forced to talk with, and take the advise of quasi-Aboriginal leaders—Aborigines who have been elected to organisations which it (governments) have created and which it (governments) fund—but which have no legitimate standing among the more traditional Aborigines. The results of this policy are becoming painfully more obvious day by day.

My contention, based on the foregoing analysis of how social change takes place and the structure of Aboriginal societies, is that for government policies to be effective in overcoming Aboriginal disadvantage they must take Aboriginal culture seriously, neither suppressing nor ignoring it.

In saying this, I am not advocating that governments seek to preserve Aboriginal culture. Governments have no such role. In fact, to do so would only force Aborigines into a dead end—forcing them to hold on to a culture that continues to marginalise them. There is nothing sacrosanct about cultures, and the Aboriginal culture is no exception. Down through the ages, cultures have come and gone and been modified as the social and physical environment of its practitioners have changed. Aborigines have, over time, discarded and/or modified aspects of their culture as these no longer served their purpose—something they have been doing ever since the coming of the first settlers. So it is to be expected that the aspects of their culture to which they continue to adhere, are seen by them as important and relevant to their current situation. Therefore, to ignore these aspects of culture in policy planning is to doom the policies to failure even before their implementation.

To guard against any misunderstanding, I want to reiterate that the rationale for taking seriously those aspects of Aboriginal culture still shaping the lives of the more traditional Aborigines is not to preserve the culture, but to utilise the culture to assist Aborigines adjust to the current social and economic situation.

The second factor that needs to be borne in mind when framing policies to help Aborigines improve their socio/economic state is the need for Aborigines to plug into the modern Australian market/contract economy.

Today, there are no Aborigines living in a traditional hunter/gatherer economy. Even after the return of some 50 per cent of the Northern Territory land mass to Aborigines
under the *Northern Territory Land Rights Act* of 1976, none of them have gone back to living off hunting and gathering. Many more traditional Aborigines still enjoy going hunting for game and gathering their bush foods. But this is more for recreational purposes—and in some cases, to supplement their food supply—than a way of life.

At present, Aborigines who are not participating in the Australian market/contract economy live off welfare payments of one kind or another, or off rents (royalties) paid for mining on Aboriginal land. As is becoming increasingly obvious, this dependency on meaningless welfare, such as that injected into Aboriginal societies and groups, dehumanises life and gives birth to the nihilism and despair so evident among Aborigines today. This, in turn, is leading to excessive drinking and the use of drugs, to domestic violence, rape, sexual abuse of minors, incest and the like. Welfare dependency is destroying Aborigines.96

Since Aborigines have shown no intention of returning to support themselves via their traditional hunting/gathering economy, and welfare dependency—with the social problems it generates—is destroying them, the only meaningful alternative for Aborigines is to plug into the Australian market/contract economy at whatever level will provide them with the standard of living to which they aspire.

This latter emphasis is important, since it leaves the initiative with the Aborigines, both with regard to the degree to which they want to change and the pace at which they want to change. Say, a man in Arnhem Land wants to live off his ancestral estate, except for some occasional tea, sugar, flour and items of clothing. He could probably purchase these by selling an occasional bark painting he has painted or some traditional artefact(s) he has made. This would mark the extent of his involvement in the Australian economy. If, however, the man wanted a four-bedroom house with air-conditioning and a Toyota 4 Wheel drive in his driveway, then his level of participation in the Australian economy would have to increase correspondingly. The choice would be his.

The current practice of providing welfare benefits—unemployment, job-search, family allowances, CDEP and the like—without any reciprocal conditions is sending a false message about the Australian economy to the more traditional Aborigines. It is reinforcing their traditional economic concepts built around ritual and hunting and gathering. As noted earlier, ritual was the Aborigines means of production, and hunting and gathering their means of accessing what they had produced.

The more traditional Aborigines have always overlaid their economic concepts on the Australian economy. The automatic provision of welfare benefits has merely reinforced their traditional concepts. As they see it, the new ritual demanded by the Australian economy is the filling in of forms (applications). If this ritual is performed correctly then the money will be there to be collected.

This should cause no surprise. The more traditional Aborigines are simply doing what people generally do when they look at another culture—they interpret what they see in terms of their own culture. It is what Australians have done, and still do, when they look at the Aboriginal culture—interpret it in terms of their own. Only long-term cross-cultural education exploring this issue, coupled with policies supporting the Australian market/contract economy, will lead to an appreciation of how the Australian economy works—and hopefully participation in it.

Within the parameters set by the need to take Aboriginal cultural realities seriously, on the one hand, and the need to take the realities of the Australian market/contract economy
equally seriously on the other, what follows are my guidelines for policies which could help the more traditional Aborigines ameliorate their socio/economic situation. These guidelines should not be seen in isolation from each other, but as together providing a framework for a new approach to the problem of Aboriginal disadvantage. Since these guidelines flow from my earlier analysis, the rationale behind the guidelines has been kept to the minimum.

The first guideline relates to communication. Currently, governments depend on Aboriginal organisations established under legislation to advise them on Aboriginal issues, and then also on their help to implement their (the governments’) policies and programmes. Now this may well be the only practical way for governments to interact with Aborigines who have lost and/or abandoned their culture, but are still deemed to need assistance. However, it should be clear from earlier analysis that these organisations do not represent the views of the more traditional Aborigines, and that their policy advice to governments is unhelpful to the more traditional Aborigines.

If governments are genuine in their desire to hear what the more traditional Aborigines have to say, then they have to make contact with the legitimate Aboriginal leaders. Within the more traditional Aboriginal groups—as well as other Aboriginal groups—there exist persons who have authority to represent their group and to speak on certain subjects relating to their group. For example, the senior pmarakurtwia (land owner) and his kurtungurla (manager) for matters relating to their traditional land, and the oldest surviving male or female in an extended family for matters considered the purview of the extended family. (In each case, the above persons would know whom else to involve in any discussion and/or decision that had to be made.) This is not the place to go into detail, but the rules for ‘discovering’ these significant persons in Aboriginal groups, is relatively straightforward. Usually, all that is required is documenting a family group’s genealogy, land affiliation and ascertaining how the group determines seniority.97

The second guideline relates to respecting and working through traditional Aboriginal authority where it still exists, and wherever possible enhancing this authority through appropriate policies. For example, by granting to nyinhanga—or their equivalent—title to their traditional lands, with all the rights and responsibilities that attend freehold land ownership under Australian law. The foregoing will have clearly indicated the importance of giving due recognition to the traditional Aboriginal leaders. These are the persons with whom governments and agencies need to talk to about the problems facing Aboriginal groups. When governments recognise the authority of these persons, they also provide themselves, and the groups, with persons who are in a position to implement, or at least strongly support, programmes intended to improve the groups’ socio/economic situation. In an earlier chapter I made the case for enhancing traditional Aboriginal authority, so there is no need for me to further belabour this point.

The third guideline relates to cross-cultural education for Aboriginal group leaders and their groups. The purpose of this would be to help them understand the working of the Australian market/contract economy in terms of their own concepts. For such an education programme to have any chance of success, the educator would have to demonstrate a knowledge and acceptance of traditional Aboriginal concepts. This is for two reasons. First, in order to enter into meaningful dialogue with the leaders, and second, to help them grasp the concepts behind the Australian market/contract economy. This may not be easy, but is not impossible, as Richard Trudgen has demonstrated.98
The fourth guideline relates to the schooling of children. Without the skills needed to find employment in the Australian market/contract economy, most Aboriginal children on reaching adulthood will be doomed to exist on welfare benefits—and the results of such a life can be seen in the lives of current Aboriginal welfare recipients.

With the change of policy from assimilation to self-determination and self-management in the 1970s, the schooling of Aboriginal children, at least in the Northern Territory, went backwards. The most recent investigation into the deplorable state of Aboriginal education in the Northern Territory was undertaken by the Hon. Bob Collins. In his report, under Education outcomes he states:

The review has found substantive evidence that indigenous educational outcomes are deteriorating from an already low base, as follows:
- an overall decline in attendance at the same time that enrolments have been increasing;
- actual attendance in terms of days per week being worse then the system averages would show;
- actual enrolment omitting more compulsory school-age children than system participation rates would show;
- poor retention rates beyond Years 7 and 10;
- advice from employer bodies that, more than ever before, they are unable to find people who meet basic literacy and numeracy entry criteria for employment and training;
- a repeatedly stated observation from indigenous elders that their children and grandchildren have lesser literacy and numeracy skills than they do.99

School attendance for Aboriginal children should be compulsory, as it is for all Australian children, and this should be enforced as a matter of great importance for the future of Aborigines. As an incentive to force compliance, government may need to consider withdrawing family allowance payments from those parents who do not send their children to school regularly. In other words, parents need to know that something is expected in return for financial assistance. This would be something Aborigines would understand. I remember when the outstation movement began at Hermannsburg, all the groups who moved out established and worked their gardens—until they found out that various forms of government assistance were in no way tied to them doing something like establishing and tending a garden.

The fifth guideline concerns Aboriginal townships. These townships inevitably comprise Aborigines with different land and family affiliations. As was pointed out in the analysis of Aboriginal culture, the more traditional Aboriginal people do not have mechanisms for co-operation in day-to-day matters. This is largely the reason why, as the Minister for Local Government in the Northern Territory Government pointed out in 2002, there isn’t one functioning Aboriginal township in the Northern Territory. It is not possible to have effective Aboriginal local government for cultural reasons, and governments should therefore directly run all essential services in Aboriginal townships.

The sixth guideline concerns the employment of Aboriginal health workers in communities made up of more traditional Aborigines. These people, like their
counterparts working among non-traditional Aborigines, play a valuable role in isolated communities, diagnosing medical conditions, and then either dispensing the correct medicine or sending the patient to a hospital. However, kinship constraints, which dictate who can say what and to whom, limit their role in the areas of environmental health, preventative health education and cultural behaviour which impacts on medical treatment. This needs to be noted so that there are no false expectations regarding the role that Aboriginal health workers can play in more traditional Aboriginal groups. Their role and functions need to be augmented by Australian health workers who are not constrained by kinship factors.

As an example of cultural behaviour which impacts on medical treatment and which can only be resolved culturally, I relate an incident observed by anthropologist Annette Hamilton, in the Pitjantjatjara lands. An Aboriginal mother had a child with discharging ears. She took the child to the clinic and had the sister clean the ears, and put some drops in them. The sister then gave the mother some cotton buds and drops, and told her to treat the ears three times a day or whatever it was. In the camp, the mother started to carry out the treatment the sister had suggested, but gave up when the child became distressed every time she tried. She gave up because, according to her culture, the task of a mother was always to comfort a child, never distress it. If she had persisted, her social group would have labelled her a bad mother. As it was, when she went back to the sister with the child’s ears worse than they were before, the sister labelled her a bad mother for having neglected her child.100

The seventh guideline relates to alcohol and drugs. It is generally recognised that the excessive consumption of alcohol (and drugs) is causing grave problems in Aboriginal societies—domestic violence, rape, incest, child neglect, etc. If unchecked, it could lead to genocide. For a number of reasons, Aborigines find themselves at a serious disadvantage, compared with Australians, when it comes to dealing with this problem. Never having had access to alcohol before the European brought it to this continent, there are no ‘laws’ in the blueprint for living that their supernatural beings gave them, to guide them in their use of alcohol. Any laws they introduce now do not carry the ‘divine’ command of the ‘Dreamtime’ and so can’t be enforced by their own societies. Consequently, laws brought in by Aboriginal communities are flouted with impunity.

Given this situation, governments have a responsibility to act for, as Noel Pearson, among others, has pointed out, unless the alcohol problem is controlled, there will be no progress in addressing Aboriginal socio/economic disadvantage. In combating this problem, governments may have to look seriously at solutions such as prohibition and giving food vouchers in lieu of monetary benefits to people who continually drink to excess, neglect their children, harm other people, and the like.

My final guideline relates to race-based legislation. Because of the divisive nature of this legislation and its dubious benefits, all legislation based on race should be phased out as soon as practical, and Aboriginal social disadvantage and needs be addressed through legislation currently used to meet social disadvantage and needs in the Australian community. Apart from the government ceasing to collect a special royalty on minerals and gas extracted from Aboriginal land—much of which is then paid to the Land Councils in the Northern Territory and used by them to further their political agenda, and not to alleviate Aboriginal disadvantage—such a shift would have minimal impact on the welfare
of the more traditional Aborigines. Aboriginal land in the Northern Territory, presently held by land trusts and administered by land councils should, wherever traditional title and owners can be identified, be returned to the traditional owners, who should then be granted freehold title under the same conditions as Australians. Similar arrangements should apply in the States that have granted land to Aborigines via Land Trusts.
5.1 Christianity and Aboriginal Culture

In this chapter I want to do three things. First, I want to look at the Scriptural and the Aboriginal understanding of reality—for example, how the world began, how the world is maintained, blessing versus fertility rites and the like, noting their major differences. I have already dealt with these, albeit briefly, in the course of my earlier analysis, but here I want to draw them together, with some additional comments, particularly from TGH Strehlow. Second, I want to draw attention to the Lutheran teaching of the Two Kingdoms and its importance and relevance when considering the Christian response to culture. And third, I want to look at the accusation, often levelled at Christian missions, that they were instrumental in destroying Aboriginal culture.

Major Differences between the Scriptural and Aboriginal Understanding of Reality

The origins of the universe. The Scriptures teach and Christians believe that God—the God who has revealed Himself in the Scriptures—alone is uncreated and eternal. Further, that this God created all that exists, ex nihilo, by His word. (‘Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. ’ Genesis 1:2) With God’s act of creation, time began.

Aborigines—I continue to use the Arrarnta as my reference point—believed that the earth was eternal, but arid, featureless and without any forms of life. However, beneath the crust of the earth numerous supernatural beings slept. They too were eternal. For Aborigines time began when these supernatural beings emerged from their eternal sleep and began wandering the earth, fashioning its mountains and rivers, creating its flora and fauna and human beings. These supernatural beings, also known as totemic ancestors, could and did appear in both human and animal form. At the conclusion of their creative activity they returned to the earth from which they had emerged.

A quotation from TGH Strehlow seems appropriate in this connection.

Throughout the Aranda-speaking area it was generally believed that both the sky and the earth were eternal, and that each of them had its own set of supernatural beings. The Western Aranda believed the sky to be inhabited by an emu-footed Great Father (kngarritja), who was also the Eternal Youth (altjirra nthitja). This Great Father had dog-footed wives, and many sons and daughters—all the males being emu-footed and all the females dog-footed. They lived on fruits and vegetable foods in an eternally green land, unaffected by droughts, through which the Milky Way flowed like a broad river; and the stars were their campfires. In this green land there were only trees, fruits, flowers, and birds; no game animals existed, and no meat was eaten. All these sky dwellers were as ageless as the stars themselves, and death could not enter their home: the reddish skinned emu-footed Great Father of the sky, whose blonde hair shone 'like a spider web in the evening sunlight', looked as young as his own sons, and all the women who lived above the stars had the grace and the full-bosomed beauty of young girls…. It is clear that it would be impossible to regard the emu-footed Great Father in the sky of Western Aranda mythology as a supreme Being in any sense of this word; for neither he nor his family ever exerted any influence beyond the limits of the sky…. They (i.e., these sky beings) had not created the earth, nor any of its landscape features, nor any of its plants and animals, nor any of its human inhabitants. They had
not brought the totemic ancestors into being, nor had they controlled any of their actions. They had no power over winds, clouds, sickness, dangers, or death. They were not even interested in anything that went on below. If any crimes were committed, the evil-doers had to fear only the wrath of the totemic ancestors and the punishment of the outraged human society.

The maintenance of the universe The Scriptures state that the same word of God which brought the universe into existence, maintains this universe until the time God has appointed for His creation of the new heavens and the new earth. ‘…Son … through whom he created the worlds …and he sustains all things by His powerful word’ Hebrews 1:2,3. ‘…that by the word of God heavens existed long ago and an earth was formed out of water…. But by the same word the present heavens and earth have been preserved for fire, being kept until the day of judgement and destruction of the godless’ 2 Peter 3:5,7.

A Western Arrarnta man once said to me: Tjurrungala alha nhanha errkuma (It is the tjurrunga which maintain this world). The Aborigines believed that through the performance of the appropriate ritual they entered into, and continued the creative activity of their totemic ancestors, and so maintained the orderly functioning of the universe and its fruitfulness. I have elaborated on this point earlier, so will not do so again. The Western Arrarnta did not see this world or history having a goal. Time is not linear, but circular.

Blessing versus fertility rites Genesis makes it quite clear the continuing fruitfulness of the earth is the result of God’s creative activity and blessing. The fact that fruits, vegetables, grains, grasses etc., etc., reproduce themselves is the result of God having created each with its own seed so that they would reproduce. ‘Then God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees with the seed in it.” And it was so’ Genesis 1:12. And when God created the fish and the birds and the animals and human kind, he created them male and female and blessed them so that they could each reproduce their own kind. ‘Be fruitful and multiply’ Genesis 1:22, 28. God empowered his creatures, sharing with them His power to create through His blessing.

As I pointed out earlier, Aborigines believed they had the creative words used by their totemic ancestors and when they used them in the correct ritual they entered into and continued the creative activity of their totemic ancestors. They further believed that unless they did this, the foods on which they depended would not grow, nor would the game animals on which they depended for meat, reproduce.

How death entered the world. According to the Scriptures death resulted from disobedience. ‘And the L ORD God commanded the man, “you may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die”… she took of its fruit; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate… therefore the L ORD sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life’ Genesis 2:16, 17; 3:6b, 23, 24. ‘Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned…’ Romans 5:12.
The Western Arrarnta had a different understanding of the aetiology of death. To quote Strehlow:

…it is nevertheless true that everywhere in the Aranda-speaking area a firm belief was held that the power of death was limited to the earth, and that men had to die only because all connection had been severed between the sky and the earth. Traditions about broken ‘ladders’ were found at many ceremonial sites. Among the Lower Southern Aranda, for instances, there was the story of a huge ‘casuarina’ tree which had stood, at the beginning of time, at Akar’ Intjorta in the Simpson Desert, and had touched the sky with its topmost branches. Another ‘casuarina’ tree several miles away, which was leaning against it at a convenient angle, could have provided a suitable ladder for the human beings of later days to climb from the earth into the sky. But the tree had been chopped down by a party of Thangka Blood Avengers, and the bridge to unending life had thus been destroyed for ever. The Upper Southern Aranda myth which relates how the two Ntjikantja Brothers, after pulling up the spear on which they climbed into the sky, pronounced a death-curse upon all earth dwellers, has been quoted in ‘Aranda Traditions’ (p.78). The Brothers then turned into the Magellanic clouds.

These two Ntjikantja Brothers, like the sun, the moon, the Seven Sisters and the evening star, had once emerged from the earth and wandered about on its surface like all other earth-born totemic ancestors. But the totemic ancestors who remained on the earth after completing their labours finally grew old, returned into the ground, and sank back into everlasting sleep. Their fellows who rose into the sky, on the other hand, changed into ageless celestial bodies that knew neither decay nor death.

The image of God and the Aboriginal belief in re-incarnation The Scriptures testify that what distinguishes humankind from the animals, is that humankind has been created in the Image of God. ‘Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion…” So God created humankind in His image, in the image of God created He them; male and female He created them.’ Genesis 1:26, 27.

The Arrarnta on the other hand believed that within each individual his totem had been reincarnated. I again quote from Strehlow:

Briefly, the Aranda doctrine of conception involves a belief in two souls possessed by every human being. Intercourse between a man and a woman results in a foetus which has a mortal human ‘life’ (or ‘soul’) of its own; in other words, man comes into being initially like the animals, whose existence also results from mating between male and female parents. But man differs from the animals in acquiring an all-important second ‘life’ (or ‘soul’) which is immortal. This second soul is part of the ‘life’ of one of the immortal supernatural ancestors, which entered the body of an already pregnant woman at some definite point in the landscape. All the instances I have given in ‘Aranda Traditions’ make it clear that the totemic ancestor seeking rebirth chose not just a married woman, but rather a pregnant woman as his mother. Hence the time of his entry into her womb was delayed until she was pregnant beyond any doubts: the first attack of morning sickness, the first pains of pregnancy, and the first daydream visions of babies, are all experiences of women who have been pregnant for some weeks.
The unmistakable nature of these experiences, moreover, enabled the identity of the supernatural being, some of whose life has passed into the future mother, to be determined beyond any doubts. In Aranda eyes, this was of utmost importance; for it was this second (and immortal) soul which decided the personality of the child after birth: the totem of each individual and his personal links with the world of Eternity were determined by the soul that took up residence in him at his pmara kngaanintja (or pmara kngaanakala)—a term which I have translated as ‘conception site’.

At birth, every human being that came into the world was no longer regarded merely as the offspring of human parents, but as a reborn part of a supernatural being. It was believed that anyone looking at a man or a woman could see before him the original totemic ancestor or ancestress. Sometimes even abnormal physical characteristics were advanced as proofs of reincarnation from specific supernatural personages. A Hale River man called Korlparinya, for instance, used to display proudly the unusually large metatarsophalangeal joints on both of his feet as proof of his being the reincarnation of the grim native cat Sire Korlpa, who had developed swollen ‘bunions’ when he angrily thrust his feet into the campfire of the sons who had left him…

The second soul of every person was not only thought to have given definite shape to the human body into which it had entered: it was also believed to act as a kind of guardian spirit for its possessor, and to have the power of becoming separately visible on certain occasions to spectators with whom it was not linked physically. Thus it was claimed among the Western Aranda that a hunter returning in the distance sometimes appeared like two persons to men watching him from the camp. These two persons looked like exact doubles or identical twins. But when they drew close to camp, the ‘other self’ would vanish, and the watchers in the camp would realise what they had been looking at. Among the Western Aranda men a man’s ‘other self’ (or spirit double) was termed his artwa nyaltja (= nyaltja man; the term nyaltja can possibly be explained etymologically as meaning ‘self-father’).

Since every human being had two souls, and therefore a twin personality, it was possible for either of these souls to leave its home in the body for a short time. Not only was it possible for the nyaltja part of the human personality to become visible separately, but it was possible also for the mortal ‘soul’ (called kurruna) to leave its body and to wander away on its own. It did so regularly when its owner was dreaming: dreams were, in fact, regarded as actual adventures experienced by a kurruna while it was wandering about in the strange and often frightening world of unknown shapes and sounds that normally lay beyond the ken of men. The Aranda term for ‘to dream’ is altjirra ‘rama, which literally means ‘to see altjirra,’ ‘to see eternal things,’ to perceive sights and shapes beyond the comprehension of human eyes—sights and shapes which had existed from all eternity and which could be seen only by a soul that had left its human body behind temporarily. This concept was used also as an explanation for the terror and exhaustion resulting from nightmares: in such experiences the wandering kurruna of the sleeper was believed actually to have been chased by the malevolent shapes seen in the dream, and to have avoided destruction only by rushing back into the sleeping body.

**Eternal life** Through his death and resurrection Jesus again opened the way to peace and reconciliation with God, and so claimed that if any man believed in him, he not only had eternal life now, but that death could not rob him of this life. ‘Very truly, I tell
you, anyone who hears my words and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgement, but has passed from death to life’ John 5:24.

According to Strehlow, the Western Arrarnta believed they ‘possessed the eternal’ in this life, but that this union was broken at death. I quote:

Before the invasion of his home country by the Europeans, the central Australian totemite certainly believed that he ‘possessed the eternal’ in his own lifetime. If, as has been stated by theologians, it is the Christian ideal that ‘we are to think, will, and act like Him’, then the Aboriginal totemite believed that he could readily achieve this ideal relationship with his personal totemic ancestor: the second soul that gave him his true personality was a part of the living supernatural being whose totemic appellation he bore. Throughout his life he regarded himself as being in perpetual union with the world of Eternity, and hence he felt no need of waiting for a future union with a supernatural being in a life after death. Somewhat paradoxically to our European way of thinking, but perfectly naturally in the central Australian worldview, it was in the present, in the limitations of evanescent Time, that a man lived in union with Eternity. Death was hence the great tragedy which dissolved that union; for it meant the destruction of the mortal body and the irrevocable separation of the two souls of man. At death the mortal ‘life’ of soul turned into a departed spirit (or ‘ghost’, lthana), which balefully hovered around the place where the body had died, and keenly watched the surviving members of its late community, drawing comfort from the show of deep sorrow made by its late relatives and friends in the form of loud lamentations and self-inflicted wounds. After some months of shadowy existence this mortal soul either ceased to exist, or—particularly according to the beliefs of the Western Aranda—was destroyed by lightning. The second (and immortal) soul returned to the dead man’s conception site whence it had first emerged in order to be incarnated in a human being: this immortal spark became reabsorbed into the ‘life’ of the totemic ancestors, and was hence taken up once more by the eternal landscape.

Sin, grace, redemption and other great themes which grew out of God’s self revelation, beginning with Abraham and concluding with the sending of His Son, are absent from the Aboriginal understanding of ultimate reality.

The Lutheran Teaching on the Two Kingdoms
The Lutheran teaching of the two kingdoms is anchored in the Law and the Gospel, the two means through which God is actively involved in His creation. At the centre of this teaching lies the truth that through His law God is actively involved in placing limits on the destructive power of the devil, and protecting and preserving the basic structures of human society that He has established—viz., marriage, the family, property, government. (He also uses the law in the service of the gospel, to unmask sin and lead people to repentance). On the other hand, through the gospel God is actively working to redeem people from sin, death and the devil and bring them into His eternal kingdom.

The law is sometimes referred to as God’s work of the left hand, while the gospel is referred to as His work of the right hand. While both are activities of the one Triune God, they serve quite different purposes and so need to be clearly distinguished. Not separated, but distinguished. When they aren’t, human institutions are likely to be denigrating, the gospel turned into a new law, and the way of salvation fundamentally obscured.
In this context, there is no need to develop the teaching of the two kingdoms, apart from the need to look at the law and its relevance for an understanding and appreciation of culture. God’s law does not operate in a vacuum, but operates in, with, and under the cultural institutions societies have created as they seek to meet their various social needs—for example, the need to exercise social control, including the need to punish those who break the law. In most instances, those enforcing the laws of their society are not aware of being instruments in God’s hands, and in some instances the laws they enforce may even be contrary to the revealed will of God. Yet it is through these laws, and those involved in enforcing them, that God exercises His dominion of the left in this fallen world.

Hence it is right and appropriate to see a society’s culture—despite the fact that it may not reflect the revealed will of God—in a positive light. In fact, it is possible to state that a society’s culture is God’s gift to that society. Without the order and the constraints that that culture imposes on its adherents, life together would not be possible. There would be chaos and anarchy in which evil would overwhelm God’s fundamental orders. Herein lies the reason why the New Testament requires Christians to obey their civil authorities, even when they persecute them.

As I pointed out in an earlier chapter, God respected the culture of the Israelites, the people with whom He had entered into a covenant relationship, even when their cultural practices did not reflect His will. To illustrate this, I mention only two examples, the practice of polygamy and the ownership of slaves. God’s one abiding demand of His people was that they should worship and obey Him only. It was out of this worship and obedience that God, over time, worked changes in the culture of His people, without creating the discontinuities that have the potential to contribute to social chaos and anarchy.

Distinguishing God’s work of the left from his work of the right makes it possible to take a positive attitude to a culture—even when there are aspects not in conformity with God’s revealed will. At the same time, it makes it possible to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ without having to alter it to somehow make it fit the culture. In this way law and gospel, culture and the Christian faith, each have their rightful place in God’s economy of governance and salvation. A good example of the syncretistic theology that results from not maintaining the right distinction between law and gospel can be seen in Rainbow Spirit Theology.

It is an unfortunate fact of history that even Lutheran churches that stressed not only the balanced use of law and gospel but also the importance of distinguishing law and gospel, failed to do so when it came to the practical application of this teaching in missionary situations. At Hermannsburg, for example, the first missionaries actively undermined the authority of the elders in their endeavour to evangelise the people through the children. However, missions were not the only ones guilty of this approach in Australia—governments too followed the same route, believing that changes in Aboriginal societies could not occur without sidelining the elders. The resulting loss of authority by the elders not only exacerbated the social problems of Aboriginal societies caught up in a situation of rapid change, but it also affected their ability to deal with these problems.

The Accusation: Christian Missions Destroyed the Aboriginal Culture

Given the above, could the often repeated accusation that Christian missions destroyed
the Aboriginal culture, be true? While I am not able to comment on whether the approach to culture adopted by other church missions in Australia led to the destruction of Aboriginal culture in the areas where they operated, I am in a position to make some comments on the past approach taken by the Finke River Mission and its effects on the culture of the people.

I begin with a brief historical perspective.

The early missionaries were concerned that at all times the Word of God should be proclaimed accurately, and the sacraments administered correctly, according to the Lutheran understanding of Word and Sacrament. Above all else, this meant avoiding any hint of syncretism.

As a result, the missionaries took a negative attitude to what might be called the more overtly religious aspects of the Aboriginal culture, viz., the tjurrunga objects, songs, stories and rituals, as well as the initiation of boys.

Rev. Carl Strehlow, who was the missionary at Hermannsburg from 1894–1922, produced a monumental ethnographical work entitled DIE ARANDA UND LORITJA STAMME IN ZENTRAL AUSTRALIEN. (The Arrarnta and Loritja tribes of Central Australia.) This work has not been published in English and so is largely unknown in the English-speaking world. However, that is not the point I want to make. The point I want to make is that, despite of all his anthropological research, Strehlow never attended a ‘corroboree’, as he felt this would compromise not only him as a missionary, but also his teaching and preaching ministry.

Similarly, Rev. FW Albrecht, who was the missionary at Hermannsburg from 1926 to 1952, never attended a ‘corroboree’. I do not know what instructions Strehlow might have given his congregation regarding tjurrunga, but I do know that Albrecht told Aboriginal Christians that they should give up their tjurrunga objects and songs, and that they should not initiate their sons.

Although this approach would not be considered politically correct today it was generally considered proper at that time. After all, according to the thinking of that period, the Aborigines were primitive savages, on the bottom rung of the evolutionary ladder, and it was the role of Australians to civilise and Christianise them. (Hints of ‘manifest destiny’?) In any case, to civilise and Christianise were seen as largely synonymous.

Given this scenario, the conventional wisdom of today would suggest that Hermannsburg should be a cultural wasteland, with the Aboriginal culture totally destroyed. Instead, when Finke River Mission senior staff in the late ’70s early ’80s set about mapping the Hermannsburg lease at the request of the traditional Aboriginal owners, all the relevant land boundaries were established to the complete satisfaction of those concerned. The traditional owners were able to do this because they still knew all the relevant stories and songs that their forefathers had used since time immemorial to establish their land boundaries. Similarly, despite my father’s advice to Christian men not to initiate their sons, all boys at Hermannsburg were regularly initiated. Furthermore, if one compares what Carl Strehlow documented about the Western Arrarnta class system, kinship, marriage customs, etc., and what exists today, little has changed.

Interestingly, at the same time as the culture remained relatively intact, apart from the performance of increase rituals, the church also made progress. Since the late 20s, and even before, Aborigines from Hermannsburg were involved in the evangelisation of other Aboriginal groups. Then, in 1964, the first Aboriginal men were ordained as pastors of the
Lutheran Church to teach, preach and administer the sacraments to their own people.

As far as I have been able to ascertain, this co-existence of the Aboriginal culture with the Christian faith has not been at the expense of the gospel, as there was no watering down of the gospel to accommodate the Aboriginal culture. Nor, except for the cessation of increase rituals, has the co-existence of the Christian faith been at the expense of Aboriginal culture.

There are reasons for this. First, the missionaries use of the peoples’ own language meant the people were able to hear the Word of God preached in their own language, and even read it in their own language. Therefore, they were in a position, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, to evaluate what belonged to the essence of the Gospel, and what might have been the missionaries’ interpretation. So the people made up their own minds as to what belonged to the essence of the Christian faith, and what was the missionaries’ interpretation.

What the first missionaries did not understand, and could not have been expected to understand, is the undifferentiated nature of Aboriginal culture. So while they, for example, looked at Aboriginal tjurrunga (the sacred/secret objects, songs and stories) as pagan religion, they could not understand that these same objects and stories were also land title deeds, that they were used for social control, that they were stories for teaching correct social behaviour, etc. While the Aboriginal Christians, were not able to articulate this, they were able to distinguish for themselves what belonged to the essence of the Gospel, and what didn’t. So, for example, they gave up increase ceremonies, as they considered them incompatible with their Christian faith, but continued to hold on to their traditions, stories, songs because they needed them to define their land boundaries, and socialise their young.

I have had confirmation in various ways, and at various times, that this is what happened. I relate one experience. I had gone to an important totemic centre, in the company of an anthropologist. In the ensuing days, the Aboriginal owners of this place told the anthropologist about many of the totemic trails which intersected at this place. However, they made no mention of the fact that this place was a major site for the increase of mulga seed, a fact of which they had informed me previously. I asked an Aborigine who had a shared responsibility for the site, why? I still clearly remember his answer. He told me in Arrarnta, ‘When our fathers heard that the God who revealed himself in the Scriptures was both the creator and sustainer of this universe, and that he is the Father who provides us with our food, we realised that if we believed this, we could not continue to believe that we sustained the universe and increased the flora and fauna on which our lives depended. So we gave up that belief and its ritual.’ But then he juxtaposed a very interesting fact. He said, ‘But the initiation of boys is something we cannot give up.’

Second, although the missionaries considered the Aboriginal culture to be basically pagan, and therefore hardly the wine skin capable or suitable of holding the new wine of the Gospel, yet from the very beginning they attempted to learn the language, and to translate the Scriptures into the language of the people. By today’s standards some of their first attempts appear crude, yet their attempts communicated their acceptance of an important part of the peoples’ culture.

Third, while other Australians may have considered them of little value, and a dying race, the missionaries’ attitude, and the Gospel they preached, said that they were of value, as people.

Fourth, allied to this was the missionaries’ love for them, evidenced in practical help like care for the sick, food for the hungry and sanctuary for the fearful and dispossessed.
Thus the missionaries sent a very strong message of acceptance and affirmation to the Aboriginal people among whom they worked. They were people of worth and value. Against this backdrop, the missionaries’ negative attitude to the overtly religious aspects of their culture did not appear to have posed too many problems for the people, especially as they had plenty of space. At Hermannsburg they only had to take a five-minute walk, and they were on their own, and could do what they liked, without any fear of interference from the missionaries. So they kept all the customs and practices that they wanted to keep, and gave up only those they wanted to give up.

The validity of my reflections and observations on what happened at Hermannsburg are, so I believe, buttressed by a sociological insight of Wilbert Moore’s. He states:

However, another question must be considered, and that is whether certain standard components of cultures and societies are especially autonomous. Such relative autonomy would have two implications for the analysis of social change: relatively high and long insulation from the effects of other systemic changes, but, correlatively, fairly ‘easy’ autonomous changes, including those of external origin, owing to the meagre links to the balance of the system. Although the evidence relating to the independent variability of some standard components of social systems is extremely sketchy, it does appear that aesthetic canons and forms provide one such manifestation and that strictly super-empirical components of religious belief represent another. To repeat, if these hypotheses are correct, it would follow that aesthetic forms and super-empirical beliefs would be only slightly affected by other social transformations, but by the same token might well exhibit changes that have little to do with their immediate social environment and in fact possibly are a result of external influence. The loose connection with other role structures and ordinary patterns of behaviour means that relatively autonomous change might occur without a kind of ‘systemic resistance’ deriving from interlocking patterns.110

That the Christian message had an impact on the Aboriginal culture goes without saying. However, to suggest that the Hermannsburg mission destroyed the local culture is not sustainable, as there is no evidence to support it. From my observations of the central Australian scene, there is no appreciable difference in cultural knowledge between Aborigines brought up on the mission station, and those brought up otherwise in contact with Australians. When it comes to cultural knowledge, the crucial element would appear to be the length of contact with Australians—not the religious orientation of the Australians.

A final comment. To maintain that Christian missions destroyed the Aboriginal culture is very demeaning of Aborigines. It suggests that Aborigines had no firm convictions of their own and simply rolled over when they were confronted with the Christian message. I conclude with a quote from the producers of the Film The Dream and the Dreaming:

We began researching the topic leaning towards the view that the missionaries arrived with their Christian god and their European civilization and imposed it on the people of Central Australia. We soon discovered how simplistic this view was. We realised that by taking this point of view we were being racist—that we were in fact saying that the Arrarnta people had no self will—that they were merely passive victims of a cultural holocaust. This simply wasn’t true. The Arrarnta used the mission for their own purposes and later, when they had no choice but to enter the mission or starve, they adopted Lutheranism to suit themselves and their culture. It was this aspect of ‘two laws’ which shaped our approach to the topic.
The Arrarnta had rejected the approach of the first missionaries i.e. to discard old traditions, just as today they don’t feel it necessary to reject their mission history to be Arrarnta.

5.2 GUIDELINES FOR THE LCA MEMBERS WORKING WITH MORE TRADITIONAL ABORIGINAL LUTHERAN CHRISTIANS

Anyone called or appointed by a Board or Committee of the LCA to work among more traditional Aboriginal Lutheran Christians will be confronted by two factors which he will need to take into account. The first is that he is not a missionary in the sense that he is bringing the Word of God to a people who are not baptised, and therefore not members of the Body of Christ. Rather, in all the areas where the LCA is currently represented and working—be it among the more traditional Aboriginal extended family groups or ‘communities’ (Aboriginal townships whose population is made up of unaffiliated groups)—Aboriginal Lutheran congregations are in existence. Many of these are served by an Aboriginal pastor(s) and/or evangelist(s). While the LCA worker may not formally join the congregation in the area where he is living, he should consider himself a full member of that congregation, contributing his God-given abilities to the up-building of the church in that location. However, because the more traditional Aborigines tend to defer to Australians when they are present or involved in joint activities with them, the LCA worker should bear the following in mind:

- not take responsibilities that rightly belong to the local congregation;
- not make decisions that rightly need to be made by the local congregation;
- not do things the congregation is capable of doing;
- not allow themselves to become a ‘milch cow’;
- respect the culture of the people and their way of organising their congregational life and worship.

The second factor the LCA worker needs to take account of is the culture of the people. Since most of the workers the LCA sends to work with more traditional Aborigines are either ordained pastors or laymen, whose major task will be to assist in training Aboriginal pastors, doing translation work, preparing relevant Christian literature, preparing literacy material, teaching literacy, and the like, the guidelines which follow have been formulated with these kind of tasks in mind.

The first thing the worker needs to do is let people know, in a kind but quite unambiguous way, why he has come (been sent), and what his role will be. The worst message he could convey to the people is that he has come to help them—an ambiguous statement if ever there was one. It does not define how or in what way he has come to help. So the person who makes a general statement like that should not be surprised if all kinds of demands are made on him for example ‘lend me your car battery’, ‘take me back to my place’, ‘come and give my car a tow back to the settlement’.

The more traditional Aborigine invariably understands an offer to help to mean and offer to help him with whatever he needs at that time. Given such a scenario, it is not long before the worker is stressed out from running all kinds of errands. He then either
leaves because he can't cope with the demands, or he decides he will no longer be used as everybody's lackey and stops running errands. In either case, he has lost. In the first because he is no longer there to fulfil the role for which he was sent. In the latter case, the more traditional Aborigines will deem him to be untruthful and unhelpful. After all, he said he had come to help and when he was asked for help he would not give it. This could have a serious effect on his ability to fulfil the role for which he was sent.

The second thing the worker needs to do is learn the language and culture of the people he has come to serve. I have grouped language and culture together because they go together and neither can be learnt in depth without the other. A worker is able to prepare himself for both these tasks before beginning his service, or soon after, by attending courses in linguistics and anthropology. But he then needs to apply himself to learning the language and culture as a priority, as he begins his service. The major reasons for this can be summarised as follows:

- to put himself into a learning position with the people. This can help to create a favourable environment for his teaching ministry.
- to show that he is interested in the matters that are of fundamental interest to the people. This can help to create a good rapport with the people.
- to equip him to accurately translate the Word of God, written as well as oral.
- to help him appreciate what it means to live as a Christian in a culture not his own, and the pressures this creates for Aboriginal Christians.
- to provide him with cultural concepts which he can use to explain Christian concepts, for example the similarity between the traditional Aboriginal concept that the tjurrunga maintain the universe to the Christian concept that the universe is maintained by the word of God; the similarity between the traditional Aboriginal concept of lyima in their fertility rites and the Christian concept of fructify contained in the concept of blessing.
- to alert him to the dangers to the Christian life posed by the undifferentiated nature of Aboriginal culture;
- to demonstrate his acceptance of the people's way of life and living. This is absolutely crucial to the people accepting him, trusting him and leading him further into their way of thinking and living. Here the old Scriptural adage holds true too, 'To him who has will be given even more'.
- to free the Aboriginal Christians to be themselves in his presence, rather than behaving in a way that they think they should in his presence.

5.3 GUIDELINES FOR LCA PASTORS WORKING WITH ABORIGINAL LUTHERAN CHRISTIANS

(including suggestions for Australians who have Aborigines in their congregation)

The focus here is Australian pastors who are engaged, either full-time or part-time, in a ministry of word and sacrament to Aboriginal Lutheran Christians. Further, the guidelines envisage that this ministry is taking place in an urban setting in which the majority of the population is Australian, that the Aboriginal Lutherans live among this population. The
Aboriginal Lutherans may be members of his congregation, or Aboriginal Lutherans who have moved into the urban setting, but without having formerly joined any congregation.

The pastor in his ministry among these people needs to convey to them in a kind and unambiguous manner that his ministry, is a ministry of word and sacrament. In this respect the pastor is no different to the LCA worker working among more traditional Aboriginal Lutheran Christians. If the pastor fails to make this clear, he is likely to be overwhelmed with all manner of welfare type requests—money, transport, housing, social security matters, and the like—and will have no time for his real ministry. If the pastor begins with a welfare ministry he will continue to be seen as a welfare provider. And if, or when, he ceases to do so, he could well be seen as having outlived his usefulness.

This is not to deny that there will be occasions when the pastor will need to involve himself in welfare activity of one kind or another, but this should be the exception, not the rule, and always be closely allied to his ministry of word and sacrament.

The pastor needs to guard against drifting into a welfare type ministry when he feels a lack of ‘success’ in his ministry of word and sacrament. In his frustration, he may feel the need to do something concrete where he can see the results of his labours. He may also assume that meeting people’s welfare needs will open the door to a more ‘successful’ ministry of word and sacrament. This is a false assumption. The one rarely leads into the other.

The pastor also needs to guard against assuming that engaging in a welfare-type ministry will help him establish a good relationship for his ministry of word and sacrament. His best way of establishing a solid and enduring relationship with his Aboriginal parishioners is to engage with them at the point of their greatest interest, namely their family. Find out who belongs to their family, (grandparents, uncles, aunties, cousins, etc.) and where did they originally come from? Where is everybody living now? Do they still speak their language? Etc. In doing this, he will show his interest in the things that are of great importance to them, and so establish a relationship with them based on his respect and interest in them as people, rather than on what ‘cargo’ he can deliver.

In the process of showing his interest in the genealogies of his Aboriginal members/contacts, he will also discover the degree to which these people want to involve themselves in the congregation’s normal worship life, or the degree to which he may have to consider an alternative ministry of word and sacrament to them. For example, conducting ‘family house worship’ for different family groups, rather than running a bus service and trying to bring everyone to a worship service.

I conclude with some suggestions for Australians in congregations with Aboriginal members.

- When speaking to them, don’t talk down to them in a sort of ‘pidgin English’.
- Treat Aborigines who have fully integrated into the Australian way of life as you would treat any other Australian.
- To establish a good relationship with Aborigines who are still attached to aspects of their culture, enquire about their family and relations, traditional land (if they still have connections with that land), whether they know any of their language, etc.
- Avoid being used as a ‘milch cow’.
- Many Aborigines will have suffered rejection by Australians and so may need time to respond to your friendly overtures. So do not be upset and put off if your initial ‘reaching out’ does not meet with success.
Endnotes

1 Throughout, when applying the term ‘traditional’ to Aborigines I am referring to Aborigines whose lives are still largely influenced by The Dreaming, to use Stanner’s phrase.

2 ATSIC was abolished in 2005 and has not been replaced. In its stead, the Federal Government has created an Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC), a bureaucracy to oversee and implement its Aboriginal policies, and established a National Indigenous Council (NIC)—whose members are elected by Government—to advise it on Aboriginal issues.

3 Peter Lawrence’s book Road Belong Cargo, University of Manchester, 1964, did much to bring this concept into popular usage. According to Lawrence, cargo cult ‘is based on the native’s belief that European goods (cargo)—are not man-made but have to be obtained from non-human or divine sources’, through ritual. When ‘cargo’ is not obtained, it is the result of incorrect ritual. While Aboriginal societies did/do not display the classic features of cargo cult as occurs in Melanesia, the underlying Aboriginal world view, in which correct ritual is the primary technology of production, leads to similar outcomes, often expressed as the white man’s unwillingness to share his secrets of wealth (cargo).


5 Quoted in Johnson, op. cit., p. 82.

6 Ibid., p. 82.


8 Johnson, op. cit., p. 99.


10 Davis, op. cit., p. 622

11 The following section on structure and function is largely based on Johnson, op. cit., pp. 51ff. See also Davis, op. cit., pp. 28ff; and Alex Inkeles, What is Sociology?: An Introduction to the Discipline and Profession, Prentice-Hall of India (Private) Ltd, New Delhi, 1964, pp. 62f.

12 Although all societies face identical societal needs, a study of different societies shows that there are many different ways in which these needs can be met. As Davis has aptly put it: ‘These needs, however, can be met in fundamentally different ways, and it is in terms of these different ways of meeting them that one type of society can be distinguished from another.’ Davis, op. cit., p. 49.


14 There are individual psychological factors which reinforce this. For example, the economy of reaction—a strong tendency to keep using response patterns which have been successful in the past, cf., James C. Coleman, Abnormal Psychology and Modern Life, Scott, Foresman and Co, 1964, p. 91, or the fact that attitude change is easier in a congruent direction, cf., David Krech et al, Individual in Society, McGraw Hill, International Student Edition, 1962, pp. 216ff.


16 ‘Social change is worked by the efforts of individuals—functioning in various capacities as innovators, advocates or adaptors—who have in some small measure and in some specific
respect been freed from the conventionalising effect of social ideology and of organisational membership' La Piere, *op. cit.*, p. iv.


19 Moore, *op. cit.*, pp. 75ff.


23 For a treatment of this subject, see, for example, S.N. Eisenstadt, *Modernisation: protest and change*, Prentice-Hall 1966; Moore *op. cit.*, pp. 89–112.

24 Moore *op. cit.*, p. 89.


27 As far as I know, no Aboriginal language has a word to describe this period. The Arrarnta word altjirra probably means ‘eternal, uncreated.’ The Western Arrarnta verb arama means to ‘see.’ The Western Arrarnta verb altjirrarama (altjirra+arama) = ‘to dream.’ The Western Arrarnta also uses the word altjirra for totem. However, altjirrarama is never used by the Arrarnta to refer to the period when the supernatural beings were engaged in their original creative work.


34 O'Dea, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

35 Quoted from Worms, in *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, p. 231.

36 For an excellent treatment of the Cargo Cult phenomenon, particularly its history and effects
in New Guinea, see Peter Lawrence, *op. cit.*


38 See, for example, the response of Obed Raggett *et al.* Aboriginal Land rights (Northern Territory) Bill 1976 Submission (unpublished). In all, some 18 separate responses were forwarded, totalling some 300 foolscap pages of transcript.

39 Quoted from Albrecht, *op. cit.*, pp. 81f.

40 While my remarks relate to the form of land rights granted by the Commonwealth Government to the Aborigines in the Northern Territory, they also apply to the form of land rights granted to Aborigines by the various Australian States, since in neither case are the traditional titles recognised by the grant of an Australian legal title corresponding to the traditional parcel of land.

41 Additional information on these concepts and their place in the kinship system will be given in the following section dealing with kinship.

42 ‘From the level of complaints received during this Review, and from my knowledge and observations of the working of the Act, I have to agree with the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission’s view that the Act has not been effective in providing Aboriginal people with effective control over activities on their land.’ John Reeves QC, *Building on Land Rights for the Next Generation, the Review of the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act of 1976*, 2nd edition, Australian Government Printing Service, 1998, p. 65.

43 There will be a more detailed look at authority in Aboriginal societies, in the section on Authority.


45 Latz, *op. cit.*, pp. 29f.


49 ‘In the classification of human groups one of the broadest and most fundamental distinctions is that between small and intimate groups on the one hand and large and impersonal groups on the other. In its formulation of this dichotomy American sociological theory has generally followed Charles H Cooley’s distinction between primary and secondary groups … European theory has followed a somewhat similar distinction formulated in 1887 by Ferdinand Tonnies between Gemeinschaft (close communal relationship) and Gesellschaft (organised impersonal relationship).’ Quoted from Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 289.


51 In this connection it is interesting to note that Aborigines compensated for their powerlessness in this area, in their religion. In their ceremonies, they believed that they created and increased the food supply of their area. See section on Super-Empirical Beliefs.

52 See section on Socialization.

53 See also Davis, *op. cit.*, pp. 407f.

54 It can be argued that given the natural environment and state of Aboriginal technology,
growth of differentiation and specialisation was not possible, or at the very least, not likely. While that may be true, I am of the opinion that even if it had been possible, the clan would have resisted it, as it could have threatened group cohesion, a factor of primary importance for survival.

55 See, ‘Principles relating to housing amongst Aboriginal groups associated with Hermannsburg’ by Garry Stoll, Rex Ziersch and Joan Schmaal, in A Black Reality, Aboriginal Camps and Housing in Remote Australia, M. Heppell ed.), ASIS, Canberra, 1979. The authors clearly show the imprint of kin on camp layouts and domiciliary arrangements.

56 We will not go into this aspect here, as it forms part of the discussion in the section on Co-operation.


59 I have quoted this particular passage earlier, but believe it is worth quoting again in this context.


62 See Tumin, op. cit., p.74; Goode, op. cit., p.76; Johnson, op. cit., pp. 120f.

63 See Johnson, op. cit., p. 112; Goode, op. cit., p. 11.

64 See Barbara J Sayers, 'The Aboriginal Child aspects of rearing, behaviour and expectations', SIL-AAIB, Darwin, 1998. This article highlights the different socialisation practices of Australians and Aborigines.

65 Berndt & Berndt, op. cit., p. 132.

66 Davis, op. cit., p. 218.


68 See also Goode, op. cit., p. 1.

69 Berndt & Berndt, op. cit., p. 131.

70 C. Strehlow gives a description of female initiation among the Arrarnta in his DIE ARANDA—UND LORITJA-STAMME IN ZENTRAL-AUSTRALIEN, IV TEIL, DAS SOZIALE LEBEN DER ARANDA—UND LORITJA-STAMME, 1.ABTEILUNG, Frankfurt am Main, 1913, p. 43.

71 Berndt & Berndt, op. cit., p. 158.

72 Authority will be taken up later, and I leave the more detailed discussion on this aspect until then.

73 Berndt & Berndt, op. cit., p. 135.

74 Visits were made at approximately six-weekly intervals, and had a duration of about twenty-four hours.

75 N.B. (i) The concepts should not be taken as absolutes, but as generalisations (abstractions), emphasising the biases of the two systems. (ii) The Australian system, as detailed, is more
descriptive of the process in the higher socio-economic groups, than in the lower. The process among the latter shows affinity with some aspects of the Aboriginal process.

76 For Noel Pearson's views on the effects of what he calls 'passive welfare' on Aborigines, see for example, his Dinner Address to the SEN Conference, Carlton Crest Hotel, Melbourne, March 2002.

77 There is a similar lack of congruence between lower socio/economic Australian families and schools, resulting in similar poor educational outcomes, leading to welfare-dependent adults.

78 P.G.E. Albrecht, 'Western Education in the Context of Societies which have no Words for Please or Thank You', unpublished paper, 1996, pp. 7f.

79 Inkeles, op.cit., p. 79.

80 The authority structure also serves other societal needs, for example, final arbitration of conflicting interests, handling of external security etc., but these do not require consideration in this context.

81 This in no way denies the influence of senior Aboriginal women.


83 Strehlow, in personal conversation.

84 Emeritus Prof. A.P. Elkin, in his address to the Missions/Administration Conference, Darwin, June 1967.

85 For example, see 'Moses Story' in Albrecht, From Mission to Church: the Finke River Mission 1877–2002, 246.

86 An excellent article on how one Justice wrestled with, and applied customary law, can be found in 'Justice Kriewaldt, Aboriginal Identity and the Criminal Law' by Heather Douglas in Criminal Law Journal, Vol. 26, No. 4, August 2002.


89 I have presented, in a simplified form, some of the processes of social stratification which have a bearing on the point under discussion. Those interested in a more complete treatment of this subject are referred to the work by Tumin, op. cit., from which I have been quoting.

90 See Berndt & Berndt, op. cit., pp. 104f.


92 This latter fact was not visible or important in the traditional setting, but must be recognised because of its implications when the setting is altered. Traditional adaptive-integrative patterns are not automatically applied to meet new needs. Put another way, because traditional people co-operate in traditional patterns, does not mean that they will automatically co-operate when confronted by new problems.


94 I am well aware of the fact that many other aspects have and still do play a part in employer–employee relations. I have only mentioned this aspect because of its relevance to the point being considered.

95 See comments by Peter Sutton, The Politics of Suffering: Indigenous Policy in Australia since the Seventies, 10 April 2001. This is a revised version of the Inaugural Berndt Foundation Biennial Lecture given at the annual conference of the Australian Anthropological Society,
University of Western Australian on 23 September 2000. See also comments by Noel Pearson, *The Light on the Hill*, Ben Chifley Memorial Lecture, given at the Bathurst Panther Leagues Club, 12 August 2000.

96 ‘The problem of my people in Cape York Peninsular is that we have only experienced the income support that is payable to the permanently unemployed and marginalised. I call this ‘passive welfare’ to distinguish it from welfare proper … What is the exception among white fellas—almost complete dependence on cash handouts from the government—is the rule for us … this safety net became a permanent destination for our people once we joined the passive welfare rolls … life in the safety net for three decades and two generations has produced a social disaster.’ Pearson, *op.cit*. Dinner Address to SEN Conference.

97 Barbara Sayers, in one of her papers, *A Pragmatic Analysis of a Failed Cross-cultural Communication*, (SIL-AAIB Occasional Papers No. 5, 1998), has highlighted the difficulties associated with communicating with more traditional Aborigines when neither party understands the concepts with which each is operating.


100 See also a talk given by Sandra Stacy on Aboriginal Nutrition to the International Congress of Dietetics in Sydney in 1977. This talk, based on her own experiences, further highlights the problems associated with changing the shocking statistics on Aboriginal health.

101 The following quotations from Strehlow—unless otherwise indicated—are all taken from his seminal article ‘Personal Monototemism in a Polytotemic Community’, which first appeared in *Festschrift fur Ad. E. Jensen*, Klaus Renner Verlag, Munchen, 1964.

102 Since I do not have access to the special symbols and diacritics used by Strehlow when writing Arrarnta words, I have changed the orthography to that currently in use in the Western Arrarnta area.


105 However, it could also be argued that given the vast conceptual difference between Aborigines and Australians, there was no other way in which initial change could have been effected. It may be, as Karl Deutsch has suggested, that it is only when ‘the process in which major clusters of old social, economic and psychological commitments are eroded and broken [that] people become available for new patterns of socialisation and behaviour’.


107 Those interested in the approaches taken by various denominational missions to culture may find some useful information in the following: *One Blood* by John Harris, Albatross Books Pty Ltd, 1990; *We Wish We’d Done More* by John Harris, Openbook Publishers, 1998; *Doctor and the Aborigines* by Charles Duguid, Rigby, 1972; *The People in Between* by Winifred Hilliard, Hodder and Stoughton, 1968; *From Patrons to Partners* by Margaret Zucker, University of Notre Dame Australia Press, 1994.

108 Comments on the present approach will be given in the following section.

Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

See: *GUIDELINES ON THE RELATIONSHIP OF ABORIGINAL PASTORS AND ABORIGINAL CONGREGATIONS TO THE LUTHERAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA* (amended 18/8/98). And: Excerpts from the *FINKE RIVER MISSION POLICY STATEMENT*. The latter gives an indication of how one Mission body understands its current role.