Searching *Altyerre* to Reveal the Cosmic Christ

A contribution to the dialogue between the ancient *Arrernte* imaginary and Christianity

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Abstract

Part One of the thesis demonstrates how in the Centre of Australia, despite being subject to Invasion, the rich imaginary of Altyerre – variously translated as dreamtime, dreaming, abiding event, creator and God – continues to hold the Ngkarte Mikwekenhe Catholic Community (NMCC), a small group of Mparntwe (Alice Springs) Arrernte people, in an embrace which provides meaning, defines everyday life, patterns relationships and assures the future.

In Part Two the focus turns to the specific aspects of the Invasion of Arrernte land by European colonists which threatened the Arrernte with extinction. It was Altyerre which provided the resources for the Arrernte to survive. The analysis of that achievement in the thesis includes and draws on detailed examination of four published works by three living and one recently deceased Mparntwe Arrernte and conversations with other members of NMCC.

Included in Part Two is an analysis of the role of the Catholic Mission as an agent of assimilation. However, the Arrernte proclivity to incorporate foreign concepts into abiding structures provided them with the mechanism to adjust their imaginary. The Christology of the Cosmic Christ offers God as Holy Mystery who exists in creation from its inception and who suffers with material existence. Both creation and salvation are seen as the core of the Cosmic Christ and of the implicit theology of Altyerre. The Arrernte have constructed an imaginary: a deeply structured foundational description of reality, defined in the thesis as Altyerre-Catholicism. However, the vitality of Altyerre-Catholicism is threatened by its dependence upon a cohort of ageing Catholic Mparntwe Arrernte and its present marginalisation from the focus of the Alice Springs-based Catholic church.

Part Three moves to analysis of Catholic/Christian theology which, in taking account of evolution, has developed a modern eco-theology with the Cosmic Christ as a means of understanding the immanent presence of Holy Mystery in the universe. The thesis seeks to link this Christology in an interface between Holy Mystery, especially in relation to creation and salvation as understood in Catholicism/Christianity, and the awareness of the creation and compassion, understood in Altyerre as arntartareme/caring for, by the Arrernte. While the dialogue between Altyerre and Roman Catholicism is the principal focus of this thesis, the
arguments could equally apply to similar engagements between other Arrernte dialect groups – and even other Central Australian Aboriginal language groups – and Western Christianity.

Part Four draws all the elements together and concludes that Altyerre presents an imaginary that is available to Arrernte and non-Arrernte, and offers an understanding of relationships that is a gift to the Catholic Church in the Northern Territory, the Christian Churches in Australia, to the Australian nation and in fact to the global community.
Acknowledgments

This thesis began over 35 years ago in 1983 when I first was employed as Community Adviser at Pukatja (Ernabella) in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands in the far north-west of South Australia. There I met men and women (anangu tjuta) who carried and were carried through each moment of their lives by their Tjukurpa. They were kind enough to embrace me, my wife Judy and our family of five boys and carry us into a tentative understanding of their culture. An extra gift of our two years in the Pitjantjatjara Lands was the birth of Majella, our only daughter. There are too many to acknowledge but I pay tribute to Peter Nyaningu, Gordon Ingkatji, Adrian Intjalki, Tjikalyi Colin, Anmanari Alice and especially Yuminia Yakiti.

Five years later, just two years after Pope John Paul II had visited Alice Springs in November 1986 and addressed the Aboriginal people of Australia, I was invited to work with the Mparntwe Arrernte people of Central Australia in the Ntyarlke Unit of the Catholic College in Mparntwel/Alice Springs. Here I was introduced to the Ngkarte Mikwekenhe Catholic Community (NMCC) connected to the Our Lady of the Sacred Heart (OLSH) church. As I taught the teenage children of these NMCC families I was slowly introduced to Altyerre, although at first I was unable to identify its true character. Again, there are many to thank and a few must be noted: M.K. Turner, Sandra Turner, Felicity Hayes, Myra Hayes, Teresa Webb, Veronica Dobson, Veronica Golder, Jamesy Palmer and especially Therese Ryder who provided the map and have been my guides for the last 30 years.

Fr Phil Hoy MSC, then parish priest of OLSH, was somehow bold enough to invite me to take on the position of coordinator in the Ntyarlke Unit. Phil and Sr Robyn Reynolds OLSH were to become and remain the inspiration of my work with NMCC. Peter Chalkley, then a Marist brother, and Nicole Traves-Johnson came to work with us in Ntyarlke and over the next six years we established the foundation for lifelong friendship and shared engagement in the mystery of Altyerre.

Mention must be given to Anne and Bill Davis whom we met in our first days working at Pukatja and who have remained friends and supporters over all these years. Fr Pat Mugavin has been a friend since before we had actually met! His guidance and intelligence, his deep commitment to his ministry, his missionary time in Chile with the Columbans, which he was able to use as a balance to my thinking, and his generous friendship have inspired me.
throughout the last 40 years. Pat has listened and listened to sections of my work, always able to add a powerful comment to the development of my thinking. It was Pat who offered the suggestion to insert the word “reveal” in the title of the thesis. Sr Margaret Carmody (SGS) has similarly been a friend and source of counsel and encouragement in the bustle of our busy family’s adventures.

Professor Mark Brett was courageous enough to accept my request to proceed to a PhD in theology from the basis of a Bachelor degree in theology, although he did suggest that “there should be a book in it, even if the PhD eludes you!” Fr Michael Kelly of Yarra Theological Union had the responsibility of formally accepting my application for study. I thank then both for their courage.

Dr John Honner has also known me for more than 50 years, yet we have never met face to face. His kindness, his intelligence, his patience and his skill have taken this “incorrigible” student to a new place. Only he knows how far I have come. My thanks to him is beyond words.

Robyn Reynolds has accompanied me since 1988 in our work with the Arrernte Catholics of Alice Springs. She was the one who introduced me to Whitegate camp, to Ilpiye-Ilpiye Town camp, to Veronica Golder, Myra Hayes and Felicity Hayes/Palmer. She has also accompanied me through the intricacies of Arrernte kinship networks and corrected my sometimes impetuous assumptions. She has made me more respectful and much more gender-aware and Mission-conscious.

In the last six months, as I have been diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease, Mark, Robyn and John have provided me with the support to complete this work within two years – which has placed them under considerable work/time pressure. I am incredibly appreciative of their friendship and their commitment to this project. I think I can say it is dear to all of us.

There are many other friends who have listened to my endless preoccupation with Altyerre. I thank them all for their patience. Professors Heather Goodall and Robert Elson have encouraged me, and having read the thesis in its development, made me feel confident that I could make it to the finish line. David Woods and Chris Hawke of Alice Springs have been unstinting supports for the work. Gavan Breen and Jenny Green applied their anthropological expertise to a number of tricky issues and helped clarify my thinking. Venetia Somerset and David Horgan assisted enormously by proof reading the final document.
Joan and Kevin Bowden (mum and dad) instilled in their three kids a sense that life was a gift to be necessarily shared with others. I have certainly experienced life as such and I hope that in this work I can honour Joan and Kevin and repay some of that debt to the *Pitjantjatjara* and *Arrernte* people who have loved our family so much.

Our children – Sean, Rhett, Kane, Joel, Patrick, Majella and Charlie – have been the greatest gifts of our lives. As both Jude and I now suffer terminating illness they have tightened their loving embrace of their Grizzy boy and Nana Jude wonderfully so that today the whole family (with the exception of Charlie who is committed to his own children in Melbourne) are now living in Darwin with us.

I have written this thesis while living in Alice Springs in a granny flat on the property of my daughter Majella, her husband Gordon Mallard, an *Arrernte* man, and their three children, Rashanna, Levi and Toby. Majella has shared with me on a daily basis the process of the work and the simultaneous care of Judy. Majella tells me that although she has not read the draft right through, she knows every word, such has been the extent and frequency of our conversations. Majella and Gordon were married in October 2018 at Ross River/Inteye *Arrkwe*, Gordon’s mother’s mother’s *apmere/country*. Coincidentally their three children were “blessed”/baptised from the *utnenge/spirit source of their Being using prayers and liturgies based on the material contained in this thesis. Majella’s and Gordon’s wedding and the blessing/baptism of their children were their final and lasting gift to Majella’s mum and dad.

Finally, my most beautiful wife Judy has travelled every kilometre of this journey, and even now when struck down by dementia and she is restricted to lying on the bed behind me as I address the computer screen, she keeps me company on the journey. There is absolutely no doubt that the people who know us both and are mentioned in this thesis all love her in a deeply special way because she is simply the most honest person they have ever met. Every day she makes me a better man, thank Mystery.
Permission - Authorisation

Arrernte Elders from the Ngkarte Mikwekenhe Community met together to consider their response to Mike Bowden’s research for his PhD Thesis Searching Altyerre to Reveal the Cosmic Christ.

We need the stories of our lives to go to professional people so that they see what it means for us to have this sacredness in our lives. Mike is one of the best people to do this.

There are a lot of books that give a general history of Aboriginal culture. The books we have written are about our sacredness and the life we have experienced first-hand. What Mike is doing is building a bridge between these two stories.

Every one of us has a place linking and connecting with others. Through doing this thesis, Mike is building a bridge. Utyerre is our Eastern Arrernte word meaning connections. Mike is doing the work of Utyerre, linking and connecting. He is putting our words on the bookshelves of the university. He has found his healing through the land and the story it tells him.

We are happy about what he is writing.
He understands our way of life.
He understands our way of thinking.
He’s listening to us.
He is sharing our sacredness.

He’s lived in our shoes.
He sits with the old people.
He is reading their books.
He is listening to them and talking to them about what they have to say.
He’s telling the people he’s learning something from us.

He is listening to the country.
He is the echo of our life.
We need that echo to go out to the people, to hear it in their hearts and minds. The story through the land is coming back to the old people through him. He is echoing our message in a special way through the land, into the world. It tells us that the stories have taken root in him.

His way of speaking is something we don’t hear very often. There has been no echo through other people like this.

We want people to sit down and read these books. What he has written is what our young people need to read. It is important for other people to read these stories that old people have told him. When we study our own Aboriginal history at university, it is hard for us to find these things that we can reference in our own study.

M.K. Turner
Margaret Heffernan
Kathleen Wallace
Therese Ryder

Conversation with Arrernte Elders, July 8, 2018
Glossary of Arrernte words and terms

All the following are either directly from the *Eastern and Central Arrernte Dictionary* or are paraphrases which include nuanced meanings drawn from the texts used in this thesis.

The **Arrernte**

The *Mparntwe Arrernte* are the Indigenous people of Alice Springs/Mparntwe. Their language is a dialect of the Arandic group of languages of Central Australia. *Eastern Arrernte*, spoken at Ltyentye Apurte/Santa Teresa, is a dialect very similar to *Mparntwe Arrernte*. Catholic *Arrernte* people are predominantly *Eastern* and *Mparntwe Arrernte* speakers. Other Arandic dialects/languages include *Western Arrernte* which is spoken at Hermannsburg and *Southern Arrernte/Pertame* spoken along the Finke River down to the settlement at the township of Finke. The *Western Arrernte* and *Pertame* speaking people are predominantly Lutheran. Other dialects include *Alyawarre* which is spoken to the north-east along the Plenty Highway, and *Anmatyerre* spoken in Aileron and Ti Tree to the north, and *Kaytetye*, spoken at Barrow Creek. These dialects are mutually understood but the different dialect speakers are strongly committed to their own ‘language,’ as they call it. All Arandic speakers share a commitment to *Altyerre* and *aknganentye* and so they are referred to as simply *Arrernte*. Sometimes, because they have different contact histories, at different times in the thesis they are referred to specifically by dialect name.

**Arrernte** Words and phrases used in the text

- **ahelhe** – earth or ground
- **akaltye** – learned. Someone who is *akaltye* is knowledgeable.
- **akaperte (kaperte)** – head
- **akeke** – used to call a person a relative, name something (past tense)
- **akenhe, kenhe** – and, but, on the other hand
- **Akepelye** – Jessie Gap
Akerte – a place north-east of Alice Springs

-akerte – with something, having something

Akeyulerre – The Healing Centre in Mparntwe (named because it is in close proximity to Akeyulerre ‘Billy Goat Hill’)

aknganeme – originate in the dreamtime and exist forever

aknganentye – the creation and places associated with it, the “Dreamings” passed down through the father’s side

akngerre – big, large, solid, strong (wind)

akngerrapate – big boss or elder

akngeye – father

akngwelye – dingo, dog

akweke – small

akwetethe – always, permanent

alakenhe – that’s the way it is, like this

alartetye – leader, boss

alere – son, daughter (what a man calls his children, or a woman calls her brother’s children)

Alheke Ulyele – Mount Gillen

alhwarrpe – sad, depressed, sorry

alheme – go (present tense)

alherntere mape – white people

alkere – sky

alkngenthe – flame

altharte – a type of public ceremony

altyerre-areme – to dream about something (Eastern and Central Arrernte Dictionary, 105)
Altyerre (Altjira [Western Arrernte]) – the creation of the world and the things in it, and its eternal existence (often termed the ‘Dreaming’ in English). Lutheran pastor Schulze in the very first phase of mission thought altjira (altyerre) meant something that has always been so. Some commentators think that the word was glossed by Carl Strehlow as ‘Dreamtime’ and High God. Carl Strehlow however, had a sophisticated understanding of Altjira which he ultimately thought meant ‘eternal’.

altjirarama – A Western Arrernte word for ‘seeing a dream’, or ‘seeing god’. (Anna Kenny, The Aranda’s Pepa, 165)

anthurre – lots, or many. A numerical intensifier.

arlwekere – women’s camp

altyerrenge – from the Altyerre times

Alyathenge – a place near Ltyentye Apurte (Santa Teresa)

amangkeke – born, be grown up or brought up (past tense)

ameke-ameke – sacred place (this word does not operate as an adjective)

ane – and (from English)

aneme – sit, be, exist (present tense)

angampermeme – to be ‘born’, come into being (present tense)

angkwetyangkwe – ritual violence done in mourning

anintyeke – always been

ankerre – coolabah

anpernirrentye – kinship system, the rules about skin names and how people are related

anpernirrentye mape – all the people in the kinship group of relations

ante – only this

anthepe – women’s dance performed at initiation of young men

Anthwerrke – Emily Gap

antirrkweme – hold or care for (present tense)
apele – ‘I know for a fact’ or ‘everybody knows’
apetyalpeme – come back (present tense)
apmere (pmere) – the land, country, region, place or camp. M.K. Turner often capitalises Apmere/Land emphasising its importance
apmereke artweye – owners or custodians of land
apmereyanhe – that large block of land. Has an inferred meaning of multiple spirits linking places together thus reinforcing kinship ties. So, father’s and mother’s homelands are linked. This word is not found in the Eastern and Central Arrernte Dictionary. It is an example of the living nature of Arrernte and come from M.K. Turner’s book Iwenhe Tyrrtye.
apwerte – rock, hill
arenge – euro (wallaby)
-aranye – from, related to
arlarte – dense scrubby bush
-arle – a suffix added to words instead of the pronoun preceding, ‘he, she or ‘it’
arntarntareme – hold, look after or care for (present tense)
arrateke – came out of (past tense)
arrantherre – two or more than two people or ‘you mob’
arremparrenge – a person's spirit double or spirit friend
arrwekele – in the past, long ago
Arrkernke – a place near Lyentye Apurte (Santa Teresa)
Arrpmurnintja – a Western Arrernte word that came to be understood as a creator (arrpmernentye [Central/Eastern Arrernte])
arrenge – grandfather (father’s father and his sisters)
arritnye – name
arlprenye – green beetle, stink beetle
Artetyerre – Harts Range
artwe – man

artweye – owner, particularly applied to an owner of apmere/land

atherre – two

Atnelkentyarliweke – Anzac Hill

Atnertarrkwe – a sacred place near Ltyentye Apurte

atnyerneme – to hold or care for (present tense)

atyelpe (atjilpa [Western Arrernte]) – native cat, western quoll

atyemeye – grandfather on mother’s side (where one draws one’s altyerre from as distinct from aknganentye)

atyinhe – mine

atywerrenge (tywerrenge) (tjuringa [Western Arrernte]) – totem board, shield or stone. This word is also used for the song that is associated with the totem board, the place and the person

awelye – women’s only dance

awelheme – feel something (present tense)

ayeparenge – tar-vine caterpillar

ayeye – story

Ilwempe – white gum tree

ikirrentye – respect. This word has an extended meaning indicating ‘shame’ ‘the sacred’ and the sacredness that underpins all notions of respect.

ikwere – for him/her/it (dative pronoun)

ikwerenge-ntyele – from him/her/it

impatye – footprint

ingkarte [inkata Western Arrernte] (ngkarte) – ceremonial leader, or boss, or priest, or God (Ngkarte)

ingkerreke – all, the whole lot
iperre – after something happens

irrernte – cold

irrerntarenge – a type of spirit

ireme – to become, to turn into something

irretye – wedge-tailed eagle

irretyeke – like a wedge tailed eagle

irrerlantye – brown falcon

itnekenge – from them

Inteye Arrkwe – Arrernte name for Ross River Station

iwenhe – what?

Kaporilja – A spring 5 miles from Hermannsburg

(A)kemarre (A)mpetyane, Pengarte, Peltharre, Perrurle, (A)ngale, Penangke and Kngwarraye – the eight skin names in Arrernte

Keringke – a Rockhole and sacred place close to Ltyentye Apurte

kwatye – water

kwementyaye – a replacement word for the name of a person who has passed away (whose name cannot be spoken)

kwertengerle – ‘manager’ of traditional country who works alongside apmereke-artweye

kurne (akurne) – bad, no good, evil

lhere – river or creek

Lhere pinta – The Finke River at Hermannsburg

Ltyentye Apurte – Santa Teresa

lyete – now

Manangananga Spring – the sacred springs at Ntaria respected by Carl Strehlow but deliberately desecrated by F.W. Albrecht
mape – lots of, many (numerical intensifier)

meye – mother

meyenge-nyele – from the mother

mikwe – his, her or their mother (as used in the title Ngkarte Mikwekenhe – Mother of God)

Mparntwe – Alice Springs

mpelkereke

Mpweringke – Burt’s Plain, a place about 60 kilometres north of Alice Springs/Mparntwe

Mpwyeterre – A town camp in Alice Springs/Mparntwe also known as Abbott’s camp. Recorded by Wenten Rubuntja as a dancing ground

mwerre, mwarre – good

ngangkere (angangkere) – traditional healer

ngkarte – boss or ceremonial leader in pre-contact times

Ngkarte – Eastern and Western Arrernte name for God, also commonly used for priest by Mparntwe Arrernte Catholics and for pastor by Western Arrernte Lutherans

Ngkarte Mikwekenhe – Mother of God

ngkwinhe – yours

nhenhe – here

nhenge – ‘you know’, ‘of course’, ‘you know the one’ etc.

Ntaria (Ntariya) – Arrernte name for Hermannsburg

-ntyele – a suffix denoting where something moves from, out of, or out from

nwernekenhe (anwernekenhe) – ours (possessive pronoun)

nyurrpe – the opposite generation moiety. Some kin that are nyurrpe to each other avoid each other. Often used in association with ikirrentye, respect

Pepa – literally paper (from English), used to describe the Christian Bible and Christian law

Pertame – Southern Arrernte language
pwarrrtyintyeme – shine (present tense)

rarle – he, she or it

arenye (renye) – to belong somewhere or usually found there. A person’s home or dreaming place

rterrke – strong

thipe – bird

thipe akatwengatwenge – red-capped robin

tyawerrelye – a traditional food offering for special occasions. Now used for money

tyerrtye – person

tyerrtye mape – all the people

unenthe – men’s dance

unte – you

ure – fire

ure alharrkentye iperre – a fire lit by lightning

Urengetyerrpe – Simpson’s Gap

urlpe – red ochre

urnterrike – men’s public dance for strangers

utmenge – life, being, soul or spirit. A source of vitality, well-being and sense of purpose, or life force. A second meaning is the solid stuff that things are made of, wood or flesh (Eastern and Central Arrernte Dictionary, 617)

utyerre – string or vein or roots connecting things underground

Uyetye – a traditional camping place of the Eastern Arrernte people close to Ltyentye Apurte

warlperle – white person

Werlatye Atherre – literally ‘Two Breasts’, a very sacred women’s site about 16 kilometres north of Mparntwe
Werirrte – Kathleen Kemarre Wallace’s grandfather, and his place near Ltyentye Apurte

yalke – wild onion

yanhe – that place over there

yanhe-arenye – from that place over there

yanhe apele – that place

yerrampe – honey ant

Other Aboriginal words

alatji - like this (Pitjantjatjara)

Alyawarr – an Arrernte language spoken by people living about 200 kilometres north-east of Mparntwe

agangu – Pitjantjatjara word for person

Anilalya – Mt Woodroffe in South Australia (Peter Nyaningu’s homeland)

Anmatyerr – a language spoken by people living about 200 kilometres north of Mparntwe

Dieri – a language of the people living in the Lake Eyre region of South Australia. Location of the first outback Lutheran Mission in South Australia

Kaytetye – a language group living in the Barrow Creek area and in surrounding communities about 230 kilometres north of Alice Springs

kunmanara – Pitjantjatjara word for a person who has died whose name cannot be spoken

Luritja – a Western Desert dialect

maŋu – kangaroo (Pitjantjatjara)

Murrinhpatha – one of the languages of the clans living now at Wadeye/Port Keats

Nauiyu – Daly River community in the Top End of the Northern Territory

ngintaka – lizard (Pitjantjatjara)
Pintubi – a language spoken by people living on the Northern Territory/Western Australia border area in Central Australia

Pitjantjatjara – one of the Western Desert languages

Tjukurpa – Pitjantjatjara equivalent for Altyerre. It also denotes story

Anthelke Ulpaye – one of the Alice Springs town camps located on the Charles Creek, from which it derives its name

Wadeye – Murrinhpatha name for Port Keats

Wapar – Yankunytjatjara equivalent for Altyerre

Warlpiri – A language group living to the north-west of Arrernte country

Warumungu – A language group of the people living in the Tennant Creek district

Yankunytjatjara – one of the Western Desert languages

yolngu – a north-east Arnhem Land word for people (equivalent to tyerrtye mape (Arrernte) and anangu tjuta (Pitjantjatjara)
Part One: Pristine *Altyerre*

Chapter 1: Introduction – Defining *Altyerre*

On November 29, 1986 Pope John Paul II made his historic visit to Alice Springs. Senior *Mparntwe* traditional owner Thomas Stevens, and Davey Hayes, senior *Arrernte* man from *Ltyentye Apurte*/Santa Teresa, and members of the *Ngkarte Mikwekenhe Catholic Community* (NMCC), on behalf of the Aboriginal community of Central Australia, met him at the Alice Springs Airport. These *Arrernte* leaders had worked with renowned *Arrernte* elder and painter Wenten Rubuntja and decided to offer a painting to honour the visit. Wenten’s painting now stands in the vestibule of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart (OLSH) Catholic church in Alice Springs.

Wenten tells the story of the visit and the painting in mixed code *Arrernte* and English below.

> *Country line re apmere Aknganentye.*
> *Pmere Aknganentye Dreamtime story re.*
> *Dreamtime paint from when people been rushing for the Holy Father from Rome.*
> *Yanhe apele Aknganentye, Dreamtime Aknganentye nhenge Creation of the world ...*
> *Country pmere Altyerre* apmere Altyerrarle akeke Creation of the world from Father of Heaven rarlne yanhe itnekenge pmere nheke aneme ... *Ingkerreke that one kenhe mape akenhe paint body song and all Ingkerreke. This is a dancing ground. (church) nhenhe dancing ground aneke – now it’s a big temple.*

That’s the country line – the traditional place. *Pmere aknganentye,* that’s the Dreaming story. A traditional painting from the time when people were rushing to...

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1. *Ngkarte Mikwekenhe Community* is the name of the community of *Arrernte* Catholics in Alice Springs/Mparntwe.
2. Wenten’s discourse contains the key *Arrernte* word *aknganentye*, which is translated as creation in this text. Because the *Arrernte* lacked an understanding of a creator god separate from the creation and responsible for it, *aknganentye/i*creation becomes a word of great significance, being the source of all meaning. In this way *aknganentye/i*creation establishes a non-contingent creation. *Aknganentye* will be discussed extensively throughout the thesis.
3. *Altyerre* is the second foundational word in Wenten’s short discourse. In this thesis *Altyerre* is used as a metaphor for all the component parts of the *Arrernte* world-view or imaginary. It will be defined in many ways throughout the thesis but perhaps the most succinct understanding, supplied by one *Arrernte* author, is the “known unknown”. The huge significance of *Altyerre* will dominate the entire study.
meet the Holy Father from Rome. That’s the Creation story, Dreamtime Aknganentye – Creation of the world … This story come from the Father of Heaven, who was living in the world here – that’s the place that he is related to through Altyerre (Dreaming⁴) … (The painting) has all those things – body paint and song and all. This is a dancing ground. (The Church) was a dancing ground – now it’s a big temple.⁵

The Catholic church is located at the foot of Anzac Hill/Atnelkentyarliweke in Alice Springs. As Wenten told the Pope, this flat ground at the base of the sacred hill, Atnelkentyarliweke, was a dancing ground and was where “the Father of Heaven … was living in the world here”. He says, “Country pmere Altyerre apmere Altyerrarle akeke Creation of the world.”

Here in this discourse the word Altyerre is used twice. It is core to Wenten’s message. For Wenten, Altyerre sees the whole of the world charged with the life of the Eternal. Some places, for example where the church now stands, are especially lit up with utnenge/spirit. Dancing grounds are where people/tyerrtye mape paint up and perform dances/altharte and anthepe associated with the spirit/utnenge of the place. The Atnelkentyarliweke/Anzac Hill dancing ground is a sacred religious site for Arrernte people.

The aim of this thesis, exploring Rubuntja’s holistic view, is to show that Altyerre in the hands of the Mparntwe Arrernte has organically absorbed key elements of the Catholic imaginary into its own imaginary so to produce Altyerre-Catholicism, a world-view or imaginary that satisfies the need for finding meaning in existence, a faith to live by.

The concept of imaginary has been applied to both Altyerre and Catholicism in this study, and it is the glue that holds this thesis together.⁶ An imaginary is understood as the product of deep and considered thought over a sustained period. It is a social rather than a personal construct. It might be conceived of as a self-conscious world-view or framework of ideas and beliefs held by all members of a culture with which members interpret the culture while

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⁴ As will become apparent the word “dreaming” will only be used when it occurs in quotes. Elsewhere the Arrernte word Altyerre, which has commonly been translated as “Dreaming” will be used untranslated.
⁵ Wenten Rubuntja and Jenny Green, the town grew up dancing (no capitals in title in the original publication) (Alice Springs: IAD Press, 2002), 64.
⁶ The overall argument adapts Charles Taylor’s view that a social imaginary underpins “the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations”. See Charles Taylor, Modern Social Imaginaries (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), esp. 23. Other terms like “social poetics” may equally be appropriate, but a more technical definition will not serve our purposes.
individuals negotiate their place in it. It might also be considered as an anthem or a rallying call. A powerful imaginary is both alluring and binding/bonding, enticing new adherents and embracing all in a common compact. Unlike the unfortunate and distracting word “dreaming” an imaginary is not the figment of imagination existing only in the mind. It provides a deeper grasp of reality beyond the empirical and a sense of confidence and assurance in the future.

Obviously, both the Altyerre and Catholic imaginaries have experienced immense change and adaptation over time. Yet when combined in modern times the amalgam of the two into Altyerre-Catholicism is capable of advancing the journey into a deeper understanding of the Mystery of the Cosmic Christ. The term the Cosmic Christ expresses both an ancient and now rediscovered modern understanding of the incarnation: the fleshed and ever alluring presence of the divine in the cosmos from its inception.

The term Cosmic Christ was not one that the German Lutheran missionaries, who founded a mission to the Western Arrernte in 1877, would have habitually used. Neither would the Catholic Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSC), who established the Little Flower Mission to the Mparntwe and Eastern Arrernte in 1935, been familiar with the term.

The first contact the Arrernte had with Christianity was in 1877 when a party of German Lutherans, who had already operated a mission to the Dieri at Killalpaninna in lower Lake Eyre region of South Australia, were granted a pastoral lease and founded a mission to the Western Arrernte at a place on the Lhere pintal/Finke River named Ntaria by the Western Arrernte but which was renamed Hermannsburg by the Lutherans. When the MSCs founded Little Flower Mission in 1935 in Alice Springs/Mparntwe, the Eastern and Mparntwe Arrernte people had been subjected to the debilitating experience of marginalisation while living on their own land.

The Catholic Church gained ownership of the site in a manner similar to the dispossession of Indigenous people across the continent. “In July 1888, the South Australian government had commissioned David Lindsay to lay out a town on the banks of the Todd River. On 29 November 1888, the town of Stuart was proclaimed. The first blocks were sold in January
Given this gazetted declaration of the new township area, one can be certain that there had been no effort to negotiate the expropriation of this parcel of land with the Central Mparntwe Arrernte people who were occupying the site.

In 1929, upon his arrival in Alice Springs, Fr James Long MSC purchased a one-acre plot of ground at the base of Atnelkentyariweke/Anzac Hill. It is unlikely that he would have known the Arrernte name for the hill, given that he had just arrived in the Territory. Soon Fr Long had started building the brick church, which still stands today beside the new OLSH church, the one Wenten Rubuntja called a “big temple”.

In 1770, when Captain Cook landed on the east coast of the great Southern Land, he saw Aboriginal people and interacted briefly with some. Despite his low evaluation of the Aborigines he sighted, there could have been no doubt that the land he claimed was occupied. Nevertheless the British government later declared the discovered land terra nullius, belonging to no-one. In 1788, when Captain Philip landed with a motley crew of 1,332 convicts and their guards at Sydney Cove, it is estimated that perhaps as many as 770,000 Aboriginal people were occupying the continent at the time. In 1872, when white settlers arrived in Alice Springs, the land that they invaded had been occupied by about 1,000 Arrernte people, they believe, since “Creation”.

In just over one hundred years, as the 19th century turned into the 20th, the culture of the Arrernte had become famous. Their arcane, pristine culture was being studied all over the world and elements of Arrernte culture were to inform the theories of some of the great minds of the Western world. Men such as James Frazer, Emile Durkheim and Sigmund

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7 Flinders Ranges Research, http://www.southaustralianhistory.com.au/alicesprings.htm (accessed March 15, 2017). Stuart was the original name of the town while the Telegraph Station stood at the Alice Springs. The name Stuart was changed to Alice Springs in 1933.

8 Mparntwe is the Arrernte word describing a large area of country centring on Alice Springs. People living in this country describe themselves as Mparntwe Arrernte. Today many Mparntwe Arrernte are represented by Lhere Artepe (literally the edge of the [Todd] River), the Native Title body for the region.


Freud\textsuperscript{12} were to use features of Arrernte culture to build their comprehensive anthropological and psychological theories. Arrernte totemism\textsuperscript{13} was to be a much-debated topic in the emergence of universal principles about “primitive” religion. The examination of the life, culture, world-view and religion of the Arrernte was to establish the reputations of many anthropologists and put Australian anthropology on the world map.

A key interest of the anthropologists, and of critical significance for this thesis, is the Arrernte word Altyerre. Chapter 2 explores the meaning of Altyerre from the perspective of four Arrernte Voices: M.K. Turner, Kathleen Kemarre Wallace, Margaret Heffernan and Wenten Rubuntja. The collective understanding of these four local Alice Springs/\textit{Mparntwe}-based Arrernte people will be compared to the academic understanding of outsiders who have lived for long periods with Aboriginal people and have written widely, and in many cases beautifully, about Altyerre.

Chapter 3 will provide an overview of the anthropology of the Arrernte popularised by two opposing teams of linguists/anthropologists in the last years of the 19th century. One of these teams was essentially British and the other German. The British group, comprising Baldwin Spencer and Frank Gillen, thought Altyerre meant “dreaming”, while the Germans, Lutheran missionaries at Hermannsburg led by Pastors Kempe, Schwarz, Schulze and Carl Strehlow,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{12} Philip Batty, Lindy Allen and John Morton, eds, \textit{The Photographs of Baldwin Spencer} (Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press, 2005), 19.
  \item \textsuperscript{13} The term Totemism was coined in 1791. Encyclopaedia Britannica, Josef Haekel, \textit{Totemism}, https://www.britannica.com/topic/totemism-religion, updated 1.30.2009 (accessed March 20, 2017). Totemism was first described in relation to the culture of the Ojibwe, a large collection of American Indians living in Manitoba, Ontario, North Dakota and Minnesota. Ojibwe people looked upon animals and birds as their totem, meaning that the individual shared the spirit characteristics of the designated animal or bird. These totemic associations were often depicted through elaborately carved symbols on totem poles. For the Ojibwe totemism was both a group and individual identification with these spirit beings. Ojibwe personal totemism indicated that particular appearances of a person expressed characteristics of the totem, such as the bravery of a bear or eagle. Many Indigenous population groups spread across the world display a variety of more or less common cultural characteristics described as totemism. “Totemism is a complex of varied ideas and ways of behaviour based on a worldview based on nature. There are ideological, mystical, emotional, reverential and genealogical relationships of local groups or specific person with animals or natural objects, the so-called called totems.” https://www.britannica.com/topic/totemism-religion (accessed May 16, 2019). In the Arrernte application, it reflects the central belief that all humans draw their existence from a place which is filled with spirit and flesh. This spirit of place enlivens each human person by association and reflects a founding myth. The association is also found in a separate sacred object, a tywerrenge (\textit{atywerrenge}), which carries the life and power both of the person and the place or life-form it represents. Diane Austin-Broos, in \textit{Arrernte Present, Arrernte Past: Invasion, Violence, and Imagination in Indigenous Central Australia} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 115, outlines the relationship between place, person and totem indicating that “the \textit{tywerrenge} or sacred boards, of conception totems were the only ones that might become the personal property of a man, in principle with full rights of disposal.”
\end{itemize}
plumped for *Altyerre* meaning “God” or at least “the eternal”. While both groups considered that they had investigated the nature of the term expertly and that their conclusions were based on solid evidence, neither was able to adequately articulate the full nature of this complex word. In the mid-20th century, later anthropologists such as W.E.H. Stanner and linguists such as T.G.H. Strehlow were better able to articulate a more nuanced understanding of the word and its complexity. However, it has taken till the first decades of the 21st century for *Arrernte* people themselves to find the space to express, in their own words and from their own experience, a deeper understanding of the complexity of their existence.

The objective of this preliminary investigation is not to undertake an exercise in anthropology or linguistics but to establish the ground of *Altyerre*. Today, 142 years after the first Invasion of their land and contact with an alien culture, *Arrernte* people survive in Central Australia. *Altyerre*, it will be shown, has been subjected to enormous interference. It has been denigrated and in some places extreme efforts have been made to eradicate it. Yet despite the forces of civilisation, Christianisation and secularisation, *Altyerre* thrives.

Part Two of the thesis explores the consequences of the Invasion upon the *Arrernte* imaginary, the history and evolving theology of the Christian missionaries, and the importance of *Altyerre*.

Part Three explores both Christian and *Arrernte* accounts of creation, with particular reference to notions of the Creator and the emerging theology of the Cosmic Christ. Based on a fresh understanding of both the Hebrew creation accounts and New Testament passages in John’s gospel and Paul’s letter to the Colossians, this understanding presents the divine as both immanent, spiritually present in all things, and incarnate, made flesh and sharing in the material universe.

Part Four brings these strands of research together, arguing for the convergence of *Altyerre* and cosmic Christology and the importance of ensuring the future of *Altyerre*-Catholicism. The thesis recognises that while the focus is on the dialogue between *Altyerre* and Roman Catholicism, because that is the existential context of the *Mparntwe Arrernte*, the arguments

14 The *Mparntwe Arrernte* are the Indigenous people of Alice Springs/*Mparntwe*. 
would equally apply to similar engagements between all *Arrernte* dialect groups and Western Christianity.
Chapter 2: Arrernte Voices on Altyerre

2.1 M.K. Turner: “Born to Be”

M.K. Turner’s *Iwenhe Tyerrtye: What it Means to be an Aboriginal Person* provides an *Arrernte* insider’s perspective on the depth of meaning of *Altyerre*. M.K. Turner introduces herself: “Akemarre Akertarenye. That’s my proper traditional name. Akemarre is my skin name, and the Land, Akerte, is where my traditional site, where my grandfather’s country is, where he originated from, like aknganeke-arle.”

Born about 80 years ago at Akerte near Harts Range/Artetyerre, 130 kilometres to the north-east of Alice Springs, and raised at the Little Flower Mission at both Arltunga and Santa Teresa/Ltyentye Apurte, M.K. Turner is the leading religious figure of Ngkarte Mikwekenhe Catholic Community, the Catholic *Arrernte* community of Alice Springs. Her contribution to Australian society through cultural education, interpreting and translation has been recognised with the conferral in 1997 of the Medal of the Order of Australia.

The first chapter of *Iwenhe Tyerrtye* is titled “Born to Be – Aknganeke-arle”, where M.K. describes how one comes to be the person one is. She says, “Aknganeke-arle means like when that name was really named. And also, it’s like where they are from … And where his Traditional Stories came.”

“And aknganentye is a name that means your totem, the Symbol for the Land. That name comes from aknganeke, and means ‘Beginning Story’.”

15 Akerte is known as Huckitta in English, a good example of how *Arrernte* names were altered and absorbed by the first non-Indigenous settlers.


17 Little Flower Mission was established by the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSC) priests, brothers and associated OLSH sisters (Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart) in 1935 at Charles Creek in Alice Springs. The MSC Catholic order of priests and brothers was founded in 1854 in France by Fr Jules Chevalier. The OLSH sisters were also founded by Jules Chevalier in 1874. Both the MSC and OLSH orders came to Australia in the late 19th century and have worked in parishes, schools and missions continuously since. Source: OLSH at http://www.olshaustralia.org.au/about-us/our-history.html, MSC: at https://misacor.org.au/index.php/what-we-do (accessed June 24, 2018). Little Flower Mission was subsequently relocated in 1942 to Arltunga, 100 kilometres to the east of Alice, and then relocated again in 1953 to Santa Teresa/Ltyentye Apurte where it continues to operate. *Ltyentye Apurte* is still commonly called “Mission” by *Arrernte* people in Central Australia. See Pye, *Santa Teresa and East Aranda History*, for a full account.

18 M.K. is acknowledged in the *Eastern and Central Arrernte to English Dictionary* as a major contributor.


20 Aknganentye, a noun meaning originating from the country of your father’s father.

21 Aknganeke, a verb meaning to be born from or created from a specific place.

M.K.’s father’s father comes from Akerte, a place about 130 kilometres north-east of Alice Springs. So he is Akerte-rename, from Akerte. Implicit for M.K. is the understanding that Akerte is one of many places in a connected travel story about rain, kwatye/water or rain. So, although kwatye is the Arrernte word for rain, her grandfather is known not as kwatye-arenye but as Akerte-arenye, a place name which connotes the rain totem. Here M.K. is aligning four things: personal name/arritnye; place/apmere; story/ayeye; and totem/atywerrenge, and each is an aspect of the other. Much of the Arrernte world is contained in these four words/concepts.

M.K. explains that personal names are a warlperle\textsuperscript{23} invention. Her own name is instructive. M.K. was originally known as Margaret Mary Neal, a family name which she had inherited from her family’s relationship to the white station people at Harts Range/Artetyerre. She had become Margaret Mary Turner when she married Maxie Turner, an Arrernte man, at Santa Teresa/Ltyentye Apurte in 1955. In the 2000s, about the time she was writing Iwenhe Tyerrtye, she adopted her skin name, Kemarre,\textsuperscript{24} as part of her name and removed the Margaret to be replaced by the letter M. She became M(argaret) K(emarre) Turner.\textsuperscript{25} In many ways this name change process reflects her increasing pride in her identity as an Arrernte/Akarre\textsuperscript{26} woman.

M.K. says of skin names, “The skin name is very important to us because it draws a line, every individual’s line. To what to do, to how to behave and how to carry on. It outlines where people stand, what is their right … It’s a real holding together in that way.”\textsuperscript{27} At its simplest, skin is a way of dividing Arrernte society into two equal groups (technically

\textsuperscript{23} Warlperle is an Arrernte word based on the English term “whitefella” for white person or non-Arrernte person.

\textsuperscript{24} Kemarre and Akemarre are the same word used alternatively by Central and Eastern Arrernte people. Even when the A is used in spelling the word the sounding of the word seems as if no is A used.

\textsuperscript{25} This name change was also stimulated by the death (murder) of her daughter whose name included Mary. This led to the application of a taboo on using her name and the need to either use the word Kwementyaye (no name) or adopt another name. Mary was dropped and Margaret, shortened to M, and Kemarre, shortened to K, incorporated into a new name, M.K. Turner, that maintained her identity and enhanced her place in the kin system.

\textsuperscript{26} Akarre is a dialect of Arrernte used by speakers around Harts Range/Artetyerre. It is M.K.’s first language.

\textsuperscript{27} Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 86–87.
anthropologists call these “generation moieties”) called *nyurrpe*, your mob\(^{28}\) and *nyurrpe*,\(^{29}\) the other mob. So, in this case it denotes a “them and us” idea. M.K. puts it this way: “So in this system, we call them *nyurrpe*, and they also call us *nyurrpe*.” Your mob is you, your sisters and brothers, cousins, your husband and his sisters and brothers, your grandparents and your grandchildren. The other mob are your parents and their sisters and brothers (your uncles and aunts) and your children and nieces and nephews – and of course your great grandparents and great grandchildren. The two moieties are *nyurrpe* for each other, which means they hold them in deep respect and avoidance.

The *Arrernte* divide each moiety into four sub-groups or skins. When it comes to land/*apmere* the two opposing moieties operate in a powerful reciprocating association of being “owners”/*apmereke artweye*\(^{30}\) (one side) and “managers”/*kwertengerle*\(^{31}\) (the other side). And this is reversed. So *Kemarre, Ampetyane, Pengarte* and *Peltharre* people are *apmereke artweye*/owners of their land/*apmere*, but *Perrurle, Angale, Penangke* and *Kngwarraye* act as *kwertengerle*/managers for that land/*apmere* and vice versa.

For M.K. all this tradition comes from the creation/*aknganentye*. *Apmere/*land is the source of being for each individual. But association to *apmere* is completely bound to *ayeye*/traditional story which communicates and teaches the links, ownership or dependence of individuals to the *apmere* by virtue of inheritance along the father’s side;\(^{32}\) but because of kinship, the generational moiety system is actually derived from grandfather, who is of the same skin as the individual.

Creation/*aknganentye* for M.K. is the source of everything. In a sense, for her, *Arrernte* people are born from the creation/*aknganentye*. “It’s like how Creation\(^{33}\) begun, you know

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\(^{28}\) “Mob” is a very common word used by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Central Australia. It is an English loan word adopted into *Arrernte*. When used as an *Arrernte* word it is written *mape* and may be used to identify one group from another – this mob and that mob. Probably derived from cattle days or sheep days on the stations, a mob means a whole lot (of cattle or sheep). It has become a numerical intensifier meaning lots or many [of everything]. The term *alherntere mape* (white people) used above uses the *Arrernte*isation of mob, *mape*, added to *alherntere*, white person.

\(^{29}\) M.K. explains the reciprocal nature of *nyurrpe* at *Iwenhe Tyerrtye*, 87. According to M.K. all people in one skin call the opposing skin *nyurrpe* and all those in the opposite skin call the first group *nyurrpe* as well.

\(^{30}\) *Artweye* means owner.

\(^{31}\) *Kwertengerle* is glossed by *Arrernte* speakers to mean ‘manager’, as in the owner of a cattle station and the manager of the station, a situation that on first contact *Arrernte* people had become used to.

\(^{32}\) It is also possible to establish links along mother’s side through mother’s father, *atyeme*.

\(^{33}\) Turner uses a capital letter when referring to Creation in *Iwenhe Tyerrtye*. Similarly, Wenten Rubuntja in *the town grew up dancing* uses this convention. It is maintained in the text here and when referring to M.K.’s views.
was. My grandfather could call himself or be called, Akerte-arle aknganeke, ‘that’s where I originated from’.”

Arrernte people see creation/aknganentye as the source of life and meaning. M.K.’s Arrernte view does not look at the world in astonishment, seeking scientific explanations for why the sun rises and sets. She sees the universe as a given from which she has been generated and which provides pleasing and satisfying meaning for her and her kin.

M.K. moves to another word/concept in Arrernte, “angampeke-arle”. The Eastern and Central Arrernte Dictionary defines angampeme as “originate in the Dreaming and exist forever.” M.K. says, “Angampeke-arle also tells the way that we all are as Aboriginal people.” This word/concept also implies apmere in its function. Additionally, angampeke-arle denotes a site or place of conception, the place where the mother and father noted the conception of a new life in the mother’s womb and ascribed that new life to the utnenge/spirit of that site. M.K. is certain of her eternal origins. She says, “And how it grew. Angampintyeke is like, that’s how the eyes of Aboriginal people saw us and it always will be that way, eternally. ‘Cause it’s not gonna end’.” It is of no apparent interest to M.K. to philosophise about the beginning of creation/aknganentye or its source or creator. While there is certainly an understanding that at some indeterminate time in the past the creative spirit-beings performed their work shaping the landscape, it appears that the paper upon which these creative acts were drawn may be eternal. Creative acts have a starting point but the origin or source of the creation aknganentye may well be indeterminate or eternal. What is very clear is that Altyerre is cyclic and has no ending.

The creation/aknganentye is so distant that it is inaccessible and to all intents and purposes infinitely remote and lost in a form of consciousness that only a dream can conjure up, and as M.K. says, it will never end. M.K. is sure of the collapse of time in angampeke-arle: “Angampeke – ‘what is what’, and angampintyeke – ‘what will be’? When we first came into

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34 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 10.
36 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 12.
37 Utnenge/Spirit is a central concept in M.K.’s world-view. M.K. sees utnenge is non-dualistic terms. For her there is no distinction or dichotomy between spirit and matter; they inhabit each other, reciprocate each other, are each other.
38 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 20.
existence, it takes us to where we are going to be. Ye,39 that’s how it is. And there’s a big feeling that people can get back to that place, in the future.”40

Here we have a form of Arrernte eschatology41 where the future is assured. The cycle of the generations, the repeated skin names in the kinship system, provide a reassuring image of a re-creating world. If the rules of angampeke-arle (where one is born from) are observed, then the future is guaranteed. In regard to the notion of time it seems that M.K. may be advancing three views of time: linear, present and eternal in both directions, and cyclical.

Apmere/ is one of the key foundational words in Arrernte. It could be translated as place, location, site, country, region, camp, home or house, even direction – meaning that way or from there. Everything flows out of apmere. M.K. says this very clearly: angampintyeke for apmere nhenhe-arle aknganeke mapeke [all the people are born to be from this place here].42 Apmere is the unifying element. Since all originate in apmere, all are related to each other.

M.K. has another word that works with apmere to link everyone to apmere. It is utyerre.43 Utyerre according to M.K. is like a string or a vein. As a string it binds things together, as a vein it brings life (as in blood). She sometimes uses the metaphor of root in a similar way, so that the roots of a tree or a yam go deep into the soil and stretch out in every direction, spawning new life and linking families. She also thinks of it as a wire (like a telephone wire) lying deep in and across the apmere sending messages from one apmere to another and essentially linking all tyerrtye mape/people to each other. So, she is able to say, “We are part of the Land. The Land is us, we are the Land. That’s how we hold the Land.”44

Another critical word for M.K. is utnenge/spirit. It has an additional meaning of ‘flesh. She fashions an association between utyerre (vein, wire, root, string) and utnenge/spirit and establishes the idea that all this connectedness is rooted in the spirit of apmere. In this way, she gives life to apmere. Apmere is a living entity, made of the utnenge/flesh of the apmere

39 Ye is an Arrernte way of saying yes.
40 See Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 12.
41 Eschatology is the theology of the end times and what happened to the soul after death.
42 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 12.
43 Gavan Breen, personal communication, November 10, 2017, says: “Utyerre seems to be an M.K. coinage. The only utyerre I can find is the name of Dalhousie Springs.” Responding to Gavan, it could be that because Arrernte is a living language and since M.K. is a user of Arrernte, the invention of utyerre may indicate an added component of the restoration of her Arrernte world-view.
44 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 15.
and filled with spirit(s) of creation/aknganentye. Then she introduces ceremony or ritual. These are the enactments of traditional stories derived from apmere. She folds all this together as in a nourishing damper: “Dreams and stories and trees and songs and animals and ceremonies, all holds in one big patch, that apmeryanhe, (that apmere there) just in that one big country-ground it holds the whole pile.”

All the land is charged with utnenge/spirit. So, the concept of apmeryanhe has multiple spirits all linked to each other and all are made of the utnenge/flesh of the apmere. To demonstrate this M.K. includes in her book paintings of country which depict a large slab of land with smaller plots marked out in different colours. Each smaller plot she calls a homeland. “Inside each apmeryanhe there are seven or nine or ten homelands … from your father’s father … us mob we look after Akerte area. And that’s our homeland boundary.”

“Looking after Land” is another key concept associated with Altyerre. It is based on the concept that “the Land is our mother”. She says that apmeryanhe “is a much bigger patch than father’s father’s homeland … Because my mother comes from there.” Because her mother is from that Land, and her mother gave her birth, M.K.’s view is that the Land is her mother. And here is a new word, ahelhe, meaning earth or ground. The Land that M.K. came from is not just a slab of country, of trees, plains, hills and creeks, but is made of gritty earth. It is the ground of her being, and both materially and metaphorically, the ground holds her. The Arrernte terms that M.K. utilises are antirkweme, atnyerneme and arntarntareme. She sometimes uses these terms interchangeably to describe a metaphorical process of holding, or more accurately caring for and nurturing, the country-ground and the people from that country-ground. M.K. concludes, “The country is us.”

As a result of this strong identity with country, marriage also comes out of country. Inside the apmeryanhe there are neighbouring homelands that belong to the skin groups. Perfect marriages are established from the different skins within those homelands. M.K. describes

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45 Songs are associated with ceremony. Song is the base line, the driving force of ritual.
46 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 18.
47 Gavan Breen, personal communication, November, 10, 2017, again notes that this may be an M.K. coinage: “Another M.K. invention is Apmereyanhe.”
48 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 21.
49 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 18.
50 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 18.
51 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 18.
52 Country and Land are virtually interchangeable words in the English lexicon of Arrernte speakers.
country marriage this way: “they marry from the strong of that Land, they marry through the flesh of that skin group, and also of that skin group, and also through utnenge/spirit, the flesh of that Land.” M.K. calls these people anperrirrente mape, the people within the kinship group. This is the first time she has used the term anperrirrente/kinship and it seems this is because it is a good way to describe the package. All the elements are contained within the capsule. This is the Arrernte world – anperrirrentyel/kinship. And this is how the world in held.

Death fits into this capsule well. Arrernte people seek to pass away in their own country, returning to their country when death approaches. M.K. has buried her own son in his apmere/country with the knowledge that the spirit/utnenge of the country is returning to the country and “[t]hen that soil makes maybe two more people the same as the one that died”. Land again emerges as the central concept, “Because our story is connected to our Land and also is connected to us and our children and our children’s children. We belong to the Land and the Land belongs to us. We live on it, we go back and get buried there. And that is our Story.”

And then utyerre/string or vein does its work tying everybody in the kinship back into the land. In this way “Your country is your country, that apmere is arrantherre – it is you mob”. It is through this return of the spirit that “all the generations hold each other”.

The closeness of anperrirrentyel/kinship and the power of the relationships between kin are linked to the existence of beings of the country/apmere. She says, “because we are close to one another. To our Beings – what comes from our Creation, what comes from our Land, what animals, hills, trees, it’s close to every one of us.” She believes that “there’s two spirits of life in me, from my father and from my mother, akngeyengetytele, ane meyenge-ntyele”. Further, “sometimes we can see it from utnenge apmere ahelhenge-ntyele.”

53 The term “country marriage” is M.K.’s term taken directly from Iwenhe Tyerrtye. It implies the absolutely correct adherence to skin rules of marriage. The right people marrying the right people in the kin system.
54 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 25.
55 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 36.
56 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 42.
57 Plural pronoun for more than two, many.
58 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 36.
59 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 36.
60 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 38.
61 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 39.
Alakenhe⁶² [Indeed, the spirit comes from the land]".⁶³ Here is a statement of the coincidence of place/apmere, ground/ahelhe and spirit/utnenge in the establishment of identity. And this goes on for generations and generations. M.K. is certain that there is a cycle to the generations. She says, “one mob fades out another mob appears”⁶⁴

In a discussion in the book between her niece Veronica Perrurle Dobson and herself, Veronica Perrurle remarks, “Our spirit’s still with our Ancestors, always. And Ancestors spirits are still with us on the Land, Alakenhe.⁶⁵ And our Ancestor Spirits, living in the country, they’re really pure – the country, the Ancestor Spirits, and the people that live within the actual country.”⁶⁶ M.K. goes further to describe “the Little People of the land”.⁶⁷ The Arrernte word is irrerntarenye, and is evocative of the meaning. Arenye means “from” and irrernte means “cold”. So, these little beings are “from the cold” or metaphorically “nasty” and they can make people very uncomfortable. However, M.K. says, they can also be friendly. She is convinced that the land is full up with these living beings. Because the little beings exist all over the country and are invested in the things of the country, they protect the country and they must be appeased, spoken to respectfully. These little beings consolidate the sacred nature of all the country on top of the sacredness of particular sites to particular people. She explains carefully: “Irreertarenye mape [all those spirit-beings] come from a Sacred Place, because our country’s really a thing you know, there’s a lot of sacredness in our homelands, in our country. Not sacred sites everywhere, but sacredness in the Land everywhere, the Land itself is sacred to us.”⁶⁸

M.K. Turner’s understanding of the sacred is a recurring theme throughout her discourse. For the Arrernte the sacred is not a binary to be contrasted with the profane or the mundane. The sacred is a function of spirit – it comes from irrerntarenye/spirit-beings and, as will emerge from the discussions throughout this thesis, spirit is also not a binary to be contrasted to body or matter; rather spirit inhabits everything, is in everything and animates or gives life to

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⁶² Alakenhe is an intensifier or confirmer meaning something like “that’s the way it is!”
⁶³ Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 39. Notice the word ahelhenge-ntyele which is ahelhe [ground, earth], enge-ntyele [from]. Here M.K. is saying the spirit comes directly from the earth.
⁶⁴ Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 40.
⁶⁵ Alakenhe means and so it is, or that’s the way it is!
⁶⁶ Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 77.
⁶⁷ Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 116.
⁶⁸ Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 119.
everything. *The Eastern and Central Arrernte Dictionary* provides an insight into the relationship between spirit and the sacred in this entry:

\[
\text{Utnenge yanhe-arenye utnenge aknganentye re. Utnenge apele aneme aknganentyele.}
\]

\[
\text{Kwatyeke-artweye utnenge arengeke-artweye utnenge, irretyeke-artweye, yalkeke-artweye.}
\]

The spirit of that place is the spirit of the dreaming. The spirit is right in the sacred place. [There’s] the spirit of the rain dreaming, and of the edge-tailed eagle, and of wild onions [and others].

The word *aknganentye*creation was used in Wenten Rubuntja’s discourse that opens this thesis. As M.K. tells it, *aknganentye* is from where one draws one’s being and signifies the creation. The essential understanding drawn from M.K.’s quote and this reference from the dictionary is that the sacred is everywhere and in everything – including a *yalke*/wild onion. The whole of creation is sacred.

What is also most intriguing is that there is no *Arrernte* word for sacred. *The Eastern and Central Arrernte Dictionary* refers to *atywerrenge/totemic objects* as sacred and provides a word, *ameke-ameke*/sacred place, but there is no word for the concept of the sacred nor an adjective for sacred. Yet, throughout *Iwenhe Tyerrtye* M.K. uses the English word “sacred” frequently. It appears that the English word has been incorporated by the *Arrernte* into *Arrernte* discourse. It is an honorific word adopted from English, but with a more encompassing non-dual meaning signifying the Holy and Mysterious nature of the creation.

In *Arrernte*, the word *ayeye* means story. By incorporating *ayeye* into a discourse on the *apmere* and “the eternal”, M.K. adds a religious dimension to the word. M.K.’s English translation of *Altyerrenge-arle Ayeye aneke, lyete-arle Alakenhe anenheme* says “Story was there in the Beginning Time and it’s still living today.” Story is the history book for M.K., but not one that is written down on paper; “it’s written in people”. And she adds, “It’s like written in the Land itself.”

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The Story is the Land, and the Land is the Story.
The Story holds the people,
And the people live inside the story.
The Story lives inside the people,
And the Land lives inside the people also.
It goes all ways to hold the Land.  

M.K. has used traditional story repeatedly throughout her book and discourse. Well into her account she introduces a word that clarifies the complexity of her tradition – ayeye/story. She includes a dot painting of a landscape with stylised boomerangs over a background of country including creeks or streams. She calls this painting

_Ameye-arle Alheme, Ayeye-arle Apetyalpeme, A Story of Going and Coming Back. Lyete-arle Alakenhe anenheme_. And it’s still living today. _Altyerrenge-arle ayeye aneke_. The Story was started by the Ancestors. The background streams are the Stories coming out _apmerenge_ [from the country] and crossing over each other (the spirit of the Land coming out, the messages of the Land). The boomerangs indicate the action of the Story going out and returning again, like a spiral. The Stories have been forever and will be forever.

It is notable that M.K. has outlined the comprehensive nature of her world-view without using the term _Altyerre_. When at last she comes to the thorny topic of _Altyerre_, significantly she initially describes _Altyerre_ as what it is not:

When the old people called our _Altyerrenge_ Stories “Dreamtimes” to the first _alherntere mape_ [white people], they probably said it in a way that the _warlperle_ [another word for white people] could understand it. Because those _alherntere mape_, the white people didn’t have the Traditional Story, _arrwekele atnyenetyakenhe-arle aneke_. But we didn’t realise that by putting it like that, “in the Dreamtime, that’s

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73 Turner, _Iwenhe Tyerrtye_, 45.
74 Turner, _Iwenhe Tyerrtye_, 73.
75 A rough translation is: “the white people did not have stories like ours from their past.” _Arrwekele_ means in the past or before
how it happened”, that the warlperles would see our traditional stories as just like their own fairy stories that begin “once upon a time” But they are not like that.76

M.K. is sensitive to the negative connotations that she suspects outsiders might draw from the use of Altyerre as “Dreaming” – as if it is not real or true. So, she says: “It’s not a dream, like fairy-tale dream, it’s a Traditional Story, and that is in us.”77 All is in all. She adds, “Altyerrenge doesn’t mean the olden days, it means always was, and nowadays as well.”78 She is much more comfortable using her own term, “Traditional Country Stories”,79 for Altyerre, because “there’s nothing old about it”.80

M.K. says that there are three ways of using and understanding Altyerre. First, there is the simple idea of having a dream at night: “Like you might dream something like the man fell off the horse …”81 Second, there is Altyerre describing “[h]ow this Traditional Story came”,82 which is really how the Altyerre travelled, meaning story line, sometimes called a song line, setting out the travels over country of the totemic ancestor. Third, altyerre (spelt with a lower-case a) is an alternative way of discovering your Story because the father’s father’s line has been disrupted.

M.K. began her account of her being with aknganentye, meaning from father’s father’s side. She now explains that altyerre means from mother’s father’s side. There are two different words for grandfather in Arrernte: arrenge/father’s father and atyemeye/mother’s father. Altyerre comes from the atyemeye line. The aknganentye line is for M.K, as it is for Wenten, a stronger affiliation with Land. Father’s father’s side is primary for her. This is her pride; this is her strength. But she is fully aware that there is her mother’s side, and she is proud of that also and draws her spirit from her mother’s country. She acknowledges the fact that many Arrernte women have had children by non-Indigenous fathers and so that father’s father’s side cannot supply the Story required for establishing skin and totem. She happily relies on mother’s father’s side for traditional country story. She says, “If your father’s line is

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76 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 46.
77 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 47.
78 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 47.
79 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 48.
80 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 48.
81 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 48.
82 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 49.
white, akngeye mpelereke artweye, you’re always connected to your mother,” though “atyeme-kenhe, it’s not as strong as arrenge/father’s father”. 83

M.K. concludes: “A dream is not just a dream. It’s a real happening Story, or a real happening picture given to you … Altyerre arratye re, [it’s actually really true] they say that Altyerre-areme [literally, seeing dreams], dreaming dreams, is right at the heart of Aboriginal culture.” 84 It seems M.K. is very reluctant to use Altyerre at the beginning of her account because she is so aware that an unsophisticated understanding of Altyerre diminishes the importance of dreams within the culture. But in the end, as long as the student of her culture has had all the preparatory learning, then that student can be instructed in the very central place that Altyerre or dreams play in Arrernte life.

Yami Lester was an outstanding Yankunytjatjara man who, although blinded as a child by fallout from British atomic bomb tests in the Maralinga area of South Australia in the 1950s, went on to become a leader of the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands in South Australia. The ritual and cultural life of the Arrernte nations and the Pitjantjatjara, Yankunytjatjara and other Western Desert people are very similar and often include ceremonial interaction between the different groups. Lester clarified the use of “Dreaming” in terms very similar to the clarification offered by M.K. Turner. His autobiography states:

So I’m a ngintaka, 86 from where I was born. Everyone has one of these wapar … They told me that ngintaka story when I was a little bit older. They said, “This is ngintaka dreaming.” Not dreaming, but ngintaka wapar. They used the word wapar, Pitjantjatjara use tjukurpa. Some people say dreaming. But it’s not a dream. It’s real to me and it means something … 87

Altyerre is equivalent to wapar and tjukurpa. Lester was the principal negotiator of the South Australian Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act (1981) and of the Commonwealth government handover of Uluru to the Yankunytjatjara traditional owners in 1985. Here he carefully

83 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 49.
84 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 51.
85 Yankunytjatjara country adjoins the southern fringe of Arrernte country.
86 A Yankunytjatjara word for perentie lizard.
87 Yami Lester, Yami: The autobiography of Yami Lester (Alice Springs: IAD Press, 1993), 9. Note that Yami’s totem is derived from where he was born, which differs from the Arrernte emphasis on where one is conceived.
clarifies, as part of his educative cross-cultural role, the correct understanding of the use of “Dreaming”. He initially uses “Dreaming” to get his audience to listen and then educates his readers to the inadequacy of “Dreaming”, as understood from English linguistic and cultural perspectives.

M.K.’s intention in writing her book is similar to Lester’s: to clarify the central core of her existence. She has concentrated on a complex of ideas that are held together under the concept of anpernirrentye/kinship. Barry McDonald, her co-author, challenged her by suggesting that some white people consider kinship is a straitjacket that constrains Arrernte people. M.K. retorts: “For me and my families ever since Creation, never did kinship hold us in chains.” 88 She adds:

Instead, our kinship has given happiness and great joy in living to all of us Aboriginal people who have been travelling this path from our Creation onwards. It has given us recognition and identity, and has allowed us to really nurture one another. That’s how it is from the Creation, and that’s how we perceive it now. 89

M.K. has a total confidence in the profound practicality of her world-view. It is a source of identity and a conferrer of respect. All Arrernte people share in the same gift from the creation. All deserve the same recognition of their identity derived from the power of the eternal, and M.K. adds, “it’s a loving way”. 90

In Iwenhe Tyerrtye M.K. Turner has provided a comprehensive account of her Arrernte imaginary. She never uses the word “religion”. In subsequent chapters this study will address M.K.’s attachment to Catholicism more deeply. In the case of her Arrernte world-view it will contend that M.K. sees these understandings as her whole life – not merely a compartment of her life in the “religious” box. In her Arrernte world, the so-called religious and the so-called secular are integrated. Her Arrerteneness is her totality as a person, the central core of her existence. She lives every moment of her life conscious that she is Arrernte. It is because she is Arrernte that through Altyerre she lives the way she does and she could not imagine herself – or her grandchildren – living any other way.

88 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 84.
89 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 84.
90 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 85.
2.2 Kathleen Kemarre Wallace: Deep Listening

Kathleen Kemarre Wallace\(^9\) is approximately ten years younger than M.K. Turner. Notably, like M.K., she now uses her skin name, for example as the author of her dazzling book *Listen deeply, let these stories in*. *Listen deeply* is beautifully illustrated with Kathleen Kemarre’s own paintings of her country south-east of Alice Springs and quite close to *Ltyentye Apurte/Santa Teresa*. In contrast to M.K.’s book, Kathleen Kemarre includes many Arrernte traditional stories that reflect her knowledge of specific instances of totemic associations and ritual law. Throughout her book, however, she addresses many similar motifs to those covered by M.K. For example, she explains who she is by placing herself within her patriline and matriline:

Then the old woman knew that part of the spirit from the kangaroo would move into my mother. I was told that when this happened Atyelpê [her grandfather] and Louisa [her grandmother] camped in the Keringke rockhole area. This area holds their story of important totemic ancestor kangaroos.\(^9\)

She explains that “it is my mother’s conception site, and I am Kemarre, I am part of Keringke too”.\(^9\) Here we see the same approach that M.K. adopted, to mark herself out by reference to her skin name and her association through father’s father’s place in her country, which is also a totemic site. She states powerfully: “Keringke is part of my spirit; it’s a place I am connected to through the totemic ancestors, my skin name, and my family. It is a place I look after.”\(^9\) And while Keringke gave her life and spirit she now has a responsibility to it: she declares herself to be a custodian.\(^9\)

Kathleen Kemarre had much more formal schooling than M.K. and was trained as a primary teacher. Her writing and her thought are more linear than the more interleaved thinking and

\(^9\) Kathleen Kemarre Wallace is commonly called Mrs Wallace throughout the *Eastern and Central Mparntwe Arrernte* region because a close relative of her husband, named Kathleen, passed away some years ago, and her name has been kwementyaye as a result. Kwementyaye is a word used by relatives and others in a respectful relationship with the deceased person to not use that person’s name. It means the name goes out of circulation. Along with the nature of cyclic generational moieties it helps explain why Arrernte have little direct historical knowledge of persons further back than great-grandfather.


\(^9\) Custodian is a term that implies less about ownership and more about care. M.K. calls it “holding”, by which she means nurturing or caring for.
In a more didactic fashion from the first page of her book she tries to carefully explain her culture:

My people come from apmere, land, which includes many places of great importance to us – they’re the special places that come from our ancestors. They’re the places where our ancestors emerged in their country during Altyerrenge. In the early days, through dreams, these Altyerre beings taught our human ancestors.

We have seen all these concepts laid out by M.K.: apmere, ancestors, Altyerrenge and dreams. Altyerrenge for M.K. denotes a place in time, but not limited by time. Time for Kathleen Kemarre is a state of consciousness, and rather than pointing to linear time she thinks of it as a realisation of time. “Arrernte people believe that there was a spirit long before anyone or anything existed and that this spirit made the world first, then the stars, and then the people. Well we call this Altyerrenge; it’s the time which was the beginning.”

Here she is speaking of the critical element in her world-view, Altyerrenge, “which was the beginning”. This is very close to the concept of creation that M.K. relies on. The difference between their thinking might be Kathleen Kemarre’s emphasis on a spirit that existed before creation and made the world first and then the stars and then the people. It is a shaping account that implies a creator. There is no other reference to this spirit having any godlike qualities apart from creative/formative power. Neither does she speculate about the nature of the utnenge/spirit or its source/Altyerre. For Kathleen Kemarre the spirit might be said to be a given, a gift and a giver. Nonetheless, she agrees with M.K. in regard to the eternal nature of Altyerre. For her the utnenge/spirit of the apmere is inextinguishable.

Another difference between the two women’s accounts is that Kathleen Kemarre has little reticence about calling Altyerre “dreams”. She links the role of spirit-beings to dreams: “The Altyerre beings taught a dance to people through the dreams of our ancestors for each totem site, then people performed these dances in their apmere country.” Her understanding is

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96 The two women are classificatory or kin sisters, not sisters from the same mother. Girls born of two different mothers who are themselves sisters would each call their mother’s sister mother and call each other sister.
97 Wallace, Listen deeply, 1.
98 Tony Swain, A Place for Strangers (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 19. Swain uses his own term “rhythmmed events” to better understand the incorporation of time in Altyerre.
100 Wallace, Listen deeply, 17.
that in Altyerre time there were beings, who still live today, who laid down the pattern of life, especially ritual life, for all humans. Humans learn these lessons through dreams.

*Listen deeply* is tinged with sadness yet filled with hope. Throughout Kathleen Kemarre talks about the importance of dance for the maintenance of story and culture. She says wistfully, “When we dance together, the whole family, we paint up for ceremony to make everyone feel happy, but also to make sure we look similar to irrentye-arenye, our spirit ancestors.” Throughout *Listen deeply* she reports on the loss of key people who were holders of knowledge and the effects of the disruption caused by the arrival of the pastoralists and the missionaries. She comments sadly:

But the last person who lived at Ltyentye Apurte and who danced has died – he was my grandmother’s brother, Tim Riley. Now days, everyone’s too busy to follow the dances, and we aren’t allowed on all that country anymore either, so mostly we just remember all that has passed.

This sits within the context of the overpowering of Arrernte culture in the time of Invasion, protection and assimilation. Kathleen Kemarre introduces T.G.H. Strehlow as a contributor to the disruption she experienced. Strehlow regularly visited Santa Teresa and advised the MSC missionaries there. Kathleen Kemarre has a memory of this process in its application to Santa Teresa:

Before the 1960s … when T.G.H. Strehlow went to Keringke the men told him the stones had already gone. At that time, he was being given some of the men’s sacred objects from their places above Keringke rockhole, and other parts of our homelands because they were not safe anymore in their special place. After that the old men’s business was finished … It makes us very sad because it was an important and sacred part of us.

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103 Fr John Pettit, personal communication, September 10, 2018, informs that in the 1970s he and another non-Indigenous lay missionary helped the Arrernte to hide the atywerrenge from Strehlow.
This sense of abandonment and of loss permeates Kathleen Kemarre’s text – but not her paintings. While M.K.’s book is a defiant riposte to the misunderstanding by the wider Australian audience of her culture, Kathleen Kemarre’s is a more wistful work designed to convince both whitefellas, and more especially her children and grandchildren, that the past is not lost. In the very first page she states, “The richness of our culture is still present, and the stories of these places are still important to learn.”\textsuperscript{105} Then she says, “We still paint our dancers up with their special designs using urlpe (red ochre)”\textsuperscript{106} and “Altyerrenge beings gave us knowledge about the colours including designs to use in ceremonies.”\textsuperscript{107} In all this, however, she remains dismayed: “Most of us have had the sensation that our spirit has left us at some time, and it makes us feel empty.”\textsuperscript{108} And yet perseverance, determination and courage radiate from her text and paintings. Her depictions of Country and her representation of the irrerntarenye/Spirit-beings convince the reader that there is a future. On virtually the last page she says, “The spirits are still here, in our country. Our way of life has all changed, but we can still listen to our ancestors, our elders, our country and our culture.”\textsuperscript{109} And then she concludes, “We must do things together: respecting, listening and thinking, doing things together, not just talking all the time. Sometimes think, just let there be silence. You must learn to wait, let your thoughts come back to you.”\textsuperscript{110}

2.3 Wenten Rubuntja: Baptised for Lollies

The painting for the Pope in the Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Catholic (OLSH) church in Alice Springs, which was described in the opening pages of Chapter 1, while commissioned by the OLSH parish, reflected what was to become Wenten Rubuntja’s political style. He was also one of the artists of the famous Barunga Statement painting\textsuperscript{111} handed to Prime Minister Bob Hawke in 1988 and later hung in Parliament House, Canberra. After the High Court ruling on Mabo, Wenten and other Aboriginal leaders presented a painting to accompany the Aboriginal Peace Plan to a meeting of the Keating Cabinet in 1993. Wenten’s paintings

\textsuperscript{105} Wallace, \textit{Listen deeply}, 1.
\textsuperscript{106} Wallace, \textit{Listen deeply}, 14.
\textsuperscript{107} Wallace, \textit{Listen deeply}, 14.
\textsuperscript{108} Wallace, \textit{Listen deeply}, 22.
\textsuperscript{109} Wallace, \textit{Listen deeply}, 169.
\textsuperscript{110} Wallace, \textit{Listen deeply}, 171.
\textsuperscript{111} The Barunga Statement was the basis for a negotiation between the Prime Minister of Australia, Bob Hawke, and the Leaders of the Aboriginal nations of the country which aimed to achieve a Treaty Agreement between the Aboriginal Nations and the Commonwealth.
depict sacred country in the Alice Springs region and declare the ongoing significance of
*Altyerre* to the nation.

Wenten Rubuntja was a *Central Mparntwe Arrernte* man, whereas M.K. Turner is an *Akarre* woman and Kathleen *Kemarre Wallace* an *Eastern Arrernte* woman. All three
languages/dialects are very closely related and the country they were born in and presently
inhabit overlaps extensively. What springs off the page in the text of Wenten’s description of
the significance of the OLSH painting is how he introduces his topic: “*Country line re
apmere Aknganentye.*” The reader is immediately confronted with identical words that M.K.
Turner and Kathleen *Kemarre Wallace* repeatedly use, *apmere* and *aknganentye*. What is
important for Wenten is “country” and “being born from the country”.

In his book *the town grew up dancing* Wenten says, “These rocks we got to worship. The
rainmakers, the caterpillars, or the kangaroo, emus – we got to pray for them.”112 For him the
whole of the country is still filled with totemic sites. Wenten continues, “They [Europeans]
got nothing to go for – they make farms, and the Aboriginals suffering to do everything,
praise worship for own country. Not them, they don’t pray …”113 His commentary is very
similar to a famous phrase of W.E.H. Stanner in his paper “The Dreaming”: “White man got
no dreaming, Him go ’nother way. White man, him go different. Him got road belong
himself.”114 What does Wenten mean by his phrase, “we got to pray for them”? He did not
say “pray to them”. These sacred objects are not idols. They do not stand for something else.
They are not the mundane made sacred. They are the living sacred themselves. Their
sacredness is not contained in the object but is a shared sacredness between the totemic
object/atywerrenge, the *apmere*/country and the *tyerrtye*/human person born from that totem.
The “worship” which Wenten says must be undertaken is to hold one’s totem close to one’s
heart. Here is the interlocking of *apmere*/place, *tyerrtye*/person, *utnengel*/spirit and
*atywerrenge*/totem into one consciousness.

M.K. Turner was able to recount the *apmereyanhe* [that one big country ground] of her Land,
which was quite some distance north-east of Alice Springs. Wenten, however, was born from
country on his *arrenge* (father’s father’s) side and on his *atyeme* (mother’s father’s) side, who

112 Rubuntja and Green, *the town grew up dancing*, 7.
113 Rubuntja and Green, *the town grew up dancing*, 7.
were both from places closer or right in/near Alice Springs. *Mpweringke*, where Wenten was born, is about 60 kilometres directly north of Alice Springs on the edge of the Burt Plain/*Mpweringke*. Wenten’s *arrenge*, his father’s father, was from Jessie Gap, about 25 kilometres east of Alice Springs. This means in Wenten’s own experience that Alice Springs was “crisscrossed with journeys by ancestral spirits and dotted with mythic sites of great importance …”

Alice Springs/*Mparntwe* was home to many Central and Eastern *Mparntwe Arrernte* people as Wenten was growing up. He has direct memories of the performance of *altharte*/public dancing of various dreamings, “Ayeparenye caterpillars, the *Yerrampe* (honeyants) and the *Arlpereny* beetles”. As mentioned in his discourse to the Pope, the place where the OLSH church now is, was not so long ago a dancing ground for *altharte* dancing in *Mparntwe*. Other places where the *altharte* occurred included *Werlatye Atherre*, a waterhole north of the Telegraph Station, and *Mpwetyerre*, near where Lasseter’s Casino now stands. Not only is the town full of sacred sites and tracks of the journeys of ancestral spirits but it is also dotted with dancing grounds that remain of significance to living, local Central *Mparntwe Arrernte* people.

Wenten introduces a new word, *tywerrenge*. *Tywerrenge* are sacred, secret objects that are totemically associated with particular sites where the ancestor resides and that, in the *Altyerre* time, formed the earth as it now appears. Men are said to own *tywerrenge* in the same way as

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115 Rubuntja and Green, *the town grew up dancing*, 44.
116 Rubuntja and Green, *the town grew up dancing*, 46.
117 *Werlatye Atherre*, literally Two Breasts, is an important women’s site, and also significant for men. Maxie Turner speaks very respectfully of *Werlatye Atherre* in his contribution to *Every Hill Got a Story*. Maxie said: “that’s where they sang for me, my poor grandfathers. And my grannies danced for me” (Marg Bowman, compiler and ed., *Every Hill Got a Story* (Alice Springs: Central Land Council, Hardy Grant Books, 2015), 136. In the mid-1980s *Werlatye Atherre* became the focus of major political action by *Arrernte* custodians when the Northern Territory Government developed a plan to flood the site in order to construct a “flood mitigation” dam and create a recreational lake in Alice Springs.
118 *Mpwetyerre* is the name of a Town Camp affiliated with Tangentyere Council. When naming Town Camps the elders of Tangentyere Council chose associations with traditional sites to highlight the continuing presence of *Altyerre* in *Mparntwe*. South of Heavitree Gap and the Blatherskite Range (a key *Ayeparenye* site) on the edge of Alice Springs, another of the Tangentyere Town Camps is named *Anthepe*, which is the word for a women’s dancing ground. Wenten’s classificatory brother, Eli Rubuntja, an ordained Lutheran Minister and Founder of Yipirinya School, lived at *Anthepe* Camp. Wenten himself lived in his later years at *Tarrentye Arlere* (Larapinta Valley Camp).
119 *Tywerrenge* is given in the *Eastern and Central Arrernte Dictionary* as *atywerrenge*. In this case the word is capitalised by Rubuntja and Green in the original because it is referring to a specific object (the painting) connected to a specific songline that accompanies the object. The inclusion of the *a* before the word is optional. The first use of the word in this thesis comes from Rubuntja, who typically uses some *Western Arrernte* conventions in his speech and so Jenny Green, his co-author, has used *tywerrenge*. 

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they own *apmere*/country. This parallels M.K. Turner’s view that “We belong to the Land and the Land belongs to us”. By adding *tywerrenge* to the complex, Wenten combines a representative object that stands for the land and the song. So, in this discourse Wenten adds song/dance. When he is describing the painting he presented to the Pope he says:

The circles are the *Tywerrenge* – that’s the song. *Ntaripe*/Heavitree Gap is in the middle. *Anthwerkel*/Emily Gap and *Akepelye*/Jessie Gap are to the east and over there to the west is *Alheke Ulyele*/Mount Gillen and *Urengetyerrpe*/Simpson’s Gap. You got to have song. Everybody has some sort of song – Chinese and Japanese (as well). It might be a song for dancing the *altharte* ceremonies or a song for the women painting up to dance the *anthepe* dance – well that’s it. All these things were created in the country. Those black dots are the men and women dancing. Men and women – all of them. All the coloured ones, white and black.

An additional feature of Wenten’s discourse is his inclusiveness. His elliptical comment at the conclusion of this quote – “white and black” – refers to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Wenten is offering the *tywerrenge* to all residents of Alice Springs. In this fashion Wenten adds an element to the all-embracing nature of the *Altyerre* complex. *Altyerre* now comprises *tyerrtye mape*/people, *apmere*/land, *tywerrenge*/sacred objects, and *altharte*/public dancing and *anthepe*/women’s dancing, and no one part can be separated from any other.

Wenten’s book *the town grew up dancing* features numerous paintings. These are not just decorative. These modern paintings, in watercolour in the Namatjira style, or acrylic in the dot style, are traditional representations of both country and the kinship system. Wenten explains:

When they see this painting here they say, “well that’s my country” and then he’ll say, “well that artist is a good man, he’s a *kwertengerle* for this one. He’s got to go

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120 Turner, *Iwenhe Tyerrtye*, 42.
121 Rubuntja and Green, *the town grew up dancing*, 63.
122 *Anthepe* is also the name of a Town Camp on the southern fringe of Alice Springs. It was obviously once a dancing ground and was the place of residence of Eli Rubuntja, Wenten’s classificatory brother.
123 Other *Arrernte* people who are “owners” or “managers” of the place depicted.
124 *Kwertengerle* is the *Arrernte* term for the reciprocating partner of an individual who is *apmereke artweye*. *Apmereke artweye* is owner of the *apmere*/country or *totem*/tywerrenge and *kwertengerle* is manager of the *apmere*/country or *totem*/tywerrenge.
through with the kwertengerle.” When you do my country you got to give me some tyewarrelye125 too, little bit of a gift, you know. Blackfellas all the time like that. It’s still Altyerre, all what we are doing now is just Altyerre.126

The paintings have become tywerenge also; they have been absorbed into the Altyerre. And the Altyerre is alive in modern times. By painting these landscapes, in either dot or watercolour format, Wenten and other Arrernte painters127 evoke the tywerenge of these heartfelt places. Wenten’s paintings occupy some of the most visited and iconic places in Alice Springs. One of his most celebrated has been transformed into a stained-glass mosaic in the front entrance of the Araluen Art Centre, and of course there is the Pope’s painting in the OLSH church.128 Wenten’s deft diplomacy and artistic skill have ensured that sites which non-Indigenous residents and visitors to Alice Springs might initially think are merely lovely places of interest, become charged with the sacred tywerenge of the country.

Wenten’s sense of the “religious” is communicated through his painting of the country. He says:

This landscape painting is the country himself. Tywerenge himself. Tywerenge comes out of there. Songs come out of all that body [of the country] … The country has got sacred sites, that stone, that mountain has got Dreaming and himself is sacred country … Well the song is the history of the country.129

Wenten’s conception of two-way thinking and Two Laws will be re-visited in the exploration of the dialogue between Altyerre and Catholicism in Part Four.

Wenten passed away in 2005, but his tywerrente lives on because he was one of the paramount teachers of the Altyerre which posits that the utnenge, spirit of the world, is

125 Tyewarrelye is traditionally a food offering by a young man to his teacher. Wenten uses it in this case as money.
126 Rubuntja and Green, the town grew up dancing, 122.
127 Many of these painters are featured in Jenny Green, ed., Pmere, Country in Mind, Arrernte Landscape Painters (Alice Springs: Tangentyere Council, 1988).
128 There are paintings by Wenten exhibited in The Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory Museum, Yipirinya School, The Holmes a Court Collection, The Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority, Yeperenye shopping centre and many more.
129 Rubuntja and Green, the town grew up dancing, 161.
eternal. His apwertel/rock teaching – “these rocks we got to worship” – inspires the entire country of his domain. The sacred paintings, the tywerrenge he has left in the households of his friends and in public buildings, major museums and galleries of the nation’s most influential people, live still with a vibrant energy that can fuel not only the Arrernte world but also the non-Indigenous culture of the nation.\textsuperscript{130} His greatest message concerns the resonance of song and dance. Song and dance occur on apmere; special places in apmere called altharte and anthepe. These dancing grounds are located everywhere across the town of Alice Springs.\textsuperscript{131} These altharte and anthepe are linked by tracks of the Altyerre ancestors who still animate the country. And as Wenten said frequently, every child, black or white, born in Alice Springs is a “little Ayeparenye”\textsuperscript{132}

2.4 All the Arrernte Voices: Harmony

Wenten Rubuntja has passed away. M.K. Turner is suffering from end-stage renal disease. Kathleen Kemarre Wallace also is on dialysis and relies on a walking frame. In their last days these artists, thinkers, elders and teachers have all independently decided to present their world-views for all to study. All three have both an Arrernte and non-Indigenous audience in mind.

M.K. says Anpernirrentye/kinship is the glue that binds society in place. Irrerntarenynye mapel/the little beings of the country, says Kathleen Kemarre, are the source of spirit and energy that connect tyerrtye mapel/people to the creation/aknganentye. Tywerrenge/sacred objects, including modern paintings, are everywhere and the land is full of anthepe and altharte/dancing grounds, says Wenten. The whole land is charged with spiritual energy,

\textsuperscript{130} In this hope, he shares a view with his erstwhile rival T.G.H. Strehlow, as will be discussed in Chapter 3.
\textsuperscript{131} Both Rod Moss (artist, confidant and advocate for the Whitegate [Irrkerlantye] community) and I have seen Arrernte men painted up and in private camps protected from public view located in very close proximity to the town. I have witnessed these camps on both the west and east of Alice Springs within 3 kilometres of the post office. Irrkerlantye/brown falcon is the totemic name for Whitegate, which is applying for a formal lease from the Northern Territory government. Whitegate is the informal name given to the place because of the battered gates that once marked the entrance to the paddock.
\textsuperscript{132} This was one of Wenten’s favourite aphorisms. Ayeparenye are the caterpillars that are regarded as the totem of Alice Springs. They are a prized Arrernte food source – one that can be stored. Yiperenye School and Yiprinya Shopping centre are named after this totem. Note the three different spellings dependent upon the different Arrernte sub-groups in Alice Springs all using different orthographies. Wenten’s phrase is meant to be especially inclusive, telling all children born in Alice Springs that they are indeed special and by association non-Indigenous people are welcome in Alice Springs providing they observe the right respect.
utnengel/spiritual life, and the life that has sustained the Arrernte is available to all who are open to it.

None of these elders says that Altyerre means God. They make no clear separation between the secular and the sacred. M.K. concludes: “there’s a lot of sacredness in our homelands, in our country. Not sacred sites everywhere, but sacredness in the Land everywhere, the Land itself is sacred to us.”133 Wenten says the same: “The country has got sacred sites, that stone, that mountain has got Dreaming and himself is sacred country … Well the song is the history of the country.”134

Totemism, the blanket term indicating the essential relationship of all individuals with a spirit-filled place, covers all. All three Arrernte Voices know that Altyerre is related to dreams, but none of them rely on Altyerre as dreams to represent the totality of the immensity and complexity of the concept. Altyerre comes from the creation/aknganentye and, as Wenten says, “all that we are doing now is just Altyerre”.135

Altyerre embraces and expresses all the core features of Arrernte beliefs and culture.

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133 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrye, 119.
134 Rubuntja and Green, the town grew up dancing, 161.
135 Rubuntja and Green, the town grew up dancing, 122.
Chapter 3: The Anthropologists

3.1 Introduction

The focus of Part One is on what the term *Altyerre* means for the *Arrernte*. However, the anthropological and linguistic scholarship of numerous non-*Arrernte* people has helped to form these views. Chapter 3 begins with summaries and critiques of the opinions of the two the most noted experts on the matter, W.E.H. Stanner and T.G.H. Strehlow, followed by comparisons with the *Arrernte* Voices reported in the previous chapter. The more recent works of Swain, Bell, Bird, Rose and Green are then considered. It will be shown that *Altyerre* is an untranslatable term with a profound and dynamic power: *Altyerre* reaches out from the eternity of creation and encloses *Arrernte* people in country with a conviction that sustains them and the world.

When the practice now called anthropology began in Australia, late in the 19th century, anthropology as an academic discipline did not exist in Australia. It was 1914 “before the first formal attempts to establish anthropology as a university discipline were taken”136 and another eleven years passed before the first Chair in Anthropology was established at Sydney University.137 The earliest exponents of the discipline thought of themselves as ethnographers – documenters of exotic ethnic cultures. Ethnographers typically were outsiders who attempted to become insiders through participant observation over lengthy periods of living with the people they were studying. Some ethnographers were such by accident: for example, missionaries, traders and government officials stationed in remote places, where their only neighbours were people very different from themselves, often became amateur ethnographers. Some of these became significant contributors. For example, Frank Gillen, who was Post Master in Alice Springs, was to become in the late 1880s a colleague of

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Professor Baldwin Spencer and would contribute greatly to the early ethnography of the Arrernte.138

The Aborigines of Central Australia caught the attention of ethnographers because, as Cowlishaw observes, “of the contrast between their simple technology and small-scale groupings on the one hand, and their elaborate ceremonial life supported by marvellous theories about the nature and origins of the world, and their intricate but flexible social structures, on the other.”139 And interestingly, almost ironically, “[m]any ethnographers became the trusted recorders of the knowledge that senior Aboriginal men and women wanted to preserve.”140

In this initial phase of anthropology two processes continued side by side in Central Australia. On the one hand, anthropology continued to treat Aboriginal people as objects of research. Ethnographers saw Aborigines as objects of scientific interest and also saw a need to work fast before the specimens became extinct.141 This view is summed up by Peterson, quoting Fison and Howitt: “They now represent the condition of mankind in savagery better than it is elsewhere represented on the earth – a condition now rapidly passing away.”142 This is the view that Aborigines expressed the primitive in the progression of evolution. On the other hand, a huge collection of ethnographic material was collected and stored, which is now available for the continued benefit of Aboriginal people. An example of these collections is the Photographs of Baldwin Spencer,143 which remains a source both for scholars and the Arrernte to this day. The same can be said for the controversial Strehlow Collection, now housed in the Strehlow Research Centre in Alice Springs144 under the management of Arrernte custodians with strict control over access.

138 Batty et al., The Photographs of Baldwin Spencer, 19. Mulvaney’s essay in this book states: “Fortunately Gillen’s weighty correspondence with Spencer between 1894 and 1903 illuminates their learning curve, methodology, questioning of accepted theories and Gillen’s major role …”
140 Cowlishaw, “Friend or Foe?”. The work of many ethnographers have been used by Aboriginal claimants since the late 1970s to assist in claims to ownership of traditional country.
141 Hill, Broken Song, 8. “Spencer and Gillen’s texts honoured the Aranda, even though their premise was that they were a Stone Age people doomed to extinction.”
143 Batty et al., The Photographs.
144 Although existing under Northern Territory Government legislation, restricted conditions of access are outlined in the Centre’s website. They include the following: “Access to the Strehlow Collection by researchers and other interested parties is governed by the Strehlow Centre Board. Many elements in the collection can only be accessed by the appropriate traditional Aboriginal custodians, or by people acting with their consent and
In the second phase of anthropology, with Australian government and Rockefeller Foundation support, Sydney University moved to establish a chair of anthropology in June 1925. However, in the United States the Rockefeller Foundation was closely linked to the Galton Society, which advanced a human evolutionary agenda. As Peterson notes, this supported studies into Aborigines because they “were seen as uniquely able to shed light on the human condition because they most closely represented it in its natural form,” which is code for the progression from savage to civilised. The financial involvement of overseas agencies caused a regression in Australian Aboriginal anthropology and a focus on biomedical anthropology rather than social anthropology in the inter-war years.

A third phase of anthropology began in the late 1960s and then into 1970s, with the emergence of National Land Rights legislation. A new form of anthropology, more respectful and informed, emerged. The role of women, the recognition that change was occurring but tradition was being passed on and was worthy of investigation, and an awareness that Aboriginal people themselves were to be seen as subjects rather than objects of research, led to a revitalised discipline of anthropology. This approach is represented by the work of Swain, Bell and Green, to be discussed below.

However, as late as 1984, despite these developments, Max Charlesworth observed in the introduction to the anthology Religion in Aboriginal Australia that “the serious and systematic study of Australian Aboriginal religion is a relatively recent development of the last thirty years.” Charlesworth continues: “the attitude of the early anthropologists and other observers to the religion of the original Australians was a melancholy mixture of neglect, condescension and misunderstanding.” It was this inadequate treatment of religion, now seen as a central component of Aboriginal culture, that Charlesworth sought to

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146 Peterson, “‘Studying Man and Man’s Nature”, 16.
147 This included measuring skulls, etc.
148 Peterson, “‘Studying man and man’s nature”’, 16, says that under the “newly established and Aboriginally-controlled Land Councils (established under the Northern Territory Land Rights Act, 1975) most anthropologists have been employed in the preparation of claims.”
150 Charlesworth, Religion in Aboriginal Australia, 1.
correct. Acknowledging the various factors that limited anthropology from the 1880s to the 1980s is all the more reason for respecting the work of Stanner and Strehlow, which, by describing Aboriginal religion in finer detail, was sympathetic to authentic Aboriginal culture. Nonetheless, as will be shown in this chapter, their work limits the meaning of Altyerre and needs to be taken further.

3.2 T.G.H. Strehlow and the Broken Song

T.G.H. Strehlow is rightly regarded as the greatest of the linguists and anthropologists who worked with the Arrernte. His insight into the relationship between time and Arrernte ceremony breaks open the concept of Altyerre: “Every full-scale ceremonial festival was, in fact, regarded as an occasion when Time and Eternity became one, when the border line dividing visible human beings and invisible totemic ancestors became temporarily obliterated …”

From the 1930s to his death in 1978, although never a professional anthropologist, Strehlow undertook the deepest and most insightful linguistic research on the Arrernte. Barry Hill’s book Broken Song tracks the career of T.G.H. Strehlow and establishes that Strehlow’s Songs of Central Australia is a hymn in praise of the Arrernte poetic genius. From the 1930s Strehlow had traversed Central Australia collecting Arrernte songs by writing the words down in his own invented script, and by audio recording and filming staged ceremonies – which he mostly paid for with food. At the same time, he collected sacred objects, tjurunga, which his informants voluntarily entrusted to him for safe keeping, or for which he paid cash or goods. Through his linguistic research Strehlow came to fully appreciate the beauty, power and richness of the Arrernte Songs.

Strehlow wanted to know “what it was to be Aranda, and what not …” Like his father and the other early Lutheran missionaries, he explored the meaning of Altjira (Altyerre).
While Spencer and Gillen had translated Altjira as “dreaming”, Strehlow’s father, Carl, was adamant that Altjira meant an “eternal being”. A generation earlier this translation issue had caused a huge battle between his father and Spencer and Gillen. Did the Arrernte believe in God? T.H. Strehlow wanted to know what altjira meant “before the missionaries arrived?”  

After settling to his task, Strehlow asked Arrernte consultant Moses Tjalkabota, one of the first Ntaria men to convert to Lutheranism, if the word meant “dream”. The answer was “no”. Throughout his life Strehlow maintained this view that the root of altjira meant “uncreated” or “eternal”, although he conceded that the verb for dreaming was altjirarama.

Why is Strehlow so resistant to accepting that in some contexts altjira means dream? To answer this, it is necessary to consider the Lutheran approach to translation. While Strehlow was never a “missionary” all the men at Ntaria before him who counted as translators of Arrernte were committed Lutheran missionaries. Translation is truly a Lutheran enterprise. Martin Luther saw that his great task was to translate the Bible from foreign Latin and Greek into vernacular German and thus make the Word available to the faithful. In this sense, the Reformation was as much about language as about doctrine. Lutheran missionaries, Australia. Western Arrernte people from Ntaria and associated places almost all refuse to use the Dictionary orthography.

157 Hill, Broken Song, 140.
158 Moses Tjalkabota was an early convert to Lutheranism and then later an Arrernte missionary who travelled thousands of kilometres across Central Australia during his long life bringing the Gospel to Aboriginal people (not just Arrernte but including Luritja and Pitjantjatjara) in the region. He was blinded by contracting measles in his middle years but continued to evangelise with the assistance of his wife, Sofia. He became a close companion of Ted Strehlow in the 1930s and lived with him at Jay Creek for some time. He was also one of the trusted men who assisted Carl Strehlow and Ted Strehlow in Bible translation. His life story is covered in Peter Latz, Blind Moses, Aranda Man of High Degree and Christian Evangelist (Alice Springs: IAD Press, 2014).
159 Hill, Broken Song, 140. At the point in his life it might have been that Tjalkabota answered this way because he was a thoroughgoing convert to Lutheranism and to accept Altjira as dream would to deny the idea of God that he had learnt from the German Lutheran missionaries.
160 Hill, Broken Song, 629.
161 Henderson and Dobson, Arrernte to English Dictionary, 105. The dictionary provides a reference to Altyerre areme, which is altjirarama in the western Arrernte orthography. The example provided in the dictionary, however, indicates that this form of dreaming is speculative but secular in nature. For example: “The-arle Altyerre areme kwatye, kele the arratye itelareme mum lyete apetyemel[ If I dream of water, I know my mum is coming today].”

162 Henry Zecher, Christianity Today, http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-34/bible-translation-that-rocked-world.html (accessed March 15, 2017). “Luther was exceptionally gifted in many areas. But the aspect of his genius perhaps most responsible for his impact is the one least heralded: his skill and power as a translator and writer. Had it not been for that, the Protestant Reformation and the growth of a united German nation might have taken an entirely different course.”
163 Language and doctrine were, however, inextricably combined since the point of Luther’s Bible was to free Germans from the control of the Roman Catholic Church.
following in Luther’s footsteps, continued the task of bringing the foreign gospel to far-flung “pagans” by translating the Word into their vernacular. To do this the missionaries immersed themselves in the vernacular in order to master it, so that they would be successful in their goal of conversion. Language is the tool of evangelisation in this approach.

As a good Lutheran, Strehlow can’t allow altjira to mean dream. The Lutheran missionaries at Hermannsburg took the injunction in Matthew 28:19 seriously, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.” Their mission was to bring their Christian God to the pagans. In seeking to find a powerful and relevant word for God, after many years of translation work, they formed the opinion that Altjira, meaning literally “eternal” or “uncreated”, was the best fit. They could not allow an alternative connotation of “dream” to confuse their audience. While never a formal missionary, Strehlow spent a great deal of time voluntarily translating the New Testament into Western Arrernte, which was to be used in evangelisation. Hill adds: “He would place the Christian message where it needed to be, in the hearts of the natives whose songs had been broken.” And here is the crux of the issue. Strehlow was the ultimate linguist. He was brilliant, thorough, grounded and well served by a group of traditional Arrernte consultants – Conrad, Zacharias, Jacobus, Nathaniel and Moses – who voluntarily supported his endeavour. These men loved him so much that at one stage they begged him to become their ingkata, “boss” or “priest”. Strehlow is trapped between being a Lutheran in a missionary tradition and being an Arrernte linguist extraordinaire.

Strehlow became enamoured of Arrernte language and religion. In Songs of Central Australia he writes that the songs/chants of the Arrernte are by no means “primitive”. Instead he points out that they are both ancient and poetic. He compares them favourably to the Greek poetry of Homer and says they serve a similar purpose as a high point of cultural and artistic

164 Perhaps a better way of explaining this is to say that the missionaries were searching for a word for “eternal” and Altyerre seemed the best fit.
165 Hill, Broken Song, 536. Note that this quote is also the source of the title of Hill’s book.
166 Hill, Broken Song, 185.
167 This contrasts with the view, based on Spencer and Gillen’s work adopted by European theorists, that Arandic religion was a stage of early primitive religion. Hill, Broken Song, 8, says: “Thus Spencer and Gillen’s texts honoured the Aranda even though their premise was that they were a stone age people as doomed to extinction as the kangaroo or the platypus....” Hill then quotes Spencer from the Horn Expedition: “The Central Australian aborigine is the living representative of the stone age. His origin and history are lost in the gloomy mists of the past. He has no written records and few oral traditions. In appearance he is a naked, hirsute savage with a type of features occasionally pronouncedly Jewish ... He has no private ownership of land, except as regards that which is not over carefully concealed about his person.”
They are worthy of world renown and can add to the linguistic heritage of the Australian nation. This is best summarised in a quote from the Ankotarinja myth:

… the deep and essential unity between myth and drama, tjurunga worship, and “poetry” in its most primitive stage. As amongst the old races, so amongst the native tribes of the great Central Australian spaces the first falterings of “religion” are the fountain from which springs poetry and drama and the making of decorative and artistic objects: native art, literature and religion, in the widest sense of these terms, form one indissoluble and splendidly complete unity.

While Strehlow describes Arrernte myth as the “first falterings of “religion”, the conclusion of this discourse expresses powerfully his growing assessment of the richness of the mythology he is being educated into – “it forms one indissoluble and splendidly complete unity”.

However, Strehlow sensed that the whole Arrernte world was in crisis and was imploding. While he came to love and admire the wonder of the Arrernte achievement, he simultaneously came to deplore its collapse. Hill says that by 1937, not long into his research, Strehlow had come to the conclusion that “the Aranda were ‘not so much a primitive as a decadent race’.” He was commenting on the strictures of the culture which to his mind limited the freedom of expression of individuals because “there was no room for imagination”. Hill sums this up well when he observes that “Songs was predominantly written as an epitaph”. Hill reports an article in the Melbourne Herald of 1936 commenting on the appointment of Strehlow as a patrol officer. The Herald applauds Strehlow’s appointment and then goes on to describe his task: “recording the passing of one of the last surviving stone age races”.  

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168 Hill, Broken Song, 491.
169 Hill, Broken Song, 214. Hill is paraphrasing T.G.H. Strehlow’s analysis of the Ankotarinja myth of the Western and Mparntwe Arrernte associated with the Burt Plain/Mpweringke (notably Wenten Rubuntja’s birthplace).
170 Hill, Broken Song, 214.
171 Hill, Broken Song, 227. In light of the use in this thesis of the sociological term “imaginary” this is a confronting conclusion.
172 Strehlow’s great work, Songs of Central Australia.
173 Hill, Broken Song, 490.
174 Hill, Broken Song, 238.
And so Strehlow began to insert himself into the drama. As he learnt the songs, understood the stories, and accepted the *tjurunga*, he began to see himself as the *ingkata* /ceremonial leader/, not just an *ingkata*, but the last *ingkata* and repository of the pristine values of his beloved Arrernte. Herein is the tragedy of Strehlow. As he is moved in awe by exposure to the Arrernte culture and religion and sees its “passing”, Strehlow was alert to the impasse he confronted. He did not rejoice in the task he took on. He simply felt there were no alternatives. He would preserve the songs, stories, chants and myths for posterity, even while the vigour of the culture collapsed. He is basically telling the Arrernte, “you had something great once, but not anymore!” His job is to be that of a museum manager, not the conductor of a symphony.

The old men had gradually, according to Strehlow, begun to hand over their *tjurunga* to him. Hill summarises: “The message from the old men to Strehlow is that the times had tragically changed, there was no future for the secret-sacred tradition, that the really knowledgeable songmen were the last of the songmen.”

Moses Tjalkabota, having been catechised effectively, resisted the old men and questioned the substance of the *tjurunga*. Peter Latz provides an exchange about the power of the *tjurunga*: “The old men told me [Tjalkabota], ‘This *tjurunga* is uncreated.’ I answered, ‘This isn’t uncreated. Perhaps a man made this.’ But they answered, ‘Don’t think stupid thoughts. You are only young. You can’t say those things to us’.”

Remembering that both Strehlows thought that Altyerre translates as “eternal” or “uncreated”, Tjalkabota is here contesting that the *tjurunga* come from the Altyerre and are also uncreated. Tjalkabota is not convinced, because he has taken on Christianity, and God is the only “uncreated”. What is also significant from this exchange is that while Tjalkabota has adopted the new Christian faith, most of the other older men have not. Interestingly, it is Tjalkabota rather than Strehlow who is making the association between the “eternal” or “uncreated” and God.

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175 *Ingkata* [ngkarte] is sometimes used by both Western and Eastern Arrernte speakers for God. In this case, it means ceremonial leader or “boss”.

176 Hill, *Broken Song*, 312.


178 It is important to remember that T.G.H. Strehlow did not think Altyerre translated as God.
What would have been the consequences if Strehlow’s appreciation of the wonder and power of Arrernte myth had been accepted and promulgated among both the settler community and the Arrernte themselves? What if, instead of reluctantly reporting the demise of a complete way of life with all the qualities that provide meaning and mystery within a matrix of confirming relationships to place and person, Strehlow had advocated for the maintenance of the ceremonies and done everything in his considerable power to ensure they continued? Put another way, can a restoration be conceived of and can it achieve an unlikely outcome? Could Strehlow, if he had had the disposition, have assisted the survival and maintenance of the pristine Arrernte culture, of Altyerre?

By 1949, well past his formative years and now an esteemed scholar, Strehlow sat with senior men at Ntaria and pondered their world-view. According to Hill, Strehlow pointed out, “they believed in natural goodness”.179 Later Strehlow quotes Tjalkabota, who in dialogue with some who denied the Christian God had them declare: “We are good and morally blameless people. We cannot imagine what your God is like. We are upright, we are altogether different and better – we [are] children of the tjibulkara/brightness. When we gaze upon the tjilpa180 [native cat, a totemic ancestor] on his own ground, then this is altogether virtuous.”181 The elders’ case was convincing. The irony is that Strehlow actually understood them.

Strehlow’s significant foray into anthropology, as distinct from linguistics, was his book Central Australian Religion.182 Hill sums it up: “The underlying feeling is that everything is actually connected to everything else.”183 “[T]he topic is in this case … a culture that has woven a seamless web of belief and ritual and social organisation.”184 What Strehlow wanted to emphasise, according to Hill, was eternity. He had started his quest with his search for the meaning of Altjira and being told by Tjalkabota that it did not mean dream; he was assured for the rest of his career that it did indeed mean what his father said it did, “uncreated, eternal”.

179 Hill, Broken Song, 422.
180 Tjilpa (Atyelpe) is the Mparntwe Arrernte name for the native cat.
181 Hill, Broken Song, 423.
182 T.G.H. Strehlow, Central Australian Religion. This small book is sometimes referred to as Personal Monototemism in a Polytotemic World.
183 Hill, Broken Song, 633.
184 Hill, Broken Song, 633.
Barry Hill’s view is that in writing *Central Australian Religion* Strehlow came to an important understanding: “[T]hese acts revealed to the Aranda their belief that ‘Nature and man shared the same life’.”\textsuperscript{185} Strehlow, according to Hill, deduced from his knowledge of ceremonial life that there was an essential goodness within them that could be a model to the rest of the Australian society. He was, in a sense, extracting the kernel of the *Altyerre* and offering it as a prototype for emulation by the nation. But Strehlow was also implicitly drawing a comparison between the social organisation and moral base of two competing societies, the settler and the invaded, and concluding that the invaded were actually morally and religiously superior.

Strehlow had come to see *Arrernte* ceremonies as vibrant religious rituals operating sacramentally. As Hill puts it, “Strehlow was affirming the daily spirituality of the Aboriginal men, and how they were all priests because of the nature of their spiritual inductions into integrated beliefs.”\textsuperscript{186}

Strehlow’s conclusions echo the *Arrernte* Voices discussed in Chapter 2. While never mentioning Strehlow, M.K. Turner interacts with him. She relegates *Dreaming* to the middle of her book in order, in the contention of this thesis, to downplay the distracting power of a belief system based on “fairy tales”. Instead M.K. says, “it’s true”. “It’s not a dream, like fairy-tale dream, it’s a Traditional Story, and that is in us.”\textsuperscript{187} M.K. has entered into the very same debate that Strehlow had with Spencer and Gillen and has come down on his side.

While she uses the term “Creation” throughout her discourse, and Strehlow uses “eternal” or “uncreated”, the contention of this thesis is that M.K. means the same as Strehlow. For her the Creation is “uncreated”; it is the “eternal” in the complete sense of having no beginning and no end. M.K. says: “Ye, that’s how it is. And there’s a big feeling that people can get back to that place, in the future.”\textsuperscript{188} The “eternal”, the unmeasurable past, the present and the future are all *Altyerre*. Strehlow would agree entirely.

\textsuperscript{185} Hill, quoting Strehlow’s ABC broadcast of 1952, *Broken Song*, 636.
\textsuperscript{186} Hill, *Broken Song*, 637.
\textsuperscript{187} Turner, *Iwenhe Tyerrye*, 47.
\textsuperscript{188} Turner, *Iwenhe Tyerrye*, 12.
Kathleen Kemarre Wallace is more direct. She includes a telling reference to Strehlow in her discourse when he comes to the Keringke Rockhole site at Ltyentye Apurte/Santa Teresa to collect tywerrenge. Her view bears quoting again:

At that time, he was being given some of the men’s sacred objects from their places above Keringke Rockhole, and other parts of our homelands because they were not safe anymore in their special place. After that the old men’s business was finished … It makes us very sad because it was an important and sacred part of us. 189

Here is the direct link between the handing over of the tywerrenge and the collapse of the continuation of the structure of belief. And it made her very sad. Listen deeply is her effort to stand in the face of the belief that the Altyerre is finished. She calls on all her audience to Listen deeply because she knows in her heart that the Altyerre is eternal and cannot be conquered. She is expressing her deep faith in the eternal.

From the 1970s Wenten Rubuntja contended with T.G.H. Strehlow because Strehlow had sought to discredit Wenten by directly impugning his traditional credentials. 190 From that moment on he fought a war of restoration. For Wenten there was no question that the Altyerre lives and is regenerating through all the little yeperenyes! 191 In fact, Wenten contends that Strehlow did not collect the tywerrenge but “stole” them. 192 And in stealing them he diminished the utnenge/spirit of the apmere/country. Instead Wenten affirms that the life of Altyerre is inextinguishable, it is eternal and he says with the greatest confidence “all that we are doing now is just Altyerre”. 193

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189 Wallace, Listen deeply, 30.
190 Hill, Broken Song, 731, and Rubuntja and Green, the town grew up dancing, 117.
191 One of Wenten’s most famous sayings was that every child (white or black) born in Alice Springs was a little yeperenye/caterpillar, the most common Arrernte totem of the local landscape.
192 Hill, Broken Song, 731. Quoting the Adelaide Advertiser, January 14, 1978, Hill reports: “Professor Strehlow claims he came by the objects after attending ‘surrender ceremonies’ in which Aborigines surrendered the sacred objects to him. But the people up here say they only gave them to him for study and to be returned to them or that he ‘bought them for bully beef and tea’.”
193 Rubuntja and Green, the town grew up dancing, 122.
3.3 W.E.H. Stanner: The Dreaming

W.E.H. Stanner was not just a consummate anthropologist, he was also a gifted writer of prose which at times becomes poetic. In his essay “The Dreaming” Stanner writes: “A central meaning of The Dreaming is that of a sacred, heroic time long ago when man and nature came to be as they are …” 194 There can be no question that “The Dreaming” that Stanner is presenting purports to be the Altyerre of the Arrernte. Later in the essay Stanner will explore the many components of the concept but at the outset he tantalises the reader: “The Dreaming conjures up the notion of a sacred, heroic time of the indefinitely remote past …” 195 By alluding to the “sacred” nature of his topic the reader is alerted to an emerging theme. “The Dreaming” (Altyerre) is not just a description of culture, kinship, language and custom; it has deeper religious/numinous resonance. Stanner notes that “The Dreaming” (Altyerre) cannot be fixed in time: “it was and is, everywhen.” 196 The idea of eternity is immediately conjured. And he says “The Dreaming” (Altyerre) has “an unchallengeable sacred authority”. 197

Stanner notes the dualistic thinking patterns of non-Aboriginal people where they separate “mind” and “body”, “body” and “spirit”, “spirit” and “personality”, “personality” and “name” as in some sense separate, even opposed entities. In comparison, “the blackfellow” 198 does not seem to think this way”. 199 The summary of his observations bears quoting in full: “The truth of it seems to be that man, society and nature, and past, present and future, are at one together within a unitary system of such a kind that its ontology cannot illuminate minds too much under the influence of humanism, rationalism and science.” 200

Recognising the prevailing prejudice within non-Aboriginal Australian thinking, Stanner’s intention is to balance the scales back to a more respectful and correct understanding of the genius of Aboriginal thought. Rather than being deficient, the Aboriginal way of thinking

194 Stanner, The Dreaming, 57.
195 Stanner, The Dreaming, 58
196 Stanner, The Dreaming, 58.
197 Stanner, The Dreaming, 58.
198 “Blackfellow” was a word commonly in use in Stanner’s discourse to describe his Aboriginal friends and informants and would not have been seen as offensive in his day. Today “blackfella” remains commonly used by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory along with “whitefella” to describe non-Aboriginal people. However, users of these terms usually assess their interlocutors before using either term. In a sense, they have become terms of endearment used between friends. Of course some “whitefellas” are black, coming from Africa etc!
199 Stanner, The Dreaming, 59.
200 Stanner, The Dreaming, 60.
provides great benefits to an Aboriginal person living in her own environment and not challenged or dominated by westerners with a dualistic mindset.

One of the special characteristics of Aboriginal thinking, according to Stanner, is that “The Dreaming” [Altyerre] manages to provide a satisfactory solution to two questions facing all people: where did humans come from; and how is society to be organised? He writes: “[I]t is a cosmogony, an account of the begetting of the universe, a study of creation. It is also a cosmology, an account or theory of how what was created became an ordered system.”

“The Dreaming” [Altyerre] is not just thinking but transmitted thinking, told and retold faithfully over timeless generations. There are stories that tell of how hills are formed or rivers gouged into landscapes and there are stories of how people came to live in groups with rules. Stanner summarises this most famously when he says that these tales are “a poetic key to reality”. This provides a principle according to Stanner of “not only what life is but also what it can be”. Importantly, Stanner recognised in the 1950s, when the Aboriginal Art movement was still to emerge, that the Aborigine “holds his philosophy in mythology, attained as the social product of an indefinitely ancient past, and proceeds to live it out ‘in life’, in part through a ritual and an expressive art, and in part through non-sacred social customs”.

Stanner has thus established an analytic framework depicting the Aboriginal world-view using markers that would also describe any of the systems of belief that we would call religions. Yet he states that “[t]he Aborigines have no gods, just or unjust, to adjudicate the world”. He continues, “no notion of grace or redemption; no whisper of inner peace and reconciliation; no problem of worldly life to be solved only by a consummation of history; no heaven of reward or hell of punishment. The blackfellow’s after-life is but a shadow replica of worldly life.”

There can be no question that Stanner was one of the Aborigines’ greatest friends and advocates. He achieved more than most to advance a better understanding of their world. Yet he may have done them a fatal disservice.

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204 Stanner, *The Dreaming*, 62.
205 Stanner, *The Dreaming*, 64.
206 Stanner, *The Dreaming*, 64.
The problem with Stanner’s conclusion is the contrast between a Judaeo-Christian world-view and the Arrernte world-view. On the one hand, the Judaeo-Christian tradition presents a transcendent God responsible for creation. All humanity and all creation are subject to God’s omnipotent power. Since the story of Adam and Eve, Jews and Christians have been educated to suspect a human capacity for fallibility, labelled as sin. Salvation then is the gift of an incomprehensibly generous and omnipotent God who saves despite human weakness. Conversely, Altyerre teaches that the creation itself is the source of being. Creation is seen as ultimate and complete, fully satisfying all human needs. By establishing a known world, known through a form of human consciousness that encompasses a form of dreaming, the Arrernte feel no need to reach out for Eden behind the veil when paradise is before their eyes. In a sense transcendence is replaced by immanence in the Arrernte world-view. Recognising that humans err, error is thought to be inherent in being. Human error is not seen as fallibility or sin, but as normal. It is laid down in Altyerre. Normalcy is living out the Altyerre by adhering to its precepts of kinship, marriage and reciprocity or “loving” as M.K. expresses it. While Stanner’s description of “The Dreaming” intimates a Platonic world of ideas known only in shadows, Altyerre, for the Arrernte, is in fact fully alive and vibrant, always wheeling around another sustaining cycle of life.207

Stanner is correct in his comparison. A world-view based on Heaven and Hell, reward and punishment, a vale of tears compared to a Garden of Eden, is vastly different from the predictable, constant, consoling Altyerre world-view of the Arrernte Voices. A Garden of Eden found in apmere is worldly and heaven is not. Heaven in another place, not apmere, does not seem relevant, whereas Eden might be. But what both world-views seek to do is to provide meaning in a challenging world. For the Arrernte, Altyerre provides predictability, certainty, familiarity and mystery wrapped in a seamless garment. It will be the later task of this thesis to demonstrate how this worldview can include divine grace without demanding the abandonment of the comfort of Apmere.

Stanner himself notes that “The Aborigines are not shamed or inspired by a religious thesis of what men might become by faith and grace.”208 He concedes that “they have a kind of religiosity [emphasis added] cryptically displayed in their magical awareness of nature, in

207 Therese Ryder believes that Altyerre is like a big wheel or circle. Therese Ryder, personal communication, March 21, 2017.
208 Stanner, The Dreaming, 64.
their complex totemism, ritual and art, perhaps too even in their intricately ordered life” 209. In
the light of the description provided by the Arrernte Voices, as noted above in Chapter 2, this
is a grudging admission, too easily absorbed by outsiders, implying that even if there are
inklings of religiosity among Aborigines, their religion does not meet the high standards of
the rest of the more developed peoples of the world.

Stanner then moves to an analysis of the social world of Aborigines where he says their
“creative ‘drive’” 210 has been concentrated. Their social structures and totemism, all focusing
on relatedness, are the signs of their genius. Stanner notes how time is “in a sense ‘bent’ into
cycles or circles” 211 producing generation classes which flip or skip succeeding generations
so that parents and children are in different classes and grandparents and grandchildren are in
the same class. Stanner sees this as the high achievement of Aborigines marooned in a natural
environment of varying degrees of hostility equipped with a “very meagre” 212 tool kit. He
argues that the Aborigine has been able to do this because he is “able to transcend
himself”. 213 It appears that Stanner is suggesting that the Hebrew tradition conceived of an
omnipotent God meting out justice on the basis of good or bad behaviour of the Israelites,
while the Aborigine developed “a philosophy of assent” 214 and was able to “defeat”
history”. 215

Stanner recounts the admirable strengths of the Aboriginal philosophy: “They do not fight
over land. There are no wars or invasions to seize territory. They do not enslave each other.
There is no master-servant relation. There are no class divisions. There is no property or
income inequality. The result is a homeostasis, far reaching and stable.” 216

Stanner is a friend to the Aborigines. He wishes them no evil. He admires and extols their
“abidingness”, 217 so much so that, when seeking to evaluate the power of “The Dreaming”
(Altyerre), he states that in the end “I should think that we are more likely to ennoble it than

209 Stanner, The Dreaming, 64.
210 Stanner, The Dreaming, 66.
211 Stanner, The Dreaming, 67.
212 Stanner, The Dreaming, 70.
213 Stanner, The Dreaming, 67.
214 Stanner, The Dreaming, 68.
215 Stanner, The Dreaming, 70.
216 Stanner, The Dreaming, 72. Stanner’s views here were based mainly on his ethnography of the Murrinhpatha
at Wadeye/Port Keats.
217 Stanner, The Dreaming, 70.
not”. Here is the critical issue. Stanner’s analysis leads to the conclusion that the success of traditional Aboriginal life was based upon “continuity, constancy, balance, symmetry, regularity, system, or some such quality as these words convey”. But are these enough? One gets the impression that, for Stanner, the Aborigines he is writing about so elegantly are now not marooned on an isolated continent but marooned in time. He says as much: “What defeats the blackfellow in the modern world, fundamentally, is his transcendentalism. So much of his life and thought are concerned with “The Dreaming” that it stultifies his ability to develop.”

In 1968 Winifred Hilliard, a deaconess of the Presbyterian Church, wrote a book which she titled People in Between. She had lived for many years at Ernabella in the Musgrave Ranges in the far north-west of South Australia as a missionary to the Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara people gathered there. The Mission, founded in 1937, was a progressive one, being based on the enlightened principles of the former moderator of the South Australian Presbyterian Church, Dr Charles Duguid, who admonished the missionary staff to interfere as little as possible in the cultural and religious life of the Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara people. Yet Hilliard, who was a Pitjantjatjara speaker, a close friend of the people, especially the women with whom she worked in the Art Room, and who wanted to represent them in the best possible light, still represented them as trapped “in between”. It is significant that T.G.H. Strehlow wrote the preface for Winifred’s book. He was also a believer that the Arrernte particularly, and by implication all the Aboriginal groups of the Central Desert, were trapped between two worlds with only one possible escape – change through adopting Christianity. Stanner seems to support Hilliard’s and Strehlow’s conclusion. “They have to

\[218\] Stanner, The Dreaming, 72.
\[219\] Stanner, The Dreaming, 70.
\[220\] In light of my comment above on the difference between a transcendent God and an immanent God it would be interesting to be able to ask Stanner what he means by “transcendentalism”. Perhaps he merely intends a focus on the process of fabricating a meaningful and satisfying world-view – which in Stanner’s view is an all-encompassing fascination.
\[221\] Stanner, The Dreaming, 68.
\[222\] Charles Duguid’s medical inspection of the plight of Aborigines in the far north-west of South Australia and across the Northern Territory was to have a powerful effect upon the Pitjantjatjara and Arrernte people.
\[223\] Winifred Hilliard, The People Between: The Pitjantjatjara People of Ernabella (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1968). This book was a seminal text in my journey into Aboriginal Australia. I read it in 1977 when I was teaching an Australian History Unit to Year Twelve students in Mildura, Victoria. Quite by accident in 1984 I was employed as Community Adviser of Pukatja Community at Ernabella where Winifred was still living.
change their way of life, or their philosophy, or both, or live unhappily somewhere in between.”

It appears, in this reading of Stanner, that in the end the essay “The Dreaming”, with all its admirable qualities – such as providing the graceful phrase “the poetic key to reality”, and in regard to Time, “it was and is, everywhen” – concludes that adhering to the principles of “The Dreaming” is fatal to its adherents. This is an outcome that Stanner would deplore, but ironically the elegance of his conclusions could well have provided the subtle continuing justification for so many, who also care for the well-being of Australia’s Aborigines, and for the Aborigines themselves, that to rely on “The Dreaming” (Altyerre) is insufficient for their viable future in the modern world.

Stanner’s findings echo many aspects of the Arrernte Voices discussed in Chapter 2. His coverage is exceptional. It leads to the conclusion that Aboriginal life was based upon “continuity, constancy, balance, symmetry, regularity, system …”. None of the features revealed by the Arrernte Voices is omitted. He recognises the interweaving, interlocking nature of a world-view that is held by every member of the group, firmly gluing them into a culture and a community that shapes and preserves their lives. And as he says, “[t]he result is a homeostasis, far reaching and stable”. But unlike M.K., Wenten and Kathleen Kemarre, he ends fatalistically: “What defeats the blackfellow in the modern world, fundamentally, is his transcendentalism. So much of his life and thought are concerned with The Dreaming that it stultifies his ability to develop.” The Arrernte Voices, on the other hand, see Altyerre as the springboard for their cultural revival, while Stanner sees it as the cause of their demise.

3.4 Tony Swain: Life is Annexation of Place

Tony Swain compiles material from some of the great anthropologists of the Centre – A.P. Elkin, T.G. H. Strehlow, W.E.H. Stanner, Deborah Bird Rose and Diane Bell – in his

224 Stanner, The Dreaming, 69.
225 Stanner, The Dreaming, 58.
226 This view is also the conclusion of Peter Latz’s work outlined in Blind Moses. It was shared by F.W. Albrecht as well, as evidenced in the general tenor of his biography by Barbara Henson, A Straight-out Man: F.W. Albrecht and Central Australian Aborigines (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1994).
227 Stanner, The Dreaming, 70.
228 Stanner, The Dreaming, 72.
229 Stanner, The Dreaming, 68.
iconoclastic book *A Place for Strangers*. If Elkin, Strehlow and Stanner dominated their field up to the 1970s, Swain, Bell, Rose and Green remain working in the field today. While Swain refers to many authorities, he does not bend to any on the basis of status or reputation. After cutting older terms down to size, Swain introduces quite a few of his own terms in order to better explicate the concepts others have raised. He wants to construct an influential body of understanding by eliminating confusion and underlining the powerful foundations of the Aboriginal world-view or, in his terms, the Aboriginal hermeneutic of being.

He commences with an analysis of time. He quotes A.P. Elkin: “To the Aborigines, however, time is now. Then is a past … that past, however, is present, here and now.” He quotes W.E.H. Stanner who says: “One cannot ‘fix’ the dreaming in time, it was and is everywhen.” He references Diane Bell, who speaks of the Dreaming as “an era shrouded in the mists of time, from which people claim to be descended without actually tracing their links”. Swain goes on to assess the concept of cyclical time, or as Stanner puts it, “social time which is itself ‘bent’ into cycles or circles”. However, in the end Swain is not convinced that time is a useful concept when talking about how Aborigines construct meaning. Time for Swain is a distraction.

So, as an alternative Swain’s approach is to develop the idea “that Aborigines operate from an understanding of ‘rhythmed’ events”. For Aborigines “there is nothing beyond events themselves”. Time is discarded and rhythmmed events are promoted as a useful building block. This leads Swain to an analysis of the *Arrernte* term *Altjiringa*, translated as Dreamtime in 1907 by Carl Strehlow to describe a High God. The stem of the word *altjira* had already been identified as a key term by Reverend L. Schulze, one of Strehlow’s predecessors. Schulze considered that *altjira* which he had learnt from his first *Western*
Arrernte informants meant that something was “not made”, but he did not think that meaning entailed an idea of God, rather something “that has always been so, always was”.

T.G.H. Strehlow argued that the altjira root of Altjiringa meant “eternal, uncreated, springing out of itself” and that “Dreaming” “was a mistranslation”. Strehlow’s understanding of the derivation of “Dreaming” is that it comes from Altjiringa ngambakala, which means “having originated out of its own eternity”. For Swain, time might be able to be thought of existing within eternity, but to think of time as a similar category to eternity is a contradiction. So, the “Dreaming”, which is said to entail eternity, cannot connote time. Stanner, Swain accepts, attempts to remove time from the concept and instead of writing “Dream Time” uses “The Dreaming”. From the perspective of this thesis, being aware of M.K. Turner’s apprehension about the connotations of “dreaming”, this might appear a useful distinction if the word “Dreaming” could be stripped of its fairy-tale connotation.

So, what does Altyerre mean for Swain? Other Aboriginal languages in Central Australia use Jukurrpa in Warlpiri and Tjukurpa in Pitjantjatjara as an equivalent for Altyerre. Swain notes that Dussart and Michaels suggest that Jukurrpa means “Ancestral Past”, and then proposes “Ancestral Now” as an alternative. Finally, however, he introduces a new term, “Abiding Events”. In this he utilises the sense of “abidingness” that Stanner says is a marker of “The Dreaming” and links it to the “rhythmmed events” he has introduced earlier. Taking another step, he says Abiding Events lead to “Abiding Law”, which he abbreviates to Law.
Swain has offered “rhythmed events” and “abiding events” as an alternative way of configuring a world of changing stasis. “Things change but they stay the same” is a simple way of expressing this idea.

Swain then moves from the conception of time to the conception of space, place or land. He thinks experts have been blinded by the words and have missed the “true significance of the concept behind the word [which] is not temporal but spatial”. He quotes Diane Bell:

The shallowness of genealogical memory is not a form of cultural amnesia but rather a way of focusing on the basis of all relationships – that is, the *Jukurrpa* and the land. By not naming deceased relatives, people are able to stress a relationship directly to the land. It is not necessary to trace back through many generations to a founding ancestor to make a claim.

Swain enthusiastically agrees with Bell and concludes with an affirmation of “the uncompromising position of place in Aboriginal society”. Bell has linked *Jukurrpa* to land because *Jukurrpa* is story, the telling of the story or myth, and land and story are essentially linked in a bracket of meanings. And one of those elements of meaning has to do with power, the compelling authority of the story, the Abiding Law, to control the behaviour of men and women who belong to the land.

Swain continues to develop a bigger picture: “The whole exists in Aboriginal thought as a conceptual principle rather than as an ontological existent.” This phrase might need translating itself. Perhaps Swain means that the Aboriginal mind has a capacity to combine and hold without compromise a set of seemingly unrelated elements. He says that the best way of stating that is to use Law as it is commonly used by Aborigines. He quotes Patrick Dodson:

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250 While *Tjukurrpa* and *Altyerre* can be seen as synonyms, *Tjukurrpa* also conveys the idea of story. In *Arrernte* another word, *ayeye*, specifically connotes story. M.K. Turner says: “*Altyerreng-enre Ayeye aneke – A story told from the Altyerre.*”
The English word “dreaming” can be misleading because the concepts which it translates are exceedingly complex and largely unrelated to the English meaning of the word. These concepts are often alternatively described as “The Law”. They are a coherent and all-encapsulating body of truths which govern the whole of life.252

According to Swain, in order to tease out the nature of Aboriginal being it is best to ignore any reference to time and to limit reliance on the term “dreaming”. Instead he suggests that Abiding Events give rise to Law which is communicated by Story and is always located in Place. The powerful ingredients for Swain are therefore Place, Story, Law and Abiding Events. These constitute a package, a bundle of principles sliding in and out of each other. Swain elucidates this point by quoting Yolngu253 Uniting Church minister and Clan leader Djinyinyi Gondarra: “To say ‘this mountain is my dreaming’ or ‘that land is my dreaming’ he really is saying that this mountain or this land holds very sacred knowledge, wisdom and moral truth.”254 These are of course the tools for making meaning and understanding being. Yami Lester and M.K. Turner would say that they are ontologically identical.

Swain then moves to creation, for him another contentious term. Swain’s view is that “There is, in their tradition, no first cause, world origin or creation.”255 He uses Stanner as support: “taken as a whole the myths deal with cosmology rather than cosmogony”.256 So, Swain and Stanner have a view that the essential concentration in Aboriginal thought is not on how the world came to be, but how it came to be an ordered place. For support of this view on creation he appeals to Strehlow who, he argues, “concedes the pre-existence of the world and lack of creation”.257 And he argues that a close reading of Strehlow’s work demonstrates that “the Aranda [sic] themselves do not present Ancestral activities as a single orchestrated event”.258 In this sense, then, there is a Given world but no sense of a unified one-off or six-day creative episode.

252 Swain, A Place for Strangers, 24.
253 Yolngu translate as “people” used by Aboriginal people of East Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory to refer to themselves. Yolngu is a term similar to anangu which is used by Pitjantjatjara people of Central Australia to refer to themselves and tyerrtye mape used by Arrernte to refer to themselves.
254 Swain, A Place for Strangers, 25.
255 Swain, A Place for Strangers, 29. As we have seen Kathleen Kemarre Wallace has a different view. Many of the Arrerrnte songs translated by T.G.H. Strehlow also depict the shaping of the land, if not the creation of the universe. M.K. Turner is with Swain here where she sees the creation as a given not an event.
256 Swain, A Place for Strangers, 29.
257 Swain, A Place for Strangers, 31.
258 Swain, A Place for Strangers, 31.
Reflecting on the *Arrernte* world-view, Deborah Bird Rose\textsuperscript{259} observes, “One of the most important principles of the whole cosmos is that the parts are autonomous.”\textsuperscript{260} Rose is suggesting that the world as it is known to *Arrernte* is separate from and autonomous in regard to any other Aboriginal world, for instance *Yolgnu*, although as Aboriginal groups meet and share views, they see resonances between autonomous worlds. As a consequence, Swain’s view is that “[t]he world is not made, but worlds take shape”\textsuperscript{261} Here Swain is differentiating between an integrated creative moment (which may take six days) and a series of unrelated, uncoordinated, sporadic events. He accepts that the world has emerged in the shape it is, but is arguing that this is not because of a unified causative principle. Swain uses examples of Desert Art where concentric circles and tracks\textsuperscript{262} are the most common motifs. These, he says, indicate that the Aboriginal conception is of sites of origin and tracks linking sites. He concludes, “Aboriginal ontology rests upon the maxim that a place-being emerged, moved and established an abode.”\textsuperscript{263} Here we see in Swain the first explicit connection between being and place. As well as establishing “an abode” it might be added that the “Ancestor(s)”\textsuperscript{264} actually shaped the abode.

In the end, by eliminating the use of the concept of creation because it is a one-off event, Swain nicely links place to the abiding events of ancestors which have the capacity to exist simultaneously in more than one fixed location. In this sense multiple, discrete, abiding events, not creation, constitute the Aboriginal world in space. This gives rise to his term “the stretching of the being of conscious-place”,\textsuperscript{265} which implies that place is filled with spiritual life, conscious life, and intentional life. Spirit is not limited to just one place in a moment of time but can widely coexist in many places at once. Spirit in space becomes Aboriginal being. Here we find a strong resonance with M.K. Turner’s world-view where she sees spirit and place as united. Spirit inhabits place.\textsuperscript{266}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{259} Working in the Victoria River District, well north of *Arrernte* country.
\item \textsuperscript{260} Rose in Swain, *A Place for Strangers*, 32.
\item \textsuperscript{261} Swain, *A Place for Strangers*, 32.
\item \textsuperscript{262} Note Wenten Rubuntja’s painting for the Pope.
\item \textsuperscript{263} Swain, *A Place for Strangers*, 32.
\item \textsuperscript{264} For Swain there is no one creative moment but a series of shaping events caused by a variety of ancestors moving over the land.
\item \textsuperscript{265} Swain, *A Place for Strangers*, 33.
\item \textsuperscript{266} Therese Ryder, personal communication May 20, 2017, says: “Spirit means life. Without spirit you are a blank or *arerte*, literally mad.” For M.K., as she says in *Iwenhe Tyerrtye*, the spirit of the place inhabits the child in the mother’s womb. The child and the place become one, are one. A totem represents that place and that
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
For Swain, as for M.K. Turner, totemism is the natural conclusion of this progression: “The basic totemic assertion is that all Lawful existence emerges from the being of place.”\textsuperscript{267} Remembering Law is a supreme concept that encompasses the “coherent and all-encapsulating body of truths which govern the whole of life”.\textsuperscript{268} Swain concludes that Law depends on place. Thus he suggests that totemism “is but an affirmation that certain humans share their place-being with other place-related existents”.\textsuperscript{269} The massive concept of totemism, which has loomed over Aboriginal anthropological discussion since 1891, is thus reduced to a simple but compelling relationship between humans and a particular spirit-charged place from which the human draws life and being and identity.

Swain summarises his view on Aboriginal ontology:

I have argued that Aboriginal ontology does not allow time or history philosophical determination because this is incompatible with an uncompromising insistence on the immutability of place. Abiding Events establish the shape of the lands, but there is no world creation, cosmic centre, or recognition of any single unifying world principle. Rather Abiding Events stress, firstly, that place is conscious (and hence consciousness exists) and secondly, that spatial intentionality gives place extension, linking sites in direction-determined pathways. In brief, space, for Aborigines, is a network of places resting upon Ancestral mind-matter.\textsuperscript{270}

Swain wants to demonstrate how this Aboriginal world-view emerged. Since he has emphasised place as the central generative force in Abiding Events he moves to an analysis of conception/birth and place: “As Peterson states Aboriginal conception beliefs serve primarily ‘to relate conception to place’.”\textsuperscript{271} He conscripts Ted Strehlow to the cause: “the whole countryside is [the Arrernte person’s] living, age-old family tree.”\textsuperscript{272} He uses a felicitous phrase: “Life is an annexation of place.”\textsuperscript{273} Here Swain is close to Kathleen

\textsuperscript{265} Swain, A Place for Strangers, 35.
\textsuperscript{266} Swain, A Place for Strangers, 24.
\textsuperscript{267} Swain, A Place for Strangers, 35.
\textsuperscript{268} Swain, A Place for Strangers, 35.
\textsuperscript{269} Swain, A Place for Strangers, 26.
\textsuperscript{270} Swain, A Place for Strangers, 38.
\textsuperscript{271} Swain, A Place for Strangers, 38.
\textsuperscript{272} Swain, A Place for Strangers, 38.
\textsuperscript{273} Swain, A Place for Strangers, 39.
Kemarre Wallace who, as has been shown, is very conscious of *irrerntarenyle* / spirit-beings who inhabit country. At the conclusion of her work Wallace says: “The spirits are still here, in our country. Our way of life has all changed, but we can still listen to our ancestors, our elders, our country and our culture.”

Swain has an authentic understanding of the *Arrernte* concept of the intrinsic connection between person, place, totem and spirit. This gives rise to a discussion on the relationship between patri-lines and spiritual identification with place. It may appear that the conception site of the individual is accidental due to periodic presence in a particular site. This of course may be limited to the extent that a woman will most likely be living in the totemic country of her husband and so the accidental association of the conception of her child will likely occur in the father’s country. Swain sees this trend as one where “kinship is allowed to be determinative over land”.

While this phenomenon is primarily associated with the *Arrernte* people, it applies in slightly different forms across the Centre. Swain notes Hamilton’s observation that “among the *Pitjantjatjara* and their neighbours location is more fundamental … ‘rights do not accrue primarily by being born to a particular father, but by being born at a particular place’.” He quotes Layton who suggests that the *Aranda* [sic] “are mostly conceived in patri-estates”.

So *Pitjantjatjara* beliefs propose that a person’s totem is associated with her birth place while *Arrernte* totemic association is with conception place (usually within the father’s estate). The *Arrernte* association with patri-estates exists because women when married normally move to reside in their husband’s country.

Swain now addresses the relationship between kin and place-based being identity. He suggests there is a conflict between an identity structure based on kin and an identity structure based on place. It seems that his argument is based on the lessening of the power of place as Aboriginal societies have been less able or willing to locate on country, thus

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276 Swain, *A Place for Strangers*, 41. The religious program Compass on ABC TV canvassed this concept. ABC TV, Compass, *Ernabella no ordinary Mission*, 2011, http://www.abc.net.au/compass/s3177987.htm. During the program my now deceased *Pitjantjatjara* friend Peter Nyamingu said: “I was born at *Ngarutjara*, *Ngarutjara* is mine.” The English name for *Ngarutjara* is Mt Woodruff, the highest peak in South Australia, located in the far north-west of the state within sight of Uluru.
278 As M.K. demonstrates, this really means father’s father’s place.
279 Turner, *Iwenhe Tyerrtye*, spends a great deal of time in her early chapters combining the two concepts into her unique being. See Chapter 1.
weakening the constant mnemonic of daily contact with sites.\textsuperscript{280} Despite this trend his conclusion is strong: “Deserts are governed ultimately by a site-based ontology”,\textsuperscript{281} where by ontology he seems to mean an understanding of the nature of being.

Swain refers to another factor contributing to the power of place. It is the role of ground or earth in birth rituals that accentuate place or country. As we saw in M.K.’s work in \textit{Arrernte}, the word for earth or ground is \textit{ahelhe}.\textsuperscript{282} As a constituent of \textit{apmere} the word \textit{ahelhe} acts as an intensifier pointing to the groundedness of an individual. Actual rituals entail the placement of the newborn on the \textit{ahelhe} at the moment of birth. Swain’s take on this is to affirm that it is the earth/place, not the mother, who is the source of life for the new individual.\textsuperscript{283}

Death repeats and reverses the ritual of birth. Upon death, the body of the individual is returned to the earth and the spirit is allowed to leave and seek its home in the earth. Swain says death “is a return of place-being to place”.\textsuperscript{284} His conclusion from this analysis is that in death “there is no room for judgements or retributions”.\textsuperscript{285} This sense of inevitability about the course of life can be seen as a rejection of the idea of an all-powerful god to whom one must genuflect in order to achieve a safe release to heaven because it limits the need for individuals to do anything in life to improve their chances of a better “life” (eternal life) after life. Swain says “it is enough that the spirit is restored to its place”.\textsuperscript{286} In this sense it is place/spirit that is eternal, not individual life.

For Swain, a notable feature of \textit{Arrernte} and \textit{Pitjantjatjara} society\textsuperscript{287} is the powerful social prohibition on using the name of a recently dead person in public.\textsuperscript{288} \textit{Arrernte} speakers use \textit{kwementyaye} and \textit{Pitjantjatjara} speakers use \textit{kunmanara} for the dead person. Since all people die all names are temporarily \textit{kwementyaye} and memory and kinship transmission are affected. This helps to explain that site-based rather than kin-based ontology prevails.

Hamilton shows how these practices “oppose ‘lineage’ by eradicating the social memory of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{280} Austin-Broos, \textit{Arrernte Present, Arrernte Past}, shares this view.
\item \textsuperscript{281} Swain, \textit{A Place for Strangers}, 41.
\item \textsuperscript{282} Turner, \textit{Iwenhe Tyerrtye}, makes frequent reference to the importance of \textit{ahelhe}. See Chapter 2.1.
\item \textsuperscript{283} Swain, \textit{A Place for Strangers}, 44.
\item \textsuperscript{284} Swain, \textit{A Place for Strangers}, 45.
\item \textsuperscript{285} Swain, \textit{A Place for Strangers}, 45.
\item \textsuperscript{286} Swain, \textit{A Place for Strangers}, 45.
\item \textsuperscript{287} Bell in Swain, \textit{A Place for Strangers}, 23.
\item \textsuperscript{288} We have noted this in relation to M.K. Turner’s change of name.
\end{itemize}
the dead with extensive taboos against referring to their past existence. Generations are therefore not amassed and thus in turn cannot constitute the measured units of time.”

Creation thus may be just a few great grandfathers away! Site-based identity then has more cogency than patri-lineal descent.

Thus it is, as Swain puts it, that “the cardinal human endeavour is to maintain the shape of the world”, which he calls, using Bruno’s phrase, “Holding this place”. Swain has touched here upon a theme that lies at the heart of M.K. Turner’s Arrernte world, where the words arntarntareme and atnyerneme are translated as “holding”. These words are powerful signs of a deep-seated responsibility of individuals to look after others and to look after country. The Eastern and Central Arrernte Dictionary shows how arntarntareme and atnyerneme (holding) ensure that “managers” apmereke artweye and “owners” kwertengwerle work together to ensure the story of country is not lost in the event of the death of an important “owner”. For M.K., it is at this point that kinship emerges, along with place, as a glue in the culture.

It is obvious that Swain has captured the essence of the discourse of M.K. Turner, Kathleen Kemarre Wallace and Wenten Rubuntja and expressed it in modern, Western and sophisticated (sometimes abstract and difficult) language. In relation to time his quote from Elkin sums the anthropology up well: “To the Aborigines, however, time is now. Then is a past … that past, however, is present, here and now.” This elaboration of time is very close to M.K.’s account of Angampeke, except that M.K. takes the notion into the future, thus establishing eternity: “Angampeke – ‘what is what’, and angampintyeke – ‘what will be?’ When we first came into existence, it takes us to where we are going to be. Ye, that’s how it is. And there’s a big feeling that people can get back to that place, in the future.”

Perhaps Swain adds one concept not raised frequently by any of the Arrernte Voices, the idea of autonomy. While the word “autonomy” is not used often, something like personal autonomy is one of the most salient characteristics of Arrernte society. However, the

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289 Swain, A Place for Strangers, 42.
290 Turner actually links both concepts in her opening identity statement. See Chapter 2.1.
291 Swain, A Place for Strangers, 50.
292 Swain, A Place for Strangers, 15.
293 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 12.
important issue in autonomy is not what westerners might call individualism, where a person has personal rights arising from personhood per se. Rather, Swain is emphasising that autonomy derives from identification with place. He summarises this idea succinctly: “Aborigines did not, therefore, protect integrity of lives but rather integrity of place.” Swain, A Place for Strangers, 54. The individuality of each person is guaranteed by virtue of his or her totem which may be shared by many others but which is held autonomously through conception association.

Interestingly M.K. Turner glosses this distinction, spending more time on her idea of the centrality of kinship: “It has given us recognition and identity, and has allowed us to really nurture one another. That’s how it is from the Creation, and that’s how we perceive it now.” Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 84. Kinship, for M.K., is the overarching unifier, establishing identity and recognition for each individual. Each person is autonomous but all are locked together in the embrace of permanent relationships from the creation and from aknganentye – patri-filiation.

Perhaps the major difference between Swain’s analysis and the Arrernte Voices is about the contemporaneous nature of the Arrernte discourse compared to the more analytical approach in Swain. Swain has conducted a deep analysis of the historical experience of Aboriginal people, including the Arrernte, in the past, through careful dissection of the anthropological scholarship on the issues he has highlighted. He has contested many of the assumptions of older scholarship. For the Arrernte Voices, on the other hand, despite their sadness at what may have been lost, particularly in the case of Kathleen Kemarre, the summary is about Now. The Altyerre is not the object of anthropological study, not something that lives in a textbook, but something that directs and guides their lives in a comforting embrace now and forever.

### 3.5 Diane Bell: Women’s Perspective

Diane Bell’s essay “Aboriginal Women’s Religion: A Shifting Law of the Land” provides a valuable complement to the male anthropological coverage of Altyerre. Bell helps to refocus our thinking when she asks, “Is it sufficient to accept the ideology of male dominance as a timeless enduring reality?” Bell, “Aboriginal Women’s Religion”, 252.

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294 Swain, A Place for Strangers, 54.
295 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 84.
297 Bell, “Aboriginal Women’s Religion”, 252.
society men held all the power. In her ethnography, she points to the critically essential role that women still play in all ceremonial life. Bell draws the conclusion from her long contact with Warlpiri, Kaytetye, Warumungu and Alyawarre women in an area about 150 to 300 kilometres north and north-west of Alice Springs, where “[a]s long as one has contact with the land and control over sites, the dreamtime as the ever-present, all-encompassing law can be asserted to be reality”.  

Both M.K. Turner and Kathleen Kemarre Wallace published their books nearly a decade after Wenten Rubuntja’s *the town grew up dancing*. Perhaps this reflects a more recent and developing sense of authority by Arrernte women in these post-contact days. In fact, only four books have ever been written from a Central or Eastern Arrernte viewpoint on what it means to be an Aboriginal person from a colonised perspective.  

Bell addresses this issue, observing that “Aboriginal religion is the political forum within which women and men negotiate authority, power, meaning and relationships”. Remembering that her analysis is based on her ethnography undertaken in the early 1980s in quite remote Aboriginal communities where ceremony was still at the heart of daily life, she comments: “It is in the living out of the dreamtime heritage, particularly in the ceremonial domain, that we see how the past is negotiated in the present, how women and men position themselves vis-à-vis each other and vis-à-vis the law.” Bell’s observations imply that, as it

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298 Bell, “Aboriginal Women’s Religion”, 255.
300 In the Ngkarte Mikwekenhe Catholic Community women play by far the dominant leadership role.
301 When Bell uses the word “religion”, she is using the English word for her understanding of Aboriginal religion, which she calls *Jukurrpa*; the Arrernte equivalent is *Altyerre*.
becomes more evident that Altyerre has survived in Alice Springs, which has suffered a far more oppressive, or different quality, overlay of white settlement, the interplay between women’s and men’s power and roles will continue to be negotiated.

Arrernte women in Alice Springs have become increasingly active over the last 30 years. Recently Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe/Children's Ground has been established in Alice Springs. It is an educational program designed to take primary bi-lingual education to Arrernte children who are back on their country in the hands of their parents and kin. In Alice Springs once again, the same small group of Arrernte women have assumed leadership of the project. The emphasis in Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe/Children’s Ground is to teach Arrernte children in Arrernte language about Arrernte topics by Arrernte teachers and locate the teaching on Arrernte Country, all constituents of the tradition so eloquently set out in M.K.’s book.

Both healing and teaching are where women exert their role of nurturance of their community. Bell notes:

In their religious rituals women emphasised their role as nurturers of people, land and relationships. Their responsibility to maintain harmoniously this complex of relationships between the living and the land is manifest in the intertwining of the ritual of health and emotional management.

Bell talks about jilimi/the women’s camp, “which is home to the ritually important senior women. It is a symbol of women’s independence, a refuge, the locus of daily activity and information exchange.” She would see that the Arrernte women at Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe/Children’s Ground are simply transferring an ancient tradition of the women’s camp to a modern setting. At Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe/Children’s Ground in Alice Springs, while men

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304 Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe/Children’s Ground is an Aboriginal corporation run through philanthropic donations, established originally in Jabiru in the Top End of the Northern Territory. It has recently expanded to Alice Springs.
305 Not surprisingly M.K. is the prime mover again in this local initiative.
307 Jilimi is a Warlpiri word for women’s camp. Bell draws this example from the Ali Curung setting where in the 1980s Warlpiri, Kaytetye and Alyawarre women lived side by side and interacted ceremonially together. As indicated Alyawarre is an Arrernte dialect.
308 Bell, “Aboriginal Women’s Religion”, 258.
are not prohibited from attending and even participating to a degree, it remains predominantly the domain of women.\textsuperscript{309}

Bell also places emphasis on women’s control of marriage: “‘Keeping the families straight’ is part of the women’s responsibility.”\textsuperscript{310} Here is another field of resonance with the role of Arrernte women in marriage. M.K. spends a great deal of time talking of the proper way of skin marriage: “they marry from the strong of that Land, they marry through the flesh of that skin group, and also of that skin group, and also through utnenge/spirit, the flesh of that Land.”\textsuperscript{311}

Bell is aware of the nature of change in Aboriginal religious life. She acknowledges the impact of the alienation of Aboriginal land from its owners: “But land, as the central tablet, as the sacred text, is no longer under Aboriginal control across the continent. Ritual politics must now encompass a dramatically changed cast of players and forces.”\textsuperscript{312} Or again: “It is no long possible to write of Aboriginal religion as if it existed in a closed world, isolated from the politics of the nation state or gender relations as if independent of the wider Australian society.”\textsuperscript{313}

The Arrernte Voices would have no problem accepting this comment. It is true that change has occurred, but not necessarily to the detriment of the maintenance of Altyerre. The power of Altyerre has worked on change itself and incorporated the alterations, forced upon it by outside forces, into a reshaped Altyerre with its own continuing potency. Change itself has been modified. What has survived is the ethos or core of the eternal. One of the remarkable features of first contact was the readiness of Aboriginal people to quickly absorb elements of the newcomers’ tool kit. Metal was quickly adapted and adopted, replacing stone and bone, sometimes even ahead of the frontier. Soon the rifle and the Toyota became signatures of authentic yet modern Aboriginal lifestyle. And Altyerre also survived, while new technology now often increased opportunity, such as the ability to access distant ancestral sites.\textsuperscript{314} So,

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\textsuperscript{309} It is notable that William Tilmouth, an Arrernte man, is the Chairperson of Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe/Children’s Ground.
\textsuperscript{310} Bell, “Aboriginal Women’s Religion”, 273.
\textsuperscript{311} Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 25.
\textsuperscript{312} Bell, “Aboriginal Women’s Religion”, 255.
\textsuperscript{313} Bell, “Aboriginal Women’s Religion”, 281.
\textsuperscript{314} In 1989, three years after our family had left the Pitjantjatjara Lands and were living in Alice Springs, my wife Judy was invited to accompany a party of Pitjantjatjara women from Ernabella on a week-long expedition to the Western Australian border with South Australia to film a ceremonial track of the “Seven Sisters”
\end{flushright}
Bell is correct that much has been attenuated, but it is still possible to write of the amazing survival of Arrernte religion through Altyerre in an open world.

In conclusion, Diane Bell’s anthropology, conducted principally with women, authenticates the power of the Arrernte Voices. The Arrernte women quoted here, including Veronica Perrurle Dobson,315 attest to the powerful, restorative role that women are playing in Arrernte society today. The women Bell listened to and whose story she tells lived in a small remote community, while the women in Arrernte Voices are principally residents of Alice Springs. Yet the Arrernte Voices reflect very similar commitments to Jukurrpa/Altyerre as their more remote isolated cousins. For example, M.K. Turner, while a leader of NMCC, is also a leader of Akeyulerre (the Healing Centre), where her daughter Amelia is employed as manager. One of their projects is to collect the raw materials that constitute “bush medicine”, particularly arrethe,316 and process it into a paste and then bottle it for sale. M.K. believes that: “plants grow with the power of the spirit of the country in them,”317 thus linking one of her primary themes of the power of apmere318 to traditional healing. Additionally, the availability of bush medicine provides an opportunity for Arrernte people to once again engage in traditional healing practices. Healing promotes restoration and re-empowerment. Essentially for these Arrernte women, the context of their ambition might be different but the dedication to preservation and renewal is the same. Dianne Bell would say, “more power to them!”

3.6 Jenny Green: The Problem of Translation

Jenny’s Green’s article “The Altyerre Story – ‘suffering badly by translation’”319 provides a scholarly review of the academic debate on the topic of Altyerre. Green has spent nearly forty years in Central Australia immersed in the Arandic world. She lived for many years with

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315 Veronica Perrurle is sometimes referred to as a co-author with M.K. Turner of Iwenhe Tyerrtye.
316 Arrethe, native fuchsia bush.
317 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 133.
318 Amelia recently confronted the whole town of Alice Springs with the “power of apmere” when she had an article printed in the Centralian Advocate imploring local Aboriginal people and visiting Aboriginal people to respect the Akeyulerre site which had been desecrated by indiscriminate burning lit by overnight illegal campers on the sacred hill behind the centre.
Anmatyerre and Alyawarre people\textsuperscript{320} in small Aboriginal communities about 150 to 300 kilometres north of Alice Springs. She was a major consultant on the Eastern and Central Arrernte Dictionary project at the Institute for Aboriginal Development (IAD) in Alice Springs. She has been a lecturer in Arrernte language to both Arrernte and non-Arrernte students and a cross-cultural consultant for many years until taking up an academic post at Melbourne University.\textsuperscript{321} She is joint author of the town grew up dancing with Wenten Rubuntja.

Green begins by pointing out that Altyerre is one of the “most contested words in modern Australian ethnography”.\textsuperscript{322} She suggests that the problem lies at the very beginning of contact with the Western Arrernte people at Hermannsburg. Here a contest of scholarship and of world-views emerged between Spencer and Gillen\textsuperscript{323} and the Lutheran missionaries. Green notes that Spencer and Gillen thought that Altyerre and its associated word alcheringa translated as “dreamtimes” while the Lutheran missionaries at Hermannsburg thought that it connoted the Christian God.

She takes us into the world of the power of language, indicating that what emerges from the struggle over a word is a metaphor for the status of a people and recognition of their worldview as worthy of respect. Green quotes Wolf: “the word ‘dreaming’ is ‘an alien word introduced through conquest’.”\textsuperscript{324} She points out that Altyerre has been used by missionaries for God, although other words such as ingkarte/boss and akngeye/father have also been used for God.\textsuperscript{325}

According to Green, T.G.H. Strehlow gets to the nub of the issue best. He described the “root meaning of altjira [Altyerre] as ‘eternal, uncreated’.”\textsuperscript{326} From a European perspective the definition of God necessarily contains the concepts uncreated, heavenly and eternal, so it is possible to see how the Lutherans were able to assert that Altyerre meant God.

\textsuperscript{320} Anmatyerre and Alyawarre are Arrernte dialect languages.
\textsuperscript{321} And as seen she is author, co-author or editor of a number of seminal books or studies on Arrernte-related language groups in Central Australia.
\textsuperscript{322} Austin-Broos in Green, “The Altyerre Story”, 159.
\textsuperscript{323} Batty, The Photographs.
\textsuperscript{324} Wolf in Green, “The Altyerre Story”, 159.
\textsuperscript{325} Green, “The Altyerre Story”, 167.
\textsuperscript{326} Green, “The Altyerre Story”, 164. I would put this another way. When looking for a word for eternal Altyerre seems the best fit!
But does *Altyerre* mean “Dreaming” or “Dreamtime”? Green quotes Strehlow:

The English ‘dreamtime’ is then a vague and inaccurate phrase: and though it has gained wide currency among white Australians through its sentimentality and its suggestion of mysticism, it has never had any real meaning for the natives, who rarely, if ever, use it when speaking in English.\(^{327}\)

She suggests that the reason for this may be in line with Howard Morphy, who makes the point that “the real meaning of terms such as *Altyerre* or *Altyerrenge* lies in their significance to Aboriginal people”.\(^{328}\) In other words, *Arrernte* people have a great deal invested in the complexity and unifying influence of the word and idea.

Green aims to settle the debate about whether *Altyerre* means dream or God. She quotes David Wilkins who points out that “*Altyerre* acts in a kin-like term way (rather than a dream way) when the meanings are associated with country … ”\(^{329}\) If it acts as a kin-like term then it connotes a matri-filial (from *atyeme*, mother’s father) relationship to country. If *altyerre* is a matrilineal term linking an individual with his or her mother’s father’s country, then it is saying nothing about dreams. In other words, the principal meaning is about relationship to land through generations or skin, not an idea collected from the unconscious – although even M.K. would admit to the role of dreaming in fashioning the concept and bringing it to bear upon the world.

Green confirms this understanding of *Altyerre* having very limited connection to dreaming by pointing out that *Aknganentye*, which means “derived from father’s father’s country”, has absolutely no connection with dream. She says “*Aknganentye* does not mean ‘dream’, and to my knowledge has never been considered for use as a translation equivalent for the Christian God.”\(^{330}\) Green argues that *altyerre* acts as a kin-like term just as *aknganentye* does. She points out that adding *atye* to *altyerre* makes it mean “Dreaming from my mother’s

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\(^{327}\) Strehlow in Green, “The *Altyerre* Story”, 65. Of course this was Strehlow speaking in the mid-20th century. It is clear that since then Wenten Rubuntja and Kathleen Kemarre Wallace and many other *Arrernie* people commonly use Dreaming in their parlance. The *Eastern and Central Arrernte Dictionary* uses it frequently. It seems the continuing need to communicate to whitefellas has promoted this usage. It is M.K. Turner who resists this trend and who sits at the centre of the restoration project.

\(^{328}\) Morphy in Green, “The *Altyerre* Story”, 168.

\(^{329}\) Wilkins in Green, “The *Altyerre* Story”, 168.

\(^{330}\) Green, “The *Altyerre* Story”, 169.
patriline”. M.K. Turner would agree with this emphasis. She acknowledges the central role that dreaming plays in Arrernte self-consciousness. And she accepts that altyerre has within it an underlying meaning of a form of consciousness that might be likened to dreaming, but not in the sense of make-believe, or invention of a satisfying story to solve a conundrum of existence or morality.

In M.K.’s world-view aknganentye, from father’s father, is the central core of Altyerre, not dreaming. We saw in Iwenhe Tyerrtye, however, that she was prepared to countenance the idea that altyerre means dream (among other things). But the reality is that the word Altyerre/altyerre lacks equivalence and has many nuanced meanings with greater or lesser significance for Arrernte speakers. Might the reason for this be that the nature of Arrernte knowledge is based on a form of consciousness that cannot be adequately described without reliance upon this esoteric term? On the basis of her linguistic research Green agrees. Having convincingly proved that the primary meaning of Altyerre is not Dreaming, she goes on to accept that altyerre is connected to the state of dreaming or of dreams: “The connection between ‘Dreaming’ and the so-called ordinary acts of dreaming is more than mere coincidence.”

She notes, “In the Altyerre case, it shows [that] the semantic connection between ‘dream’ and what came to be glossed as ‘dreamtimes’ was not just a figment of Gillen’s imagination.”

The discussion over the nature of one word is confusing and complicated. While it is absorbing for linguists, for the layperson it provides little guidance. Aware of the need to make things absolutely clear, and also perhaps conscious of her Aboriginal audience, Green concludes “the choice not to translate is perhaps the best way of honouring the complexity of key Indigenous words”. Translation is inherently more difficult when the languages being worked on encode vastly different world-views as the Arrernte – and all Aboriginal world-views – do. A translation from English to French entails comparing different words that encode similar cultural features. However, when seeking to discover deep concepts from an alien culture there will be many notions that have no equivalent in the target language. This means that in comparing languages from alien cultures efforts are made at approximation and

331 Green, “The Altyerre Story”, 169. She also says that the “association between Altyerre and a person’s mother’s country was recognised early on by missionaries such as Schulze and Carl Strehlow.”
333 Green, “The Altyerre Story”, 166.
in that calculation, subtleties are encountered that are serious hurdles to equivalence and utility. From the perspective of this thesis, *Altyerre* is the classic example of this complexity, even impossibility. In summary, and in comparing Green’s arguments with the *Arrernte* Voices, it is clear that in their way they resonate Wolf’s aphorism that “Dreaming” is “an alien word introduced through conquest”. For this reason, Green’s suggestion that *Altyerre* be used untranslated will be adopted in this study.

### 3.7 *Altyerre*: Conclusion – A Symphony

M.K. Turner, Kathleen Kemarre Wallace and Wenten Rubuntja – the *Arrernte* Voices – have not just survived the Missions and the Invasion, but they continued to resist alienation in the 21st century. They are deep, rich thinkers on their heritage, perhaps theologians of a kind. Each accepts that there has been change – while they often deplore it – and each has incorporated change into their thinking. According to Gavan Breen, long-standing *Arrernte* linguist and major contributor to the *Eastern and Central Arrernte Dictionary*, M.K. has actually added words or invented words, such as *apmereyanhe* and *utyerre*, that were not discoverable in the *Eastern and Central Arrernte Dictionary* project. This active fashioning of *Arrernte* by an *Arrernte* speaker indicates a level of vitality and innovation concomitant with restoration or revitalisation. Their language has survived and is being transmitted to the next generation. Their kinship system is intact – even if young men and women admittedly sometimes marry “wrong way”. Their spirituality continues to draw sustenance from the link between *apmere* and each person totemically. Those who infringe *Altyerre* are repeatedly drawn back into the kinship network. The structure is intact, perhaps the façade has altered. And the *Arrernte* Voices are determined to act as prophets to their generation, ensuring a return to the deep and sustaining faith of the ages. Theirs is a task of revival as well as restoration. But in that restoration, they are happy to continue to absorb change and offerings of new hope in a once overpowering world.

It is argued in this thesis that M.K. Turner, Kathleen *Kemarre* Wallace and Wenten Rubuntja are seeking through the manner of their representation of their religious values and world-

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335 Green, “The *Altyerre* Story”, 159.
336 Breen is the most respected *Arrernte* linguist in Alice Springs. He was the principal scholar in the development of the *Eastern and Central Arrernte* orthography – which is the cause of much dissension between *Eastern* and *Central Arrernte* speakers and *Western Arrernte* speakers, who use a different orthography.
view to turn the tables, to resist the power of the invader (and the anthropologist and the linguist) by spending time in a step-by-step revelation of the true nature of their understanding. M.K., as an example, is certainly no “conquered” woman, but rather a compelling advocate for her people, their language, their culture, their land and their religion. I think it is clear that M.K. is resisting the missionaries and whitefella experts everywhere in her reluctance to rely on Altyerre as “Dreaming” in her revelation.

So, does Altyerre mean God? From the time of their earliest contact with Arrernte speakers the Lutherans at Hermannsburg were convinced that Altyerre was the closest they could get to finding an Arrernte word for God. They were searching for a word that they could use to introduce the concept of the Christian God to the Western Arrernte. The missionaries may not have been seeking to conquer the land of the Arrernte but, with their training and personal skills as linguists, they were definitely seeking to conquer the Arrernte language and turn it to their purpose – evangelisation. The Lutherans were not the only Christian missionaries using Altyerre this way. Fr Dixon MSC at Santa Teresa, the Catholic mission to the Eastern and Central Arrernte, is reported by Veronica Perrurle Dobson as assuring his Arrernte parishioners that Altyerre meant God, not dream.

But this argument will not stand. Altyerre means Altyerre. It cannot bear translation. When talking with my Arrernte friends about how God can be rendered in Arrernte in the readings for Mass on Sunday, they universally say that Altyerre does not translate as God. They offer Ngkartel/Leader, or Akngerrapate/Big Boss or Elder, as alternatives. So, although the Arrernte refuse to translate Altyerre as God, they have inherited an understanding of the Christian God as a Big figure, a transcendent idea of an all-powerful God. Herein lies a tension for Arrernte Catholics. From the time of Spencer and Gillen through the Lutherans

337 In the famous “Stuart Case”, Fr Dixon was to achieve fame as the priest who believed that Rupert Max Stuart was not guilty of the murder of a young white woman at Yatala in South Australia, on the basis of his (Dixon’s) knowledge of the Arrernte language that Stuart spoke, and the signed police statement in English that the Crown relied upon to convict him. Dixon collaborated with T.G.H. Strehlow on the case and it was Strehlow’s expert testimony that eventually achieved a reprieve for Stuart. Dixon’s close relationship with Strehlow, and Strehlow’s periodic visits to Santa Teresa, may have been influences upon Dixon in his belief that Altyerre means God. The case is dealt with extensively in Part Four. Hill, Broken Song, Chapter 4, “Saving Caliban”.

338 Personal communication with Veronica Perrurle Dobson, November 12, 2017.

339 Catholic Arrernte people make a distinction between Jesus, Ngkarte Jesus, and God the Father, Ngkarte Akngeye, where akngeye means Father. For the Holy Spirit, they use Utnenge Mwarre (spirit good) where Mwarre means good. The Sign of the Cross is given as: Akngeye, Aler, Utnenge Mwarre aneme; Father, Son and Holy/Good Spirit. Aneme means to sit, or to be, or to exist. Interestingly when the Aboriginal Our Father is translated into Arrernte the first phrase is rendered “Unte Ngkarte, Unte Altyerre…” Neither of these words mean Father. Ngkarte may mean leader or boss and Altyerre means mother’s father’s line.
and on into the Catholic missionaries, *Altyerre* has been harnessed to an alien agenda. This thesis is determined to allow the *Arrernte* Voices to be heard: *Altyerre* will be used but not translated. It will operate as a metaphor for the totality and simplicity in complexity that is the genius of *Arrernte* imaginary.

*Altyerre* is a symphony, a masterpiece of many parts, a *magnum opus*. A symphony requires an orchestra made up of many sections: a conductor, the string section, the brass and woodwind, the tympani, piano and perhaps a harp. All are required; none is sufficient on its own to ensure that classical music stirs and moves its audience. *Altyerre* is the same, made from many parts: the Story and the Country; Kinship, Skin names and Relationships; Time and Eternity; Spirit and Totemism; Language and Law; Song and Dance. Each is essential; none is sufficient on its own to define or describe *Altyerre*. When *Arrernte* people say *Altyerre* they mean all these things in one breath, in one aspiration, in one utterance. Each is interlaced, interwoven, interleaved with the other. Each anticipates the other, relies on the other, and depends on the other. The string section cannot play a symphony on its own. It would be deficient, hollow, and unsatisfactory; and what could the percussion section do with a Beethoven symphony on its own? Neither is *Altyerre* defined by just one term or concept. *Altyerre* is a complex interaction between its components working as a unity to provide an integrated sense of meaning to the mystery of human experience. Because it is interactive, relying on the relationship between its many parts, *Altyerre* is essentially alive. It presents the world as it is, always transforming, yet always maintaining both the world and the integrity of its own genius. *Altyerre* swells and abates, it rises and it falls with the rhythm of life, within its own eternal rhythm. *Altyerre* never changes, it is laid down in precept; but *Altyerre* is capable of absorbing change. Change itself is changed as it is taken up, proactively manipulated, modified, reassembled and reintroduced into the eternal with no loss of *Altyerre*’s pristine value.

*Altyerre* is an *Arrernte* word. It reflects an *Arrernte* world-view. The world-view of the *Arrernte* people of Central Australia is mythic rather than historic. It reflects the wisdom of the ages, distilled from the timeless intelligence of living in a desert infused with both

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340 Therese Ryder, personal communication, April 17, 2017, defined *utnenge/spirit* (a deep component of *Altyerre*) as “being alive”.

341 Nevertheless, examination of Margaret Heffernan’s book *Gathering Sticks: Lighting up Small Fires* (Alice Springs: IAD Press, 2018), demonstrated that history can be the material used in myth-making.
opportunity and threat in equal portion. *Altyerre* brings the world to life. *Altyerre* explains the origins of people. It links generations and controls marriage and thus offspring. People see that the earth is fecund, that it nourishes and sustains. *Altyerre* explains the mystery of fecundity. *Altyerre* knows that even a rock can be alive, filled with an eternal spirit. As people move through country *Altyerre* reaches out and infuses them with life from the spirit of the country, forever defining individuals as connected to specific country. *Altyerre* knows that the mountains are immovable, but also knows that rain can be fickle, both sustaining and destroying. *Altyerre* teaches that all that can be known was known by ancestors who established a template and laid it down for all to follow. People know that men and women are fallible and loveable. *Altyerre* teaches people that these qualities are inherent and honourable. *Altyerre* celebrates life in full measure. Its song and dance sustain people and ensure generational transmission of certainty. In a world that could fall apart if humans act capriciously, *Altyerre* provides a framework of Law that interprets behaviour and constrains conduct in an interlacing network of relationships that define responsibilities. Ceremony, song and dance prescribed by *Altyerre* sacramentally re-create the creation, continuously bringing it to life. *Altyerre* reaches out from the eternity of creation and encloses *Arrernte* people in C=country with a conviction that sustains them and the world.

*Altyerre* does not mean any one word that in English can contain its richness and complexity. *Altyerre* does not mean “Dreaming” or “Dreamtime”. It does not mean God, although it might almost mean “uncreated” or “eternal”; giving rise to the fascinating possibility that somehow the eternal, uncreated creation holds all the elements that Christians would call God, for as M.K. Turner concludes: “’Cause it’s not gonna end.”342 *Altyerre* means *Altyerre*.

Part Two of this thesis will outline the process whereby modern *Arrernte* people connected to *Ngkarte Mikwekenhe Catholic Community* have arrived at the understanding of *Altyerre* that now sustains them.

Part Two: *Altyerre under Assault*

Chapter 4: Introduction – Fire/*Ure* and Water/*Kwatye*

Part Two of this thesis explores the effect of Invasion and Mission upon the *Arrernte* imaginary. In this thesis “imaginary” means a deeply structured foundational and all-embracing description of reality. Invasion is characterised as the onset of an array of disruptive forces, including the negative impacts resulting from the presence and involvement of explorers, missionaries, pastoralists, miners and government personnel.

Where W.E.H. Stanner had argued that the Aborigine is defeated by “his transcendentalism”, it is proposed here that it is this very transcendentalism – an ability to metaphysically construct a satisfying world-view in the face of overwhelming assault – that saves *Altyerre*, protects *apmere* and preserves the *Arrernte*.

After an anecdote drawn from the life experience of a person born into *Altyerre* and raised in Catholicism, this introduction lays out the schema for the succeeding chapters in Part Two.

**4.1 The Healing Spring at *Ltyentye Apurte/Santa Teresa***

The Healing Spring has an iconic place in the religious practice of *Arrernte* people at *Ltyentye Apurte/Santa Teresa*. Unobtrusively it joins *Arrernte Altyerre* and Catholic imaginaries together. Here is an account by Bessie Oliver of the discovery of the Healing Spring.

> When I saw that young man, I was crying. He was really weak and lying down. We was holding our hands then, me and my sisters. We was praying for him: “God help him to get up.” But he could hardly stand up. We said three Hail Mary and three Our Father inside this room. And we was crying then. Then he said to my sister, his mother: “Mummy you better go and get holy water. Go and look for that water”. But

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344 Bessie Oliver is acknowledged as being the principal owner of the Healing Spring story. Personal communication, October 11, 2018.
we was just thinking, you know, what water, nobody knows the water was there. Then we was outside and talking: “Where’s the water?” You know that two big hills, two big stones, below. He talked to his mother. And we asked Leonie. So, we got a little tin, fruit tin. We didn’t know anything was there. Leonie said: “Sister we got to go and look for this water.” Well, that young man, he told me to go and look for that water. “Mother Mary was saying to me, that was holy water,” he said. And he saw Mother Mary on top there, on the other side of that little stone. Mother Mary was standing: I think he was just looking at Mother. We went up then, Leonie and my sister and me, slowly, and talking and looking. And we did went up. And we was just standing above that hill, and the little creek down there, and we was just standing, the three of us. We can see something, just here and the water was rising up. Then we stand for a while and there was a big wind, just like a whirly wind. And we was holding each other. And we said: “What’s happening now, the wind?” And we went down and we saw, that water was rising up. We got that water in the little tin. Then we went back and took the water and gave the water to the young man. And when I saw him, I was very sad to see his face. He was really thin. And he told us he saw Mother Mary. And he drank that water and he got better after about three weeks. And everybody came from everywhere with jerry cans to get that water. We were really excited and we said: “that’s really true”. Me and Imelda, we was thinking that he should turn back to Church and he should go to Mass.

Therese Ryder, who was living at Ltyentye Apurte at the time, knows this story very well. Therese talked about the significance of this story in relation to the power of dreams:

Now a lot of people said the water might be coming out of the tank.\textsuperscript{345} I don’t know. But it was in that dream. People believe in dreams. Some say that’s just a dream, it’s not real. I don’t know. I collect the water and I collect the sand and when I had problem, I spread the sand around the house and people stopped coming. I used to have a yard full of young people drinking with my sons and so I sprinkled that sand everywhere where people drink and everywhere around my house. And people stopped coming. It works. The young fellas didn’t know that I had sprinkled the water. It’s powerful. I believe in the power of the sand. And I believe about that

\textsuperscript{345} There is a town water supply tank on the side of the hill.
young fella’s dream as well. That tank on the top of the hill is separate altogether from the springs. It’s not leaking out of the tank. I believe in that. Santa Teresa was built on a rain dreaming apmere/place. At Uyetye346 there is a place with a spring, my conception place. I’m one of the kids from Altyerre kwatyay-ntyele (the rain dreaming from Uyetye), Old Jim Hayes and Bruce Hayes’ traditional country.347

Kwatye/water is a powerful and common Arrernte conception totem. It is significant that Therese links the kwatye/water dreaming of the place/apmere to the young man’s Catholic religious dream of Mother Mary. Indeed, three principal Arrernte informants to this thesis are connected to kwatye. M.K. Turner pointed out that her being was Akerte-renye, from the rain dreaming at Akerte. Therese declares herself to originate from Uyetye, a conception place associated with the kwatye/rain dreaming. Kathleen Kemarr Wallace’s grandfather Atyelpe348/native cat or Bill Hayes349 was a rainmaker.350 Unobtrusively this story joins Arrernte and Catholic imaginaries together.

The idea of conception totemism351 is a powerful force in Arrernte culture. The MacDonnell Ranges/Tyerrtye attract rain, and its many waterholes and the Finke River and its tributaries provide an abundant supply of life-giving water in all but the very driest of times. It is obvious that the lightning and storms that bring rain, and the water that persists after rain,

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346 Uyetye is a traditional camping place of the Eastern Arrernte people close to Santa Teresa. It is Kathleen Kemarre’s kwatye [water or rain] conception place.
347 Therese Ryder, personal communication, November 12, 2018.
348 Atyelpe is the Arrernte name for the native cat written in the Eastern and Central Arrernte orthography. In the Gap Area of Alice Springs, where from the 1960s many Aboriginal people lived, is Achilpa Street. For years I did not know that Atyelpe and Achilpa were the same word. This difference in orthography is a source of confusion for non-Indigenous people and dissent by many Arrernte people, regarding the best way to render Arrernte words.
349 In Central Australia many Arrernte people have European names which are often derived from the name of the lessee of the cattle station upon which they lived and worked in the settler period. The Hayes family is a significant settler family in the vicinity of Alice Springs. There are many Arrernte with the name Hayes, not all of whom are related to each other. Having the name of the station owner does not mean that the Arrernte are direct descendants of a white settler. In some cases, however, non-Aboriginal settlers cohabited with local Aboriginal women and the children of these unions were acknowledged by the fathers. T.G.H. Strehlow in Journey to Horseshoe Bend, 75, recounts the relationships that Bob Buck and Alf Butler, famous settler pioneers in the region, had with Arrernte women in the 1920s at their station at Henbury, close to Hermannsburg. Both men had de-facto Arrernte wives and “half-caste” children. These children did not live with their fathers but did bear their surnames; their fathers provided funds for their education and retained contact and affection for their daughters.
350 Kathleen Kemarre Wallace, Listen deeply, let these stories in (Alice Springs: IAD Press, 2009), 37.
351 Conception totemism describes the Arrernte belief that every person draws their utnenge/spirit from the apmere/place where their mother noted that she had conceived by the quickening in her womb. This conception will often occur in the apmere/country of the woman’s husband because upon marriage a woman normally moves to her husband’s estate. This helps to confirm a patrilineal association with sacred sites and place primary responsibility for maintenance of apmere/country on father’s father’s side.
have become powerful symbols in *Arrernte* mythology. Much of the perennial travelling of *Eastern Arrernte* people was from waterhole to waterhole, especially in the summer months. For *Western, Eastern* and *Mparntwe Arrernte* rain, water, and waterholes provide rich material for myth.

Fire is another elemental force in the *Altyerre*. A meaning given in the *Eastern and Central Arrernte Dictionary* for fire/ure reads, “When lightning strikes and starts a bushfire, the country burns.”352 The *Mparntwe Arrernte* have a name for this fire – *Ure alharrkentye iperre*.353 Often working together through lightning strikes, kwatye/water and ure/fire provide the backdrop to the drama and help form the imaginary of *Arrernte* lives. Carl Strehlow indicates that Mt Rubuntja in the Western MacDonnells is associated with a fire ceremony.354 Peter Latz, one of Australia’s foremost experts on Central Australian ecology, comments on the role of fire in the history of Hermannsburg Mission:

> The last six months of 1921 were somewhat drier, and during most of November there was a severe heat wave. This was followed by dry thunderstorms which gave rise to huge bushfires ignited by lightning, which raged everywhere and lasted from four to six weeks … Unlike coastal areas which usually have fires during drought times, in the Centre it is only after exceptionally good rains that there is enough fuel to carry fire throughout the land. If there is little rain after these fires, one ends up with the paradoxical situation of good seasons actually doing more harm than good. In the past the severity of these fire events would have been reduced by traditional burning practices.355

Both fire and water can bring life and augur destruction. While the kwatye/water from the Healing Spring offers life, the arrival of the first Europeans in Central Australia could be interpreted as a ure akngerre/firestorm, threatening to engulf and destroy the *Arrernte*. These

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352 Henderson and Dobson, *Eastern and Central Arrernte Dictionary*, 594. Dianne Austin-Broos, *Arrernte Present, Arrernte Past*, 57, records the Western *Arrernte Kaporilja* myth as collected by Carl Strehlow. Talking of two rain men, Strehlow reports: “From time to time *atua kwatja* [water man] would throw a burning kangaroo tail (*ara-parra*) from on high and caused the earth to burst into flames (lightning struck).”

353 Therese Ryder, personal communication, September 11, 2018.


two themes will run through Part Two as it examines the impact of the Invasion on Altyerre and the survival of Altyerre both in spite of and because of the missionaries.

4.2 Fire over the Land

Before the arrival of explorers, miners, pastoralists, settlers, government officials and missionaries in Central Australia, the Arrernte were living satisfying lives in an abundant, if at times threatening, natural environment. They had interpreted natural events and social interactions mythically into a world-view through the power of their Altyerre imaginary. The secret of Arrernte success was their understanding of not living on the apmere/land but holding and being held by the apmere/land. Being was “emplaced being”. M.K. Turner summarised it this way: “The Story is the Land, and the Land is the Story. The Story holds the people, and the people live inside the Story. The Story lives inside the people, and the Land lives inside the people also. It goes all ways to hold the Land.”

In the 1870s alien forces burst in on the Arrernte. They could well have felt that their land/apmere and their Altyerre had been overcome by an inferno. Their experience may be compared with Moses’ meeting God in the burning bush (Ex 3:1–5), which is not consumed by the fire because it was on “holy ground”. In like manner, it could be said that, in the consciousness of the Arrernte, the sacredness of Altyerre and apmere/country shielded them from the furnace of Invasion. Invasion could not kill Altyerre, nor the inferno destroy ampere. The Arrernte emerged with a refreshed, indeed strengthened Altyerre – the guiding imaginary of their lives.

Chapter 5 explores the colliding worlds on the frontier in Central Australia. Commencing with a general survey of the effects of non-Indigenous settlement on the Arrernte, this chapter points to the cultural mismatch that characterised mission life at Hermannsburg which set many of the parameters for Christian missions in the Centre. It also argues that anthropology, rather than assisting practitioners on the frontier, disempowered the Arrernte and restricted opportunity for the Arrernte and the non-Indigenous settlers to understand each other better. The chapter finally examines government policy and the actions of officials and advisors.

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356 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 45.
demonstrating the inconsistent and sometimes contradictory nature of public discourse and subsequent policy.

Chapter 6 describes the experience of the Mparntwe Arrernte during the three iterations of the Catholic Mission which began in Alice Springs, but which was relocated to Arltunga in 1942, and later to Santa Teresa in 1953. It explores the missionary effort of the men and women who worked at the Catholic missions to the Arrernte. It will be argued that two elements worked in opposition/collaboration with each other: on the one hand was the narrow, hierarchical concept of Church, with a doctrine of salvation through membership of the Church; on the other hand, was a persistent and persevering commitment by the Mparntwe Arrernte to their place-based world-view of Altyerre. These two elements produced a unique and perhaps surprising outcome – the emergence of a preference by the Mparntwe Arrernte to maintain their agency in the face of an apparently overwhelming force.

Chapter 7 proposes that the emergence of a unique form of Arrernte Catholicism is written in Arrernte consciousness through Altyerre. Capturing material introduced in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, it explains the typical Arrernte attitude of eclectic interest in novelty – while maintaining a commitment to tradition. The chapter continues the contrapuntal themes of kwatye/water and urel/fire. In this metaphor, water is life but presages danger. It is noteworthy that Eastern and Mparntwe Arrernte stories, such as many included in Kathleen Kemarre Wallace’s book Listen deeply, are travel stories recounting visits and camps at life-sustaining waterholes across Arrernte country. The chapter demonstrates that the Arrernte tradition is based on a dynamic, organic process of incorporation, adaptation and assimilation of a variety of extraneous influences which, while absorbed, never necessarily eliminated or even diluted the Arrernte pledge to Altyerre. From this intuitive way of looking at the world has emerged a form of Catholicism that is named here Altyerre-Catholicism.
Chapter 5: Colliding Worlds – The Context

The metaphor used in this chapter is a collision between two cultures. Peter Latz describes it this way: “in many respects, the happy-go-lucky Aranda [sic] and severe German cultures could not have been much more different.”\(^{357}\) Thinking of a collision of two different cultural groups immediately conjures the notion of fault and injury. It might be asked, whose fault was it, who was injured, and how seriously? In this sense a “collision” is understood as being different from “contact”. Indeed, it is common to think of “first contact” between Indigenous Australians and the white settlers as being a “collision” with deleterious consequences for the Indigenous Australians. It might even be assumed that the Arrernte were ignorant of the power, difference and consequences of the impending contact/collision and destined to be its inevitable victims. While this assumption has some validity, the following sections of this chapter will indicate subtle variations on this theme. It is arguable that the Arrernte were interested in contact: they were attracted to novelty and innovation; they were quick adapters. While it might appear that they lived in a closed world, in fact they were accustomed to contact with other groups and had engaged in trade across language boundaries for millennia.\(^{358}\) From this contact they had absorbed a number of new ideas, customs and even language features. In this sense the collision of worlds explored in this chapter is not necessarily a clash of cultures or a culture war, but an interface where two quite different peoples met each other on a frontier and where the Arrernte expressed a great deal of agency in the contact. Indeed, as a result of the collision the white settlers suffered some significant impediment to the immediate achievement of their goals and their assumptions of superiority. The Arrernte survived the collision through their innate adaptability and the strength of their Altyerre.

5.1 The Impact of Invasion and Settlement

In 1894 Baldwin Spencer had been the biologist and photographer member of the Horn Expedition, a scientific survey of Central and Northern Australia.\(^{359}\) The Photographs of

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357 Peter Latz, Blind Moses, 26.
358 The difference was that the other Indigenous groups, (Warlpiri, Pitjantjatjara and Luritja) with whom they had contact, were similar in most features of custom and culture, while the white settlers were, as Latz says, worlds apart.
Baldwin Spencer\textsuperscript{360} include some images of \textit{Arrernte} people engaged in ceremonies taken in Alice Springs, both during the Horn Expedition and later during other visits when Spencer revisited Alice Springs to engage in his collaboration with Francis Gillen, the Officer in Charge of the Alice Springs Telegraph Station, in the early 1900s. The last images in the publication are of Hermannsburg and of Palm Valley, near Hermannsburg, taken in 1923. The early photographs offer images of a vibrant people living their daily and ceremonial life on their own country, while towards the end of the publication a number of confronting images show the increasing marginalisation of the \textit{Arrernte}.\textsuperscript{361} The early photos transport the viewer into an extraordinary world where a naked people go about their mundane business and also perform the most elaborate of rituals based on a sophisticated philosophy of life. T.G.H. Strehlow described these \textit{Arrernte} rituals this way: “Every full-scale ceremonial festival was, in fact, regarded as an occasion when Time and Eternity became one, where the border line dividing visible human beings and invisible totemic ancestors became temporarily obliterated.”\textsuperscript{362}

In the last quarter of the 19th century, as the Australian colonists sought to exploit the wide spaces of the continent, the Arandic people of Central Australia flourished. Dwelling in the MacDonnell Ranges/Tyuretye, with its many permanent waterholes, they were protected even in prolonged drought. It was these same relatively well-watered Ranges that lured white settlers into the region. By 1935, the situation in Alice Springs was very different. From the perspective of the Catholic Church’s story, it was in that year that Fr Patrick Moloney MSC\textsuperscript{363} had been appointed parish priest of the OLSH Catholic parish in Alice Springs and commenced a mission to the \textit{Arrernte}. Br John Pye MSC, in recording the history of the Catholic Mission,\textsuperscript{364} writes that Moloney “soon became concerned about the Aborigines living on the outskirts of Alice Springs; and so, began his major work amongst the Aborigines”.\textsuperscript{365} In the 40 years since Spencer’s photographs were taken the \textit{Arrernte} had

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Batty} Batty, \textit{The Photographs of Baldwin Spencer}).
\bibitem{Batty200-203} Batty, \textit{The Photographs of Baldwin Spencer}, 200-203. These include photos of The Bungalow in Alice Springs, a “home for half-caste” children, and a makeshift camp at Undoolya, a pastoral station to the east of Alice Springs.
\bibitem{BarryHill} Barry Hill, \textit{Broken Song} (Sydney, 2002), 635.
\bibitem{Missionaries} The Missionaries of the Sacred is an order of priests and brothers founded by Jules Chevalier in 1854 in France. The MSC motto is “Jesus loved with a human heart: with him we proclaim his love to the world”, https://misacor.org.au/index.php/who-we-are/jules-chevalier (accessed September 25, 2017).
\bibitem{TerribleMiss} The term “The Mission” will be used in reference to all locations where the MSC priests and brothers and OLSH sisters worked: Little Flower Mission at Charles Creek, Arltunga, and Santa Teresa Mission at Tyentye Apurte.
\bibitem{Pye} Pye, \textit{Santa Teresa and East Aranda History}, 7.
\end{thebibliography}

moved from being the centre of outsider focus to living on the periphery of settler society. They were now in a pitiable condition.\textsuperscript{366}

John McDouall Stuart’s successful crossing of the continent in 1862 pointed to the pastoral potential of the region and soon his track was followed, first in 1872 by the South Australian government as it laid a telegraph line from Adelaide to Darwin, and second by graziers and prospectors. Alice Springs, located so centrally, became one of the Telegraph Stations dotted along the 3,000-kilometre single strand of wire linking the cities of southern Australia to the rest of the world. Before Alice Springs became the Centre of the Red Heart, for many years the mining town of Arltunga, 100 kilometres to the east, was home to the largest population concentration in the area. Gradually Alice Springs became a service centre for scattered mining settlements and far-flung pioneers.\textsuperscript{367} The commercial imperative of swift communication served by the telegraph, the rapid spread of pastoralism, and opportunistic exploration and mining of precious and semi-precious minerals contributed to an inexorable increase in the white population and to the struggles and marginalisation of the \textit{Arrernte} who still lived in the hills around the town.\textsuperscript{368} Christian missions, while they were a component of the Invasion, were to play a part in ameliorating the impact of this disturbance.

\section*{5.2 The Impact of the First Missionaries: Cultural Mismatch}

In order to fully appreciate the issues affecting \textit{Central and Eastern Arrernte} in the Catholic missions in Alice Springs, Arltunga and Santa Teresa, it is instructive to review the earlier history of the Lutheran Mission at \textit{Ntaria} (Hermannsburg)\textsuperscript{369} on the \textit{Western Arrernte}.

\textsuperscript{366} Barbara Henson, \textit{A Straight-out Man: F.W. Albrecht and Central Australian Aborigines} (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1994), 89–94. Albrecht was Superintendent of Hermannsburg from 1926 to 1963 but also took an interest in \textit{Arrernte} in Alice Springs. In 1934 his view, along with that of Dr Charles Duguid, was that the Aborigines in Alice Springs were in a dire state. Albrecht sincerely considered that their future was bleak and they could die out.

\textsuperscript{367} The population at Arltunga was initially composed of both \textit{Arrernte} locals and white prospectors and miners, and soon the progeny of both, with some Aboriginal families bearing the adopted surname of some of the early miners.

\textsuperscript{368} A deep insight into the racial relations on the Centralian frontier is presented in the book by T.G.H. Strehlow \textit{Journey to Horseshoe Bend} (Sydney: Giramondo Classic Reprints, 2015). The sentiment expressed there is of white entitlement along with grudging acknowledgement of the protective nature of the work of the Hermannsburg Mission.

\textsuperscript{369} The Aboriginal people occupying \textit{Ntaria}, a plain adjacent to the Finke River (\textit{Lhere pinta}), where the Lutherans decided to settle, spoke \textit{Western Arrernte}. The Lutherans renamed the settlement Hermannsburg Mission. However, the forces described here affected not just the \textit{Western Arrernte} but their neighbours, the \textit{Northern Arrernte} and \textit{Southern Arrernte} (\textit{Pertame}) and the \textit{Luritja}-speaking people (alternatively called \textit{Kukatja}) who lived in adjacent country. The three \textit{Arrernte} groups spoke very similar languages/dialects, but the
Hermannsburg Mission was to become a haven for the Arrernte in the firestorm of European settlement. Yet while the Hermannsburg Mission protected the Western Arrernte from the worst effects of the “bushfire” surrounding them, even at Hermannsburg Western Arrernte culture was seriously threatened. The potential threat came from Lutheranism itself. The impact of the Mission at Hermannsburg will be discussed in three phases: phase one under Pastor Kempe, phase two under Pastor Carl Strehlow, and phase three under Pastor F.W. Albrecht.

While the discussion below necessarily looks at the difference between these phases, it is nevertheless true that several general features characterised the Lutheran Mission through the entire period. Both positive and negative forces combined to convince many Western Arrernte, some Southern Arrernte (Pertame), some Northern Arrernte and Luritja to settle at Hermannsburg Mission. The allure of the strangers and the novelty provided by the Europeans, expressed through their material culture, tools, housing, clothes, their habits and indeed their language and religion, were all attractions. Another magnet was rations, provided freely, but with an implicit understanding by the missionaries that the Arrernte would work for their rations, which reduced the daily demand of increasingly fruitless gathering and hunting for a decreasing supply of native flora and fauna. Simultaneously, within a very short period, the presence of the surrounding pastoralists and their beasts created competition over resources and subsequently tension between the new arrivals and the Arrernte scattered widely across their estate. On the new pastoral leases in the area surrounding the mission the killing of livestock by the Arrernte, both for food and as a deterrent against encroaching white settlement, created the immediate justification for retaliation by the newcomers and was another trigger for a retreat of many Aboriginal groups into the mission station. Having settled semi-permanently in Hermannsburg, the Arrernte groups and the Luritja were no longer able to regularly visit their country and ensure the safety of their atywerrenge/totemic stones and boards secreted in the caves of the many ranges surrounding Ntaria. Since ceremonies also occurred in these totemic locations, the Arrernte were now separated for long periods from their life-giving, spirit-animating Altyerre.

Luritja/Kukatja language is a member of the Western Desert Languages and totally different from the Arandic group, although there is word swapping between the languages, such as between French and English. However, there were jealousies and difference between all groups, mitigated over the ages by separation. All these groups were enticed into Hermannsburg by the presence of the Mission. Diane Austin-Broos describes the complexity of communal living at Ntaria in Arrernte Present, Arrernte Past.
Living a sedentary life in a village setting was completely novel for the Arrernte. It is clear from the evidence of the missionaries that they adapted poorly. Having never lived in permanent shelters, the Western Arrernte found the requirements of sanitation and the missionaries’ expectations of cleanliness difficult to meet. Henson reports on a flu epidemic in the 1930s where Albrecht went to a stone hut to discover two old Arrernte people who were lying very ill. “Albrecht found them almost unrecognisable with ashes and dirt.”

Despite the house having a fireplace and chimney, they had built a fire on the floor in the middle of the hut. Albrecht hoped that the Arrernte would take on the development and care of their own vegetable gardens. Henson records the outcome: “The response so far had not been particularly heartening: nothing had happened so far, they said ‘too much trouble’.”

Albrecht’s subsequent observation was that “they carry a dreadful burden of laziness”.

Given that the resources available to the Mission were very limited, the provision of an adequate diet was an ever-present challenge and sicknesses such as scurvy ensued that were associated with an unvaried diet deficient in nutrients. The women, who were the principal providers of plant food and small game, still went out foraging, but the population density at Hermannsburg had decimated available native foods within a day’s walking distance. On a visit in December 1929 Professor J.B. Cleland of the University of Adelaide diagnosed scurvy and recommended the provision of a daily intake of oranges. Henson reports that this was effective: “Within a day or two, most people reported that bleeding from the gums had ceased and they were beginning to feel better.”

The oranges had to be transported from South Australia, which was both expensive and unreliable. Eventually the Kaporilja Spring was connected by pipeline to Hermannsburg in 1936 and the Mission gardens were now secure.

Throughout all the three phases discussed below, from 1877 to the late 1930s, the German missionaries were dismayed by the apparent inability of the Arrernte to care for themselves.

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370 Henson, A Straight-out Man, 82.
371 Henson, A Straight-out Man, 100.
372 Henson, A Straight-out Man, 100.
374 Henson, A Straight-out Man, 46.
or to act magnanimously towards others. When the rules of reciprocity did not apply, the Arrernte seemed to the missionaries to adopt a selfish approach to resource distribution. The use of extreme violence and the incidence of payback killings were also abhorrent to the missionaries. These general features characterised the Mission through the entire period under discussion, but within each phase some different emphases can be distinguished.

5.2.1 Lutheran Mission Phase 1: A German “Outback” Village

In 1877 a microcosm of pietistic, evangelical, Lutheran Germany was deposited in the middle of the MacDonnell Ranges/Tyerrtye in Central Australia. It was the direct result of the inspiration of Rev Ludwig (Louis) Harms. In 1849 Harms founded his Confessional Lutheran seminary at Hermannsburg in Germany. While being religiously and politically conservative – he was once, according to Regina Ganter, accused of Pietism and on another occasion suspended from the priesthood – Harms adopted a radical approach to the education and training of his future Hermannsburg evangelisers.\(^{375}\) He sought out candidates for clergy training from among the German peasant class. He adopted a revivalist theology which sought to inspire his peasant trainees through strenuous discipline based on the idea that the saving of heathens\(^{376}\) in remote places would bring blessings thirty times over on Hermannsburg itself.\(^{377}\) He retained the traditional Lutheran emphasis on the learning of and use of the local language for evangelisation. Once in the field, the initial Harms model of mission operation was austere, with the missionaries being paid a meagre wage, subjected to close scrutiny by distant superiors, and being required to engage in scrupulous accounting of their expenditure. The Harms/Hermannsburg model was based on the appointment of conservative, patriarchal, hierarchical clergy in far-flung remote mission stations, where they also exercised practical skills, such as blacksmith, carpenter and mason at Hermannsburg.\(^{378}\)

The first Lutherans in the South Australian outback arrived at Killalpaninna on Lake Eyre in 1866. While that Mission struggled to survive,\(^{379}\) in 1876–77, on hearing of the exploration and white settlement of Central Australia and the existence of an untouched Aboriginal


\(^{376}\) “Heathens” was a very common word used by all the missionaries at Ntaria.

\(^{377}\) Hermannsburg Mission.

\(^{378}\) Hermannsburg Mission.

\(^{379}\) The Lake Eyre mission closed in 1917.
population, Harms sought a lease from the government for a mission. The standard Harms/Hermannsburg mission model entailed the establishment of a communal village ruled over by the senior pastor and a staff of subordinate fellow pastors and lay missionaries. The object was to establish a self-supporting faith community and economy. Day-to-day life was intense, closely ordered and left little scope for personal initiative. All the Harms/Hermannsburg missions suffered from internal strife and bickering among the staff.\textsuperscript{380} Latz says that “Harms believed that Jesus would not return to earth until most heathens had been given the chance to recognise him as their saviour and he was in a hurry to see this happen”.\textsuperscript{381}

The Lutheran Mission at Hermannsburg/\textit{Ntaria}\textsuperscript{382} exemplified the translocation of a particular form of German culture that would have been incomprehensible to the \textit{Arrernte} and \textit{Luritja}. It was not just world-view or religious belief, or even ethics or morality, that were so starkly different. German social structure and material culture were entirely strange to the residents of \textit{Ntaria}. For example, two significant features of \textit{Arrernte} male culture are personal autonomy and social equality: all men thought of themselves as equal and none could be ruled by any other. There is no formal leadership structure that allows any one person to be seen as permanent ruler, leader or chief, although certain men were recognised as cult leaders for their totemic site and ceremony. The \textit{Arrernte} power structure is non-hierarchical. There are distinctions between initiated and uninitiated men, adults and children, and between men and women. It appears that there is an acceptance, by both men and women, that in some aspects of culture men are dominant.\textsuperscript{383} Of course, in other areas women have their own field of power, for example in matters of kinship, livelihood, religious ritual, and especially law and custom around conception and childbirth. As well, there are situations where men’s and women’s ceremonial roles interact and each is essential to the other, such as at a boy’s initiation. All are based on an ancient world-view shared by all and not open to question. In

\textsuperscript{380} Latz, \textit{Blind Moses}, 32

\textsuperscript{381} Latz, \textit{Blind Moses}, 16. Latz is an interesting commentator because he was born (1941) and grew up at Hermannsburg and because he trained in zoology and botany and is regarded as the paramount expert on the ecology of Central Australia. He has a Masters degree in the Aboriginal use of plants. A Christian by birth, Latz now says he has no religious beliefs, see Latz, \textit{Blind Moses}, 3.

\textsuperscript{382} \textit{Ntaria} was the name of the Westem \textit{Arrernte} place that the Lutherans named Hermannsburg.

\textsuperscript{383} M.K. Turner comments on the differentiation between men and women: “[W]omen can’t talk about Species or any details about Land. Some of my nephews, my brother’s sons, can talk about it. Because they are \textit{ikwerenge-nyele}, they are male-descended from my father, their \textit{arrenge}. All I can say is that we are from that place. We are \textit{Akerternyes}, and that’s the only name I can use. I can’t do any more explaining, because I’m a woman.” Turner, \textit{Iwenhe Tyerrtye}, 9.
the missions, however, the Arrernte were to meet a people who operated in a strongly hierarchical social system.

The advance Mission party that arrived in Ntaria in July 1876 was composed of Rev Herman (A.H.) Kempe (leader) and Rev Wilhelm (W.F.) Schwarz. Latz reports: “They were both used to heat, as one was a blacksmith (Kempe) and the other a baker …”384 A year later, as Latz says, “the Western Arrernte people were invaded by the full missionary party. Suddenly in their midst were ten white men, thirty horses, twenty-three cattle, two thousand sheep, five dogs, one rooster and four hens, as well as several wagons, a violin and several rifles …”385 Disruption was on the doorstep.

Latz notes the Lutheran focus on language learning. He writes that the “two missionaries … immediately began to record the local Aranda language”.386 Soon the missionaries established a school for the Arrernte children in the settlement. By November 1877, as well as these linguistic and educational achievements, they had built wooden shelters for themselves and soon a kiln to produce materials for their next construction, a stone house. By 1878 lessons were conducted in two sittings: for older children in the morning and younger in the afternoon. Latz reports that the program “initially consisted of Scripture lessons and hymns”387 for the younger children, noting that song and music were especially productive. He adds, “It is astonishing that the missionaries were already able to teach the students in their own language and especially have them sing hymns in Aranda.”388 The singing was often accompanied by Kempe on the flute or violin,389 and music was to remain an integral component of Lutheran missionary style to the present day.390

While the emphasis was on the construction of a settlement and education of children, the Lutherans had one significant blind spot. As Latz noted, “It was highly unfortunate however,
that in the first few years the Germans considered that Aranda weren’t very religious, and that even if they were, their religious beliefs were heathen mumbo-jumbo, and had to be replaced by the Lutheran faith.”

This was in accord with Harms’ own teaching at Hermannsburg in Germany. Ganter reports, “Satan was easily invoked in his [Harms] speech and against majority opinion and church law of 1864, he insisted that baptism expressly included an avowal of the devil.” Latz reports an interchange between some senior Arrernte men and missionary Schwarz who said, “this tjurunga is bad. You are lying. You are the children of the devil.” Latz is firmly of the view that in the early days the clear intention of the missionaries was to eradicate the magic that the missionaries thought pretended to be Arrernte religion.

Latz reports that in 1881:

Kempe, the former blacksmith, produced an Aranda book of Christian instructions containing Old and New Testament stories, psalms, prayers and fifty-three hymns. This was an exceptional effort, considering that very few Australians elsewhere could have done the same in any of Australia’s many Aboriginal languages.

Yet the Mission was full of discord and by 1882 the pastors and lay workers were no longer living communally. The pastors had all brought their wives to Hermannsburg. Ironically, sexual relations would continue to be a sore point. According to Latz the Arrernte women saw the arrival of whites as an opportunity to have some independence from their men. By now it was not uncommon for Arrernte women to engage in episodic sexual relations with pastoralists, miners, policemen, station hands, sometimes with terrible consequences. The Coniston Massacre is an example where misunderstanding – perhaps wilful on the part of the

391 Latz, Blind Moses, 27.
393 Tjurunga means totem or totemic board or object. In this case, early in the contact period, it seems that the missionaries were referring to an Arrernte ceremony.
394 Latz, Blind Moses, 29.
395 Latz, Blind Moses, 32.
396 Latz, Blind Moses, 32.
397 Latz, Blind Moses, 48.
non-Indigenous men – was the cause of some of the worst cases of interracial violence on the frontier.\(^{398}\)

In 1891 Kempe had a paper published on the Western Aranda Language in the journal of the Royal Society of South Australia.\(^{399}\) From the perspective of this study, however, Latz’s comment that Kempe’s work was admirable – “especially as once the [Arrernte] adults became aware of the fact that he was obtaining this knowledge to apparently subvert their children’s belief, they became quite adept at giving him misinformation” – indicates that from its inception the Arrernte were engaged in a subtle standoff with the missionaries. Learning Arrernte by the missionaries was linked totally to their evangelising agenda. Arrernte language was to be the means of conversion and implied the destruction of the old Arrernte beliefs.

A disturbing aspect of settlement that confronted Kempe and his team was the frequent resort by Arrernte to extreme violence in order to resolve disputes. Before contact with the European culture, wrongdoing and punishment had been a component of Arrernte culture. In the new circumstances the Western Arrernte were now surrounded by white settlers and living in close contact with various Arrernte and Luritja groups. This combined pressure appeared to allow violence to erupt much more frequently than before white settlement and to cascade on into the next “payback” event. Latz concludes: “in my opinion previous authors have tended to only emphasise the violence carried out by whites against the locals. The point I want to make clear is that … as many as twenty five percent of Moses’\(^{400}\) Aboriginal acquaintances had been violently killed by other Aborigines.”\(^{401}\)

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\(^{399}\) Latz, Blind Moses, 49.

\(^{400}\) Moses is the European name of Tjalkabota, the subject of Latz’s book. Moses was an early convert and later a renowned Christian evangelist.

\(^{401}\) Latz, Blind Moses, 107.
Richard Kimber reports that from about 1875 “upwards of 160 Aboriginal people were killed over three years”\textsuperscript{402} by other Aborigines.\textsuperscript{403} Latz considered that Moses Tjalkabota and his newly converted Arrernte Christian associates, along with the German missionaries, decided that this internecine violence indicated there was a corruption at the heart of Arrernte culture and that this needed replacing with the Christian alternative.

The Lutherans as a team were successful evangelisers, largely based upon their commitment to a consistent language policy. Latz reports that “in April 1888 seventeen more locals were baptised, six of whom were children. Kempe, prolific as ever, had his Aranda [sic] primer printed in Adelaide, giving the Mission’s students something to read in their own language.”\textsuperscript{404} Moses Tjalkabota was one of the success stories of this period. He was baptised as a youth in 1890 and went on to become a lifelong Lutheran evangelist. However, disharmony and the death of Kempe’s child and then of his wife soon after the birth of their child led to the formal abandonment of the Mission by the pastors. After Kempe left in 1891 only three lay missionaries remained at Ntaria to oversee the secular operation of the Mission. Latz concludes: “What Kempe managed to do in the short thirteen and a half years that he spent in Central Australia is astonishing. Apart from playing a direct role in setting up the infrastructure of the settlement, and are also conducting his priestly duties, he produced a considerable number of scientific and translated documents.”\textsuperscript{405} He was to be followed, after a two-year break, by another outstanding Lutheran, but a man with a different character and theology of Mission.

5.2.2 Lutheran Mission Phase 2: Ethnography or Mission?

Carl Strehlow’s time as senior pastor at Hermannsburg (1894–1922) had a powerful and lasting effect on Western Arrernte people. Strehlow was a thoroughly German missionary intent upon bringing the Lutheran faith to the Arrernte and Luritja. Through his great expertise as a linguist he quickly improved the existing translations of the gospel into


\textsuperscript{403} Kimber suggests that between 500 and 1,000 Aboriginal people were murdered by police and pastoralists during the most violent period between 1881 and 1891. In Frances Coughlan, “Aboriginal Town Camps and Tangentyere Council: The Battle for Self-Determination in Alice Springs” (Thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Arts, La Trobe University, Melbourne, 1991), 26.

\textsuperscript{404} Latz, \textit{Blind Moses}, 43.

\textsuperscript{405} Latz, \textit{Blind Moses}, 55.
Arrernte, thus promoting his evangelical agenda. He was also an erudite humanist, and responding to encouragement from Baron Moritz von Leonhardi,406 he began to undertake a wide-ranging ethnography of the Arrernte and Luritja people. To pursue the collision metaphor, two consequences of Strehlow’s dual program appear. First, it was Strehlow himself who, noticing that he was standing on a knife’s edge, recalibrated his roles as both an evangelist and an ethnographer and modified some of his early more interventionist evangelising approach.407 Second, his wisdom and intelligence allowed him to pursue a policy that to a degree cushioned the impact of the colliding worlds. Through his frequent meetings with senior men, where he sought out the finest nuances of Arrernte and Luritja languages, he developed a growing appreciation of the richness and integrity of the Arrernte “religion”, as Strehlow called it, thus leading him to restrict the severity of the impact of the Mission, for example by protecting the Manangananga cave from trespass.408 In this way he fostered among his Arrernte friends an enhanced sense of their self-worth and thus gave them a protective capacity that equipped them to resist the most damaging consequences of contact.

Strehlow began his initial missionary training at Neuendettelsau in Germany. Here he was introduced to German humanism. Kenny notes “that at the turn of the century the discussion in Lutheran theological mission circles on how to accommodate different religions became increasingly explicit”.409 This was a significant change from the earlier Harms/Hermannsburg theology of mission. Kenny explains the Neuendettelsau style:

The German Lutheran linguistic tradition … heavily influenced the seminary’s approach towards indigenous peoples. It went without saying that the knowledge of indigenous vernaculars was the prerequisite for successful mission work. Thus, potential missionaries were encouraged, through linguistic work, to learn about other people’s cultures. The serious study of indigenous languages lead [sic] some missionaries towards an interest in the Weltanschauung and mythology of a particular people.410

407 Latz, Blind Moses, 105.
408 Hill, Broken Song, 135.
409 Kenny, The Aranda’s Pepa, 80.
410 Kenny, The Aranda’s Pepa, 81, 82.
A major influence on Neuendettelsau was Dr Gustav Warneck, Professor at the Halle University. According to Kenny, Warneck’s approach was that “all humans in all times, climates and cultures had religion and language … He maintained that since there were no peoples in the world that were speechless, there also could be no people that were without religion.” He even held that there was “universality of a spiritual propensity to Christianity”. Strehlow’s ethnography revealed to him convincingly that the Arrernte and Luritja possessed religion. Therefore, he felt justified in assisting in the pursuit of the propensity to Christianity. However, Kenny goes on to point out that even with this propensity “it was never necessary to destroy a culture in order for its people to become Christian converts”.

Strehlow found him positioned precariously between his Lutheran missionary responsibilities and his ethnographic investigations. As Kenny notes, he was confronted with “a pietistic parochialism and anti-intellectualism that could have been his undoing”. He came and learned Arrernte in order to evangelise in Arrernte and bring Christ to the “heathens”. But through his emerging familiarity with Arrernte and his theology of mission, along with stimulating correspondence with Baron von Leonhardi, he began to understand the innate religious character of Altyerre. Kenny summarises it well:

Carl Strehlow was a scholar, with a positive and intimate appreciation of the ancient biblical and classical worlds which were older and different to his own; in Australia he came in contact with another different world, which seemed to him in some ways analogous to these remote worlds. This new world opened itself up to him through his intensive study of its languages and his personal interest in myth and song, and allowed him to enter the world of Aboriginal mythology which gave him a glimpse of the worldviews of the Aranda and Loritja.

412 Kenny, The Aranda’s Pepa, 90.
413 Kenny, The Aranda’s Pepa, 91.
415 Kenny, The Aranda’s Pepa, 94.
416 Kenny, The Aranda’s Pepa, 2. Carl Strehlow began his monumental ethnography Die Aranda- und Loritja-Stämme in Zentral-Australien, as a result of prompting and encouragement from Baron Moritz von Leonhardi, a German intellectual with interests in philosophy and anthropology.
417 Kenny, The Aranda’s Pepa, 93.
Barry Hill in *Broken Song* argues that Strehlow travelled an inculturating pathway in his approach to mission:

Pastor Carl Strehlow had begun by preaching against native belief, but as his ethnographic studies continued, he drew back from such militancy. He had, as his son was to write, a “deep respect for aboriginal [sic] culture and for the creative aboriginal mind,” so much so that “the sacred cave at Manangananga, two miles from Hermannsburg, was never permitted by him to be violated\(^\text{419}\) by any white intruders. When he visited it himself, he came as an honoured guest,” invited by Loatjira.\(^\text{420}\) His father’s [Carl’s] regime, [Ted] Strehlow was suggesting, was “stern” and with “strict discipline”, and yet by a strange process of respectful intimacy it was fostering a kind of quiet coexistence with the pagan culture.\(^\text{421}\)

Carl Strehlow’s work on rendering Christian ritual\(^\text{422}\) and belief available to the *Western Arrernte* and his collaborative work with Aboriginal consultants on translating the Bible attest to his missionary stature. But while he refrained from attending *Arrernte* ceremonies, lest he give the impression he endorsed them, he made a most detailed study of many *Arrernte* and *Luritja* myths and treated them sympathetically, making them available to the Western world. Strehlow was limited by the work of his more pietistic Lutheran predecessors – indeed he felt the need to correct them in regard to their understanding of *Altjira (Altyerre)*. Strehlow came to respect the sincerity and sense of mystery that the *Arrernte* and *Luritja*...

\(^{418}\) Inculturation, sometimes described as contextualisation, is a two-way process whereby Christian missionaries working with indigenous non-Christian cultures and peoples frame their message in a culturally sensitive manner so that both the Christian message and the culture being addressed are modified. Bevans and Schroeder describe inculturation as “dialogue with the context in which the gospel is to be preached or the Christian life interpreted, and to listen and discern how best to connect the unchanging aspects of Christian faith with the changing and challenging aspects of a particular experience, culture, social location or social changes in a specific place or with a specific people.” Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, New York, 2009), 387. This topic is dealt with in greater detail in Chapter 11 below.

\(^{419}\) Many years later in 1930 his successor, F.W. Albrecht, deliberately led a party of non-*Arrernte* people to Manangananga in order to demonstrate that its mythical power over *Arrernte* people had been broken. Hill, *Broken Song*, 135. Also described in Henson, *A Straight-out man*, 53, 54.

\(^{420}\) Loatjira was one of Carl Strehlow’s most significant informants. He remained unbaptised until very shortly before his death.

\(^{421}\) Hill, *Broken Song*, 75. \(^{422}\) The Lutherans relied on music, especially German hymns translated into *Arrernte*. The Presbyterian Mission at Ernabella translated English hymns into *Pitjantjatjara*. At Santa Teresa, according to Therese Ryder, personal communication January 17, 2018, the *Arrernte* learnt Latin hymns.
men possessed for their *Altyerre/Tjukurpa*.

In the end it seemed almost inevitable that, according to his son Ted, Strehlow may have had a final crisis of his Christian faith. As he lay dying in a dark room of a travellers’ hotel on the sandy bank of the Finke River at Horseshoe Bend, his wife Frieda sought to console him by singing one of his favourite Lutheran hymns. According to Ted his father cried in anguish: “Stop Frieda, God doesn’t help.”

Perhaps Strehlow had come to question the idea of an interventionist God. If so, he had anticipated a thesis in modern Christian theology based on an ancient dilemma proposed by Job.

Perhaps also he was questioning the very nature of Lutheran Mission and his role in it.

Carl Strehlow’s understanding of *Arrernte* led him to understand that “the Aranda [sic] were part of the universal plurality of one humanity”.

Contrary to the belief of Spencer and Gillen, they were not doomed to extinction. Strehlow’s final word on the topic was published on December 7, 1921 in Adelaide’s newspaper, *The Register*:

If you see in the present type of the aborigines the missing link, you require 11 more links from the present type of the aborigine [sic] to the common ancestor of man and ape, because the greatest difference between an ape and an aborigine is not the bodily structure, but the wonderfully structured language of the aborigines, and their religious beliefs.

It is even possible that Carl Strehlow came to identify their religious convictions as his own. Certainly, his son T.H. Strehlow, in the concluding pages of *Journey to Horseshoe Bend*, suggests sentiments about the links between this world and Eternity, and how his father may have thought about it, that sit much more comfortably within an *Altyerre* framework of

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423 It is important to recognise that all of Carl Strehlow’s informants were men. He was only able to provide an insight into *Altyerre* from a male perspective. His ethnography did contain some information relating to the views of women which was researched by his wife Frieda; see Kenny, *The Aranda’s Pepa*, 44.

424 Hill, *Broken Song*, 93.

425 Ted Strehlow includes an analysis of Job in relation to his father’s travails in the text of *Journey to Horseshoe Bend*, 140–43. In Ted Strehlow’s representation of his father’s anguish he transforms the focus from the suffering of an individual to the self-righteousness of the same individual in his judgments of others and thus throws a light on the reason and justification of mission.


Eternity than within a traditional Christian understanding of Heaven as another place or state.\textsuperscript{428}

5.2.3 Lutheran Mission Phase 3: Finding a Place in Australian Society

The unexpected death of Carl Strehlow in 1922 led to another hiatus in leadership at Hermannsburg Mission. It was to be another two years until his position was filled by F.W. Albrecht. Albrecht was an alumnus of Hermannsburg seminary in Germany, came from humble stock, and was more inclined to its pietistic traditions than his predecessor. Born in 1894, the same year that Carl Strehlow arrived as a 22-year-old at Hermannsburg, he had been engaged in World War I as a medical orderly in the German Army and knew suffering firsthand. Additionally, he was a German, Russian-speaking Pole, the eldest of ten children whose father was a farmer. His personal theology of mission was closer to that of Harms, Kempe, Schwarz and Schulze than to that of his immediate predecessor.

Carl Strehlow was mightily missed because he had become the white \textit{ingkarte}\textsuperscript{429}/ceremonial leader at Hermannsburg. For more than thirty years Albrecht adjusted into his shoes, but for different reasons and with a different result. Albrecht consolidated the model of self-sufficiency that was the distinctive approach of the Lutheran missionaries. He was a master of languages and an indefatigable communicator. He was a warm man with great evangelising energy and effectiveness but, despite his knowledge of Arrernte, he emerged from his long service with less confidence in the capacity of Altyerre to sustain the Arrernte into modernity. His son Paul, later also a Lutheran pastor, commented on his father respectfully: “Although he held a deep respect for Aboriginal spirituality, he could find no way to reconcile traditional religion with Christian faith.”\textsuperscript{430}

Albrecht worked in a time when periodic droughts, encroachment by neighbouring pastoralists, general community enmity towards Germans in World War II and continuing

\textsuperscript{428} This is powerfully portrayed in the closing paragraphs of Strehlow’s \textit{Journey to Horseshoe Bend}, 288–90.

\textsuperscript{429} \textit{Inkata} (\textit{ingkarte}) is the Western Arrernte spelling for \textit{ngkarte}. The Central and Eastern Arrernte word \textit{ngkarte} has several meanings. Often is it used for God but also for ceremonial leader, traditional healer (similar to \textit{ngangkere}) or priest or simply boss. The \textit{Eastern and Central Arrernte Dictionary} (493) says: “Some older people do not accept this as a traditional \textit{Arrernte} word. They say it was first brought into use by early missionaries.”

communal health crises all threatened the survival of the community at Hermannsburg. He met each challenge stoically. Limited water meant death through scurvy because the Mission depended on growing its own fresh food and vegetables. A solution presented itself in the constant supply of water at the Kaporilja Springs, but these were 5 miles away and on the other side of the Finke River. Building a pipeline from Kaporilja to Hermannsburg in 1936 was a major feat of engineering. It was to manage this project that Arthur Latz was recalled to the Mission. The Arrernte, however, had no cultural preparation for this sort of commitment. It many years before the Arrernte understood the Protestant work ethic.

Carl Strehlow was originally convinced that the only way to ensure the physical survival of the Western Arrernte was for them to convert to Christianity.431 To the practically minded Albrecht it appeared impossible to distinguish the work of civilising from the task of Christianising. Indeed in 1930, after a serious attack on one individual, where he was stabbed in the thigh to the extent that it appeared he would bleed to death, Albrecht decided that “The time had come to put God’s word before tribal law” and he set upon a plan to desacralise the Manangananga Spring,432 perhaps the most sacred ceremonial centre close to Hermannsburg/Ntaria, by leading a party of women and children into this secret, sacred ground.433 For Albrecht, to civilise the Arrernte was to do God’s work.

While the primary form of Lutheran evangelisation was with the children, from its inception the Hermannsburg missionaries sought to convert, and were successful in converting, a number of young adults to Christianity, including Moses Tjalkabota. Experiencing the impact of the arrival of white settlers first hand, and the disruption of the routine of a hunting and gathering lifestyle, Tjalkabota came to the judgment that the sedentary, compressed new lifestyle was dangerous and destructive of Arrernte survival, allowing elements of Arrernte culture to be distorted in this foreign environment, and so he felt the Arrernte had no alternative but to convert to Lutheranism. Tjalkabota was to become Albrecht’s greatest ally.

Albrecht’s understanding of mission was not as severe and uncompromising as that of Harms and the first Lutheran missionaries. But, despite his undoubted skill in Arrernte, he did not

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431 Latz, Blind Moses, 105.
432 Carl Strehlow had previously honoured the sacredness of this nearby Altyerre site and only ever visited it in the company of Loatjira, the senior owner of the myth for the site. Strehlow never allowed any other Europeans to enter the vicinity.
433 Hill, Broken Song, 135.
engage in a deep study of *Altyerre* and came to the conclusion that the expressions of *Altyerre* in the recourse to violence through payback, the apparent reluctance of *Arrernte* to operate under the moral guidance of Christian charity rather than the rules of kinship obligation, and their sexual habits and marriage rules, were making it impossible for the *Arrernte* to adapt to a modern world. Tjalkabota supported Albrecht. So, Albrecht offered the *Western Arrernte* an alternative – turn your back on modernity and live a life virtually unchanged in the bush or make major changes to lifestyle. This became a theology of mission in practice. Albrecht was morally supported by none other than T.G.H. Strehlow, whose conclusion from his study of *Arrernte* ceremonial life was that it was doomed as *tjurunga (atywerrenge)*/totemic objects were surrendered to him and ceremony was discontinued. The alliance of T.G.H. Strehlow, Albrecht and Tjalkabota was to be a formidable one.

By the 1930s the situation for Aboriginal people in Central Australia was parlous, with many experts and locals believing that they were doomed unless significant policy changes were made. A.P. Elkin, the most senior anthropologist working in remote Australia, and an Anglican priest, held the view that missions like Hermannsburg, despite their efforts to save the Aborigines from illness, starvation, depredation and destruction, were actually contributing to the disintegration of the capacity of Aborigines to survive. Elkin’s hope was that the *Arrernte* would not lose their affiliation with *Altyerre*, while Albrecht was sure that such was their inevitable fate. Thinking that the Mission was destructive of *Altyerre*, Elkin believed “much mission work to be damaging to Aboriginal welfare and a failure”,434 because it directly undermined attachment to *Altyerre*. He also thought that the missionaries were being “duped by the outward appearances of ‘the young fellow advancing along the path, and in his heart getting further and further away from the white man’s doctrines and way of life’.”435 Nevertheless, the Lutherans at Hermannsburg continued to advance a policy of limiting, and in some cases directly opposing, ancient *Arrernte* religious and cultural practices.436

434 Hill, *Broken Song*, 287.
436 T.G.H. Strehlow, however, directly sponsored the convocation of *Arrernte* men for the purpose of conducting ceremonies in totemic country. These gatherings, nonetheless, were for the purpose of recording the ceremonies on film and audio tape and for their scientific study and deposit in safe keeping and were seen by Strehlow as the last ever performance of these rites. Since he had also accepted thousands of *atywerrenge*/totemic objects, along with these recordings, Strehlow believed he was to take over as the keeper of the ancient tradition that was now forever lost.
Paul Albrecht summarised his father’s impact on the *Western Arrernte*: “[T]he Hermannsburg Christians affirmed the theological tenets of their faith [learned from F.W. Albrecht] but quietly retained ritual practices relevant to their continuing tribal and social existence.” In practice they refuted T.G.H. Strehlow’s assumptions that the *Altyerre* was dying and Albrecht’s belief that Christian faith was the only path to a secure future.

It was not simply religious difference that lay at the heart of the challenge confronting both the *Western Arrernte* and the Lutherans at Hermannsburg. Cultural differences, and the fact that the *Western Arrernte* occupied a territory desired by non-Indigenous pastoralists, led to a situation where the *Western Arrernte*’s choices were severely limited and they were compelled to choose between being hunted and possibly exterminated by their white neighbours, or perhaps worse, living in a confined space and suffering disease and social decay, while managing to survive physically. Indeed, in the end the Lutherans and some *Western Arrernte* initially, and most *Western Arrernte* eventually, decided that a compromise with Christianity was both inevitable and salutary.

In summary, across the three periods leading up to the 1950s, Lutheranism at Hermannsburg was pietistic and at the same time sensitive to *Arrernte* culture. It was simultaneously both evangelistic and respectful of the underlying religiosity of the *Western Arrernte*. Lutheranism was not forced on the *Western Arrernte*, but conversion might have appeared to have been a *sine qua non* by them. The Lutheran missionaries were dedicated to the well-being of the *Western Arrernte* and *Luritja* people at Hermannsburg/Ntaria. They protected them from outside enemies, from government authority’s intent upon taking children of mixed descent from their mothers, and as far as possible from starvation, drought and disease. The missionaries were the same people who collected and wrote down the *Western Arrernte* and *Luritja* mythology while they consulted the *Western Arrernte* elders in their efforts to effectively render the Good News in their language. There was much that they shared and much that was different, while a mutually respectful life grew out of shared – in many cases – desperate situations. All the while the *Western Arrernte*, with their capacity to make meaning out of the world that surrounded them, continued to make sense out of the arrival of these...

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strangers and imagine a world where they retained agency, even when the very opposite appeared to be the case.\textsuperscript{438}

5.3 The Impact of Anthropology: Debate and Confusion

Jenny Green argued, as noted in Part One, that the work of some anthropologists in translating \textit{Altyerre} as God could be construed as part of a process whereby the \textit{Arrernte} were assaulted through the usurpation of their language. From the start \textit{Altyerre} stood at the centre of the dispute between Carl Strehlow’s linguistic, cultural approach on the one hand and Spencer and Gillen’s evolutionary biological approach on the other, in which the \textit{Arrernte} world-view would become the battleground.

The publication of Spencer and Gillen’s books, \textit{The Northern Tribes of Central Australia}\textsuperscript{439} and \textit{The Native Tribes of The Northern Territory of Australia}\textsuperscript{440} at the turn of the 20th century, led to the primacy of an anthropology based on Spencer’s evolutionary approach and his judgment that the \textit{Arrernte} were a dying race. Meanwhile, Carl Strehlow’s work, containing a broader, humanistic, more sympathetic understanding of the cultural strengths of the \textit{Arrernte}, was deliberately marginalised by Spencer and confined to a very limited audience. Strehlow’s seven-volume ethnology, \textit{Die Aranda- und Loritja-Stämme in Zentral-Australien}, although reviewed in German and British academic journals, was much less well known. If Carl Strehlow’s work had been read by a wider audience it is possible that a richer understanding of \textit{Arrernte} culture would have been achieved and their culture better protected.

Strehlow’s ethnology was overpowered by a combination of factors. First, being written in German it was not readily available for other ethnologists of the time.\textsuperscript{441} Second, the field of ethnology was in thrall to Spencer’s and Gillen’s evolutionary understanding of indigenous cultural expression. Strehlow was a product of the Later Enlightenment and Early Romanticist traditions in Germany which had been developed by thinkers such as “Johann Gottfried Herder in his interaction with Immanuel Kant and the von Humbolt brothers.

\textsuperscript{438} See Austin-Broos, \textit{Arrernte Present, Arrernte Past}, 30, 31.
\textsuperscript{439} Spencer and Gillen, \textit{The Northern Tribes of Central Australia} (London: Macmillan, 1904).
\textsuperscript{440} Spencer and Gillen, \textit{The Native Tribes of the Northern Territory of Australia} (London: Macmillan, 1914).
\textsuperscript{441} The ethnology was recently republished, still in German only. https://www.amazon.de/Aranda-Loritja-St%C3%A4mme-Zentral-Australien-Freiherr-Leonhardi/dp/3959401930 (accessed February 7, 2018).
Alexander and Wilhelm”, concentrating on “philology, languages, literature and art traditions” which was largely ignored by the British ethnologists at the time. Indeed, Spencer sought deliberately to undermine Strehlow’s work. Third, anthropology was not fully developed as an independent academic discipline and lacked a theoretical foundation. Strehlow was intuitively breaking new ground – as were Spencer and Gillen. As a result of these factors there was no agreed framework to refer to for clarification.

5.4 The Impact of Government Policy: Protection by Separation

From 1788 across Australia, after a brief period where colonial administrations sought to deal equitably with the Aboriginal people, fairness had been displaced by what Stanner famously called “the Great Australian Silence”. Stanner describes relations on the frontier in New South Wales as being based on “indifference” as the settlers came to recognise that they did not need the Aborigines. As time went on indifference turned to hostility. Stanner describes his own experience of the hostile nature of the relationship between Aborigines and newcomers during the Tennant Creek Gold Rush of 1934, where he felt the need to carry a loaded rifle for protection. The Tennant Creek miners decided that they did not need the Warramunga and actively sought to disperse them so they could prospect without disturbance. Pastoralism was much more pervasive than mining and soon it became obvious that “a hunting and pastoral economy cannot co-exist within the same bounds”. The result was the complete marginalisation of Aborigines across the continent from the social and economic life of the settlers. Stanner’s conclusion was that in the minds of European Australians the dispossession was somehow justified, because “the white man did the black man very little wilful harm and the rest was inevitable”.

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443 Latz, Blind Moses, 111.
444 Stanner, The Dreaming, 182.
446 During John McDouall Stuart’s fourth attempt to cross the continent from south to north the Warramunga confronted his party at Attack Creek, north of Tennant Creek, on June 25, 1860. Stuart was forced to turn back.
447 Stanner, The Dreaming, 180
448 Stanner, The Dreaming, 186.
449 Stanner, The Dreaming, 186.
Following Stuart’s eventual crossing of the continent, the Colony of South Australia established a distribution of the land through the granting of pastoral leases. The first pastoral leases were granted in Alice Springs in 1872. The widely accepted implicit doctrine of *terra nullius* completely dispossessed Aboriginal peoples of any legal claims to land. “Between 1872 and 1912 over 2,200 lease registrations” were taken out in the Northern Territory as Aborigines were pushed off any land that appeared to be of value to the white settlers.

The country was not as rich as Stuart’s reports had suggested. The climate was prone to drought and flood, markets were far away, transport was unavailable or exorbitantly expensive, and pests soon began to ravage productivity. The pastoralists’ introduction of European animal species and intense over-grazing of pasture soon diminished the productivity of the land, arguably causing the desertification of the country. Only a few pastoralists managed to make a reasonable living. A contest over land, at least notionally never ceded by the *Arrernte*, was inevitable. By 1901 the South Australian government, faced with the costly consequences of these conflicting forces, was seeking to transfer responsibility for the Northern Territory to the newly constituted Commonwealth of Australia. In 1911 the transfer of responsibility was completed, but the problems of how to “protect” the displaced Aborigines of the Northern Territory remained unresolved.

Jamie Dalziel makes it clear that while the interests of Aborigines living on pastoral stations were informally “protected”, it was only those Aborigines who were deemed useful to the pastoralists, by engaging in work on the stations, that were considered, and consequently many were forced off their lands. This policy was based on a report written by Baldwin Spencer, who remained attached to his view that the Aboriginal people were destined to die out. In 1923, just before his death, when he visited Hermannsburg, Spencer was apparently annoyed at the apparent success of the Mission, even to the point of denigrating its work and advocating the replacement of the Lutherans by the Salvation Army. Spencer remained

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452 T.G.H. Strehlow underlines the primitive living conditions on Centralian pastoral leases along the Finke River valley in his book *Journey to Horseshoe Bend*.
convinced that in the contest over land the Aborigines were sure to be the losers, and recognizing their attachment to land, he saw this as the final blow to their survival. It was his ethnology that convinced him of this conclusion. And so paradoxically, the express interests of the Aborigines of the Centre were consistently denied and they were in dire need of protection if the predictions of this powerful evolutionist ethnologist were not to be fulfilled and the Arrernte and their culture were to survive. Finally, the remnant tribes were confined to reserves on land not considered to have pastoral potential. In looking back at the period Stanner says, “The great wrecker had been the pastoral industry” and the absence of a legal framework that protected the rights of the Indigenous owners of the land.455

Frances Coughlan argues that as a result of the encroachment of pastoralism across the Centre, Aboriginal people were forced into towns, particularly Alice Springs. By the end of 1911, when Baldwin Spencer became the Northern Territory’s Chief Protector of Aborigines, a new policy of Protection was introduced. Spencer’s strategy was to gather the Aboriginal men into squads of cheap labour and to place the women and children directly in his care as Protector. He also planned for removing children of mixed heritage from their mothers and placing them in institutions.456 This was not a policy of assimilation but of absorption. It was expected and hoped that the colour of the Aborigines would eventually disappear as they continuously intermarried with non-Indigenous spouses. And there was an expectation that the progeny of these associations would make an extensive working-class population upon whom the white bosses could rely and prosper.457

When Spencer’s policy was adopted there were perhaps thirty white settlers in Alice Springs and probably 400 Arrernte people forced to live in shanties on the margins of the town. However, the non-Indigenous townspeople resented their presence and from “1928 until 1964 the town area was a prohibited area for Aboriginal people, and on at least four occasions town campers were physically rounded up and shifted away, in 1928 to Hermannsburg, in 1940 to Jay Creek, in 1942 to Arltunga, and in 1960 to Amoonguna”.458

455 Stanner, The Dreaming, 197.
World War I had an impact on government policy for Aborigines in the Centre because it was widely suggested that the Germans were a threat to the British war effort and Hermannsburg Mission should be closed down. Hill reports that the culmination of this distrust was the loss of government subsidies for rations at Hermannsburg from 1917 to 1923. This placed enormous strain on the operation of the Mission, which was caring for elderly and sick adults and many children of workers on pastoral properties in the region. Additionally, Pintubi, Pitjantjatjara, Luritja and Warlpiri refugees, from the expropriation of Aboriginal land by pastoralists moving ever westward, had sought safety in Hermannsburg, adding a heavy load on the meagre resources of the Mission.

Dr Cecil Cook, appointed Chief Protector for the Territory in 1927, noted that rather than dying out, the population of Aborigines had begun to rise. Many of these new births were children of mixed descent. Cook sought a new solution of “to breed the colour out” by advocating and supporting marriage of Aboriginal women with white men. Cook’s policy of “biological absorption” established the foundation of the Assimilation Policy that emerged over the next ten years.

The Bleakley Report of 1928 found that conditions for Aborigines in the Northern Territory were deplorable and so a new set of policies was introduced. Bleakley “was impressed with the work of the church missions” and recommended an increased role for church-run missions, particularly in regard to “half-caste” children.

In 1939 John McEwen, Deputy Prime Minister, introduced a New Deal policy which explicitly connected the missions with assimilation. The National Archive summary bears quoting in full:

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459 The Mission received a subsidy from the Commonwealth government for this service.
460 Hill, Broken Song, 82. T.G.H. Strehlow reports similarly in Journey to Horseshoe Bend, 17.
464 “Half-caste” was a term of the day and even today many Arrernte people use it. A wider more commonly used term is mixed-descent.
465 At this time, the Federal Government had jurisdiction of Aborigines only in the NT, since this power had been reserved in the Constitution for the States.
The aim of McEwen’s policy was to raise the status of Aboriginal people so that they could qualify for the privileges and responsibilities of full citizenship. In addition, he wanted to meet their immediate physical needs and deal with health issues; to supply education and training for useful community services; and to promote civic and religious instruction. The church missions would play an integral role in the policy of assimilation.\(^{466}\)

The next blow to the *Mparntwe Arrernte* occurred during World War II when large numbers of Australian and American troops arrived in Alice Springs to defend the nation and, as a consequence, the Little Flower Mission\(^{467}\) was forced to move to Arltunga in 1942.

The following chapters will demonstrate the effects of this explicit assimilation policy on the *Arrernte* and their culture. Under both the Bleakley recommendations and the new McEwen policy there emerged a contract between the governments of the day and the Christian missions across the Northern Territory.\(^{468}\) All the missions conducted by various denominations, with the exception of Hermannsburg from 1917 to 1923, were invited to participate in the implementation of the assimilation policy and all received financial assistance for the upkeep of existing works and the establishment of new missions. In some cases, as at Croker Island\(^{469}\) and Garden Point on Melville Island,\(^{470}\) these missions were established specifically for the care of children of mixed descent.

### 5.5 Conclusion: Imagining a Better World

Four forces – Invasion by outsiders, ethnology/anthropology, the missionary projects, and colonial administration – combined to produce a bushfire that threatened to destroy the *Arrernte*.

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\(^{467}\) O’Grady, *Francis of Central Australia*, 23. Little Flower Mission was the name given to the *Arrernte* mission in Alice Springs by Fr Paddy Moloney in 1935. The name remained Little Flower when it was relocated to Arltunga in 1942 but was renamed Santa Teresa Mission at *Lyentye Apurte*. Both names recall the same person, a French Saint, Therese of Lisieux.

\(^{468}\) Henson, *A Straight-out Man*, 175. F.W. Albrecht was pleased with this government change of heart, which he had been advocating for many years.


people and their culture in the years from the first European settlement up to 1942. Apart from the relative safety of Hermannsburg, where they were to a degree quarantined, the proud Arrernte were reduced to a diminishing band of survivors living on cattle stations, near mining settlements, or on the fringes of small towns. In Alice Springs the marginalisation was legalised and the Mparntwe Arrernte were formally excluded from white society, with little capacity to engage in the white economy except to carry out the most menial of tasks.471

The unrestrained forces of the modern, industrial, self-righteous world with its capacity to reach out technologically and conquer space and collapse time, began to slide into an uncontrolled collision with an ancient world content in the abundance of its unfettered natural environment and its abiding vision of eternity. The response of the Arrernte to this multi-faceted invasion has been astutely analysed by Diane Austin-Broos in her book Arrernte Present, Arrernte Past. The Arrernte were not powerless in the face of the onslaught but were to have recourse to the deep reserves of their imaginary to fashion an effective reply. She concludes: “Their cumulative effect on Indigenous Central Australians has been searing; one of the world’s great object lessons in forms of violence visited on a Fourth World people in the wake of an Invasion by industrialised Europeans.”472 Yet, as she demonstrates from her fieldwork at Hermannsburg, the Arrernte were able to develop their own distinct social imaginary and incorporate the Invasion into their place-based philosophy of Altyerre.

472 Dianne Austin-Broos, Arrernte Present, Arrernte Past.
4. Austin-Broos uses the powerful analytical tools of ‘homology’ and ‘ellipsis’ to analyse this survival technique of the Western Arrernte.
Chapter 6: The Catholic Mission to the *Eastern* and *Mparntwe Arrernte*

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how the *Arrernte* re-imagined their culture and the role the Catholic Mission played in that reconstruction. This re-imagining is the result of a unique frontier experience whereby the *Mparntwe Arrernte*, confronted by Invasion and succoured by Mission, constructed for themselves a world-view based on an interactive combination of ancient *Altyerre* and early 20th-century Catholicism.

In 1929 the construction of the Ghan Railway\(^{473}\) ended the isolation of Alice Springs and the Centre. This connection to the outside world was to change the character of the small town and re-set the relationship between the Indigenous inhabitants and the settlers. In the Catholic context until that year there was no priest, no church and just a few non-Indigenous Catholics living in the small town of Alice Springs.\(^{474}\) The Catholic Church’s official presence in Alice Springs commenced in 1929, just one year after the government legislated that the township of Alice Springs was a prohibited area\(^{475}\) and no Aboriginal person was permitted to reside in the town area after dark.

In his history of the Santa Teresa Mission, Br John Pye MSC includes a sample of the early letters of Fr James Long MSC, the first parish priest appointed to Alice Springs. Written in 1929 and 1930, the letters make only one reference to Aborigines – a request by Long to his Provincial to send an MSC Brother who would be physically a big man to protect him on his pastoral travels from the Aborigines, “who are treacherous”.\(^{476}\) Race relations in Alice Springs in the mid-1930s were fraught, which probably explains why it took six years before the Catholic Church made a concerted effort to reach out to the *Arrernte* residents of the town. In 1935 the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart appointed a new parish priest, Fr Patrick Moloney, with orders to establish a mission to the Aborigines. Moloney was soon joined by

\(^{473}\) Originally called the *Afghan Express*, today *The Ghan* commemorates the work of the Afghan cameleers who provided the first transport link between the Centre and South Australia.

\(^{474}\) Pye, *Santa Teresa and East Aranda History*, 4.

\(^{475}\) Central Land Council, “A Colonial Chronology of Alice Springs”.

\(^{476}\) Pye, *Santa Teresa and East Aranda History*, 76. Published in 1988, this sentiment indicates how tenacious the idea of the collapse of *Altyerre* was amongst both missionaries and secular authorities.
Frank McGarry, a layman from Sydney, who was to become the man in charge of the Little Flower Mission’s outreach program over the next ten years. Moloney reports that McGarry, when he sought to set up a medical centre in the presbytery precinct, was threatened with arrest by the town’s Catholic police officer for infringing the law that had made the town a restricted area for Aborigines. Moloney, according to Pye, explained that this was because of “the deep rooted feeling against Blacks”.\(^{477}\)

The Mission went through a series of stages. At first, in 1935 it was located at Charles Creek/Anthelke Ulpaye\(^{478}\) on the edge of Alice Springs outside the gazetted restricted boundary, to be relocated in 1942 to Arltunga, 100 kilometres to the east of Alice, then relocated in 1953 to Santa Teresa, 80 kilometres to the south-east. In the 1970s and 1980s some of the Mparntwe population, which had survived and grown in the first three periods of mission, were to return to Alice Springs while the bulk of the Catholic Arrernte population remained in Santa Teresa/Ltyentye Aruttu. This chapter provides an account of the development of the unique Mparntwe Arrernte form of Catholicism that emerged through this process.

### 6.2 Catholic Theologies of Mission

According to Francis Anekwe Oborji’s history of Catholic missiology, the theology of mission that would have guided the missionaries in Alice Springs was developed in the first decades of the 20th century at the University of Münster. Oborji quotes Schmidlin, who describes Catholic mission as “the commission which issued from God the Father, in the fullness of time, and was given to His Apostles and His church by Christ Himself, on the conclusion of His life on earth – a commission to go forth and preach the Gospel to all peoples.”\(^{479}\) In the early Catholic approach, as Oborji reports, “for practical and historical

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478 Anthelke Ulpaye literally means tree-litter creek. Anthelke Ulpaye is also the name of one of the Town Camps (Housing Associations) serviced by and a member of Tangentyere Council. There are three special purpose leases with Aboriginal Housing Associations next to Anthelke Ulpaye occupying this area very close to the heart of Alice Springs right next to Anzac Hill/Anwelkenyarrliwe. A tributary of the Todd River/Lhere Artepe, the creek rarely runs except in major floods. In the dry times it fills with litter which in the earliest part of a flood forms a foaming wave as it opens up and cleans the creek bed of the flotsam of ages.

reasons, mission aims at the conversion of the non-Christian individual”. In this model baptism was the pathway for an individual’s incorporation into the Catholic Church.

It was Fr/Monsignor/Bishop Francis Xavier Gsell MSC, first appointed Apostolic administrator of the Northern Territory in 1906, who established the platform of Catholic mission in the Northern Territory. In his 2006 reflection on Gsell’s Centenary, Wilson asked why “Gsell and many other Europeans chose to go on mission on the other side of the globe?” The answer he gave was a simple one, that Gsell was responding to the direction of Jesus: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (Matthew 28:19). Missionaries are those who “urged on by the Spirit of Christ, must walk the road Christ himself walked, a way of poverty and obedience, of service and self-sacrifice …” Gsell’s decision to station himself on Bathurst Island in 1911, rather than in Darwin, is evidence of his focus on the welfare of the Aborigines in his care.

The belief in extra ecclesiam nulla salus, that outside the Church there is no salvation, may have constituted an element in Gsell’s thinking. However, as expounded by Irenaeus as early as the 2nd century, the teaching acknowledged that for those who had no knowledge of Christ salvation was still possible. Unfortunately, according to De Bethune, in some circumstances the outcome of the belief could lead to hubris where some Catholics “lived with an overriding sense of our own superiority, and that led to haughty disdain for all other religions”. This limited understanding of the double-sided character of the extra ecclesiam teaching may be the reason why Gsell, initially at least, demonstrated limited respect for the culture of Aboriginal people under his jurisdiction.
Martin Wilson points out that Gsell was a practical ethnologist and uses a quote from Gsell’s autobiography, *The Bishop with 150 Wives*, to describe his missionary style:

Fifty years ago, when I started my missionary life, anthropology was still in its infancy. If it had been developed as it is in our days, it would have been very useful to me and would have helped me to avoid many mistakes. I had to establish contact with the natives, alone, slowly, prudently; I had to endeavour, to the best of my ability, to learn gradually their habits and customs so as to penetrate into their minds and hearts without hurt or shock.\(^{486}\)

It is not clear that Gsell had studied under Schmidlin at the Münster School of Missiology,\(^{487}\) but there is certainly a coincidence of his practice and the principles laid out at Münster: “the basic argument is that the primary goal of mission is the conversion of non-Christian individuals. The Christian mission aims first and foremost at the salvation of souls (*salus animarum*).”\(^{488}\) Gsell’s practical approach was influenced by his gradual understanding of local Indigenous cultures. Wilson comments that Baldwin Spencer, now Chief Protector, came to admire Gsell’s approach:

Gsell’s elementary yet tentative anthropological approach towards first comprehending Aboriginal culture and language, in order to transform it, gained Spencer’s grudging approval. His [Spencer’s] correspondence contains numerous references to the strength of Gsell’s character and his success, as compared with [others] …\(^{489}\)

Wilson reports that the intention of Gsell’s tentative anthropology was to transform Aboriginal culture through conversion to Christianity: “I wonder if many missionaries have had as much effect on the very social structure of their people as Bishop Gsell had on the Tiwi … he undermined the social structure of Tiwi society.”\(^{490}\)

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\(^{489}\) Wilson, “Gsell Centenary, Missiological reflection”.

\(^{490}\) Wilson, “Gsell Centenary, Missiological reflection”.

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According to Regina Ganter, writing on German missionaries in Australia, Gsell’s approach came in for serious criticism from anthropologists such as Charles Hart as well as from Protestant missionaries. This criticism of Gsell’s behaviour is mitigated in Wilson’s view by his efforts to have the whole of the Tiwi Islands declared a Reserve against the intentions of the government of the day. Despite this, Gsell does not appear to have sensed the presence of the divine in Tiwi culture.

Bishop John O’Loughlin MSC succeeded Gsell in 1949. O’Loughlin was originally of the view that Aboriginal culture was not just pagan but “devilish”. Such a depiction of Aboriginal culture could be seen to justify the eradication of Aboriginal religion. Since there is a powerful relationship between language and culture the consequence of this attitude is that the continued use of Aboriginal languages came to be questioned. O’Loughlin, at least early in his episcopate, had a negative attitude towards the continuation of the use of Aboriginal languages on the Catholic missions in the Northern Territory. When he saw charts in Murrinhpatha used for catechetics on the walls of the MSC missionary office of Fr John Leary MSC at Wadeye, he ordered them removed. In her thesis based on inculturating initiatives at Wadeye, Sr Robyn Reynolds OLSH recalls, “When I worked at Wadeye as a young teacher in the late 1960s, students were forbidden to speak Murrinhpatha.” This policy was consistent with the prevailing government policy of assimilation. For O’Loughlin assimilation entailed the severing of the Murrinhpatha’s links to their ancient culture, which he saw as inimical to the inculcation of Catholicism. Nevertheless, processes were in train that would challenge and eventually change this narrow prohibition.

Leary, responding to the refreshing winds that blew through the Catholic Church after Vatican II, was open (already evidenced by the Murrinhpatha charts in his office) to exploring an inculturated approach to mission at Wadeye. The Council (1962–1965) had

493 Harmsen, “You gave us the Dreaming”, 142.
494 A view similar to Lutheran Ludwig Harms at Hermannsburg in Germany.
495 Robyn Reynolds, “Catholic Sacrament: Engaging With Wadeye Ritual” (PhD Thesis, Northern Territory University, Darwin 1999), 109. Murrinhpatha is the common or dominant clan language now spoken at Wadeye.
496 Reynolds, “Catholic Sacrament”, 109. This meeting between Leary and O’Loughlin occurred in 1959. Reynolds reports that O’Loughlin later softened his hard-line opposition to vernacular language use in the missions he administered.
promulgated *Ad Gentes* (11) which addressed Christians working in missions, directing that “they can discover ‘the seeds of the Word’ that lie hidden in their cultural heritage”\(^{497}\). In 1969 it appears that Leary began to work collaboratively on inculturation projects with Reynolds, who was appointed as a teacher at Wadeye, and Boniface Perdjert, a young *Murrinhpatha* man who was later to be the first Aboriginal deacon ordained in 1974 for the Catholic church at Wadeye. Reynolds already had a relationship with two *Murrinhpatha* young women with whom she had trained in the OLSH novitiate and were now living back in their home community. Through this team of Indigenous and non-Indigenous collaborators a form of locally grown inculturation was developing at Wadeye.

In 1975 Patrick Dodson MSC was the first Aboriginal man to be ordained a priest in Australia. As a seminarian Dodson had experienced the high energy of the 1973 Eucharistic Congress in Melbourne\(^ {498}\) where he assisted in the planning and running of a seminar for 500 Indigenous participants. *Ad Gentes* was followed by the publication in 1975 of the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of Pope Paul VI which called for “an evangelisation of human cultures in a way that takes culture with absolute seriousness; and this is why, too, evangelisation is a message ‘about life in society, about international life, peace, justice and development – a message especially energetic today about liberation’.”\(^ {499}\) Dodson was to be moved by powerful forces within the Church to be part of wide-ranging change.

In July 1976 Dodson was appointed as an Indigenous clerical representative to the Eucharistic Congress in Philadelphia, USA. After the Conference he visited the Dominican Republic, site of Christopher Columbus’ landing in the New World, and met with MSC priests working with the poor and marginalised there. Dodson came away feeling empowered and liberated. Keefe reports: “Patrick was inspired by the sense of possibility in adapting religious form and worship to blend with the economic, cultural and political realities of the people of the parish.”\(^ {500}\) He was appointed to Wadeye as assistant priest to the founder John Leary in late 1976. Soon Leary left for Daly River/Nauiyu, leaving Dodson as acting parish priest.


\(^{498}\) Kevin Keefe, *Paddy’s Road* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2003), 214.


\(^{500}\) Keefe, *Paddy’s Road*, 240.
By now Dodson’s views on inculturation had moved beyond the modifications to liturgy or iconography that characterised the situation at Wadeye. In Paddy’s Road Kevin Keefe reports him thinking that “[a]n Aboriginal liturgy was insufficient without fundamental changes in the relationships of power. It was the people who made the Church, not the priest.” Dodson threw himself into active participation in local cultural events and, partially abandoning his priestly attire, dressed in a traditional Aboriginal manner. His stated intention was a reorientation of political power in the relationship between the Church and the people. This approach was well ahead of the thinking still prevailing in the missionary Church in the Northern Territory. Perhaps Dodson had moved too fast, but certainly faster than Bishop O’Loughlin could accommodate. By 1981 the relationship between priest and bishop had broken down and Dodson abandoned priestly ministry. The disagreement between bishop and priest was recorded in successive statements printed in The Age newspaper on June 21 and 22, 1981. Here O’Loughlin says that he “had tolerated but not approved of the resurrection of pagan ways … I agree with an old man who told me that once an Aboriginal is initiated into the old ways, you can wipe him off as a true Christian and as a man who can survive successfully in the 20th century.” Dodson and O’Loughlin were worlds apart.

Enveloped in a whirlwind of change, the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart were confronting difficult problems. There is no doubt that at the grassroots considerable thought was being given by missionaries on the frontier to these apparently intractable issues as the 20th century unfolded. For example, Leary worked at Daly River/Nauiyu Mission from 1955 in an exceptionally sensitive manner. But even Leary offers an insight into problems associated with church practice:

Maybe it was a good thing I had no or very little foreknowledge of Aborigines. To be honest, I do not recall ever having previously seen one. Perhaps this was a good thing. I believe the study of anthropology in this regard can be an impersonal exercise and even become a prejudicial one. I have become convinced that nothing can replace personal contact, genuine friendship and an honest mutual sharing.

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501 Keefe, Paddy’s Road, 239.
502 Hearn, A Theology of Mission, 266. O’Loughlin is here on the same page as F.W. Albrecht in Central Australia.
Leary is right in at least one regard; it is at the level of interpersonal relationships and witness that effective mission is achieved. But this is no justification for a failure to prepare men and women for the field and runs counter to Gsell’s stated opinion that he wished he had anthropology as a tool. Despite Gsell’s views, rather than train their potential missionaries in anthropology, linguistics and contextualised missiology, the Bishop and Religious superiors consistently sent men and women with little or no experience into the mission fields. In an effort to ensure improved effectiveness on the missions, in 1977 Fr Martin Wilson MSC established Nelen Yubu Missiological Unit from Nauiyu/Daly River Mission with the aim of instituting a new missiology linked to anthropology and language. Yet it remains true that many MSC missionaries spent most of their working lives in one or many mission settlements in the Northern Territory, but were still not given sufficient initial training for their new jobs. As a result, many went into the field with fewer of the necessary intellectual tools, missiological training and practical skills than would have enabled them to respond better to the immediate needs of their charges and to foster an inspired vision for the Church of the future as offered by Vatican II.

It is clear that from the first days of Moloney and McGarry in Alice Springs at the Little Flower Mission, despite the fact that they worked with great zeal and compassion and clearly cared for the Arrernte people of Mparntwe, they worked from a limited theology of mission. In those early days conversion of the individual through baptism and the establishment of a church community were the primary goals of Mission. The Little Flower missionaries were, however, significantly constrained by their failure to entertain a coherent Arrernte language policy and their inability to consider anthropology as a guide to the already existing richness of Arrernte culture.

Peter Hearn’s analysis of the work of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart in the Northern Territory indicates that from its inception their theology of mission was limited by these two factors. The sections below will demonstrate how the politics of race in Australia brought new issues to bear on the mission to Aboriginal people. Unfortunately, even as the theological principles of Vatican II, which included “culturally sensitive communication of the gospel, and participation in dialogue with men and women of other faiths”, were

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505 Moloney’s theology of mission is consistent with Oborji’s summary.
506 Bevans, Evangelisation and Religious Freedom, location 1692.
enunciated, with a few notable exceptions the MSC missionaries failed to develop a modern and effective theology of mission.

6.3 Catholic Mission Phase 1: Little Flower at Charles Creek

Pye’s history makes no reference to Moloney’s instructions from his MSC superiors about a mission specifically to the Arrernte. O’Grady points out that the employment of Frank McGarry, who arrived later in 1935 to work with Moloney, was personally arranged by Monsignor Gsell507 and was specifically based on Gsell’s stated intention to establish a Catholic mission to Aborigines in Central Australia.508 The history shows that the local Mparntwe Arrernte in Alice Springs were not the first target of the Central Australian Catholic mission endeavour. Harmsen notes:

Initially, both Moloney and his religious superiors were of the opinion that an Aboriginal mission ought to be established well away from the township of Alice Springs … It was Moloney’s task to find an “unspoilt” group of Aborigines, on an adequate site well away from white settlements to congregate into a mission.509

This instruction is in accord with the spirit of Bishop Gsell’s transfer of his own Mission to the Tiwi islands. The history of the Catholic Mission to the Arrernte in Alice Springs demonstrates the difficulties confronting the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart and Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart510 in establishing a Mission to Aborigines in an urban setting where white settlers had the predominant power. A similar urban effort in the Northern Territory was the Jesuit Mission at Rapid Creek in Palmerston/Darwin in the 1880s, which failed within a decade.511 The Rapid Creek site was within 12 kilometres of the European

settlement at Palmerston and close to many distracting influences. Bishop O’Loughlin MSC accounts for the demise of this Mission: “they had opium and … it was a hopeless task to try to deal with them. They had very nomadic habits and the Jesuit Fathers decided that there was no future in their mission at Rapid Creek …”

It had become the agreed wisdom among both Catholic and Lutheran missionaries in Central Australia that a successful mission to the Aborigines needed to be located well away from the vices and entrapment of white settlements. Moloney and McGarry thus conducted a reconnoitre of a location called Whistleduck to the east of Tennant Creek, 500 kilometres north of Alice Springs, to see if they could identify a group of Aborigines fitting this description. After searching in vain there, and a short time later in an area west of Ti Tree, 200 kilometres north of Alice Springs, again without success, they returned to Alice Springs.

With a remote site no longer thought possible, McGarry increased the tempo of his charitable work with the indigent Arrernte who were camped on the outskirts of Alice Springs. On October 1, 1935 on the feast day of St Therese of Lisieux – also called “the Little Flower of Jesus” – while smoking cigars in the presbytery, Moloney and McGarry conceived a plan to start a mission to the Arrernte in the township of Alice Springs. The Mission soon to be developed at Charles Creek/Anthelke Ulpaye, 2 kilometres from the centre of Alice Springs and just to the north-west of Anzac Hill/Atnelkentyarliweke but outside the prohibited area, was named Little Flower. While Moloney was the priest in charge of Little Flower, McGarry was its daily driving force. The decision to commence a mission to the local Arrernte in Alice Springs was a brave one. McGarry was a truly compassionate Christian and considered his duty was clear. O’Grady, in his hagiography of McGarry, recounts the strenuous opposition of the white community to the permanent provision of services to the local Arrernte people. Because he was inviting Aborigines into the presbytery in the heart of town McGarry was threatened with arrest for breaching the restricted area law that compelled Aboriginal people

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513 Pastor F.W. Albrecht remained committed to this proposition throughout his long career.
514 Moloney was parish priest of a huge area of the Northern Territory from the South Australian border to the Barkly Tablelands around Tennant Creek.
515 O’Grady, Francis of Central Australia, 21.
516 The title of O’Grady’s book indicates the reverence the author had for the indefatigable work of his subject.
to reside outside the town’s gazetted boundary. McGarry proceeded regardless. Soon he began providing the local people with food and was teaching Catholic religious classes and reading, writing and counting to an ever-increasing number of Arrernte children on the presbytery verandah. It was Catholic (and Lutheran) thinking that the future lay in the children and that the best way to secure their life chances was through limiting the influence of their parents and culture.

Moloney’s approach to mission is well summed up in the recollections of Br Ed Bennett MSC, who had worked alongside Moloney and McGarry: “Paddy had a flexible theology based on ‘Rules are made for people not people for Rules’.” So “he put his brand on them and left the rest to providence”. Harmsen also notes Moloney’s proclivity to baptise, commenting that Moloney himself was not quite sure if mass baptism was the best way to conduct the Mission. The last word comes from Wenten Rubuntja, who was baptised in this time: “Old Father Moloney found us and baptised us. We were bludging around for lollies. We got baptised for lollies … We went along to every church and got baptised.”

Harmsen reports that Moloney “wanted to separate the children from the adults and place them in dormitories”. Indeed in 1938, soon after they arrived, the OLSH sisters opened their convent and took in non-Aboriginal, mixed-descent and Aboriginal children to live with them, a precursor to the dormitory that would later open in the next phase of the Mission when it moved to Arltunga.

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517 O’Grady, Francis of Central Australia, 25.
518 O’Grady, Francis of Central Australia, 25.
519 O’Grady, Francis of Central Australia, 24.
520 Hearn, “A Theology of Mission,” 24. When establishing the Daly River Mission in 1956 Bishop O’Loughlin stated that the Mission was set up to provide health care and a school at the request of the government and the Aboriginal people. O’Loughlin sent a similar direction to Fr Baily MSC at Santa Teresa in 1956. Hearn “A Theology of Mission,” 106.
521 Henson, A Straight-out Man, 213. A policy shared by the Lutherans at Hermannsburg under F.W. Albrecht.
522 Pye, Santa Teresa and East Aranda History, 7.
523 O’Grady, Francis of Central Australia, 24. O’Grady recounts Moloney baptising Aboriginal people on the first day of encountering them.
524 Harmsen, “You gave us the Dreaming”, 63. This policy of early baptism was exactly opposite to the Lutheran policy where baptism was withheld until the Pastor was convinced the candidate had a complete understanding of the Lutheran catechism. See also Henson, A Straight-out Man, 171.
525 Rubuntja and Green, the town grew up dancing, 58.
526 Harmsen, “You gave us the Dreaming”, 62.
Particular features characterised the early contact of the *Mparntwe Arrernte* and the early Mission venture. One was the role of rations\(^{528}\) and another was intolerance of the continuance of *Arrernte* ceremony. While McGarry was prepared to withstand the white racism opposed to his works of charity, it is arguable that he used his control over both rations\(^{529}\) and ceremonies to assist in his inculcation of the Catholic faith. It could be said that the missionaries saw their role was to save (in the sense of providing food, health care and protection from violence), to Christianise and to civilise the *Mparntwe Arrernte*. Which was of more importance – to save, civilise or Christianise – might be disputed. Wilson, in a paper written to celebrate the Gsell Centenary,\(^{530}\) notes Bishop Gsell’s view that “Religion is primary in our intention, but in a manner secondary in our practice, because we recognize that we must first civilize the blacks before we can Christianise them …”\(^{531}\) In order to promote both, McGarry consulted T.G.H. Strehlow, now a patrol officer of the Protectorate stationed at Jay Creek 50 kilometres west of Alice Springs, and they decided that McGarry should work to eliminate the continuation of ceremonies at Charles Creek.\(^{532}\)

There appears from the MSC record to be little recognition of the need to, or intention of, entering into a sincere dialogue with the *Arrernte* people. McGarry, for example, made only a limited effort to learn *Arrernte*.\(^{533}\) Since there was little apparent interest in or acceptance of the existence of any *Arrernte* religion by the missionaries, they failed to seek to establish an understanding of *Altyerre*. In a letter to his mother McGarry, after witnessing a Sugar Ant ceremony, wrote:

> There is no religion or anything I can trace as being objectionable in these bush corroborees. I feel that just as we jump about in the surf and act in elated ways from the joy we find in a lovely dip, so they act in showing their joy at this time of the year when these palatable delicacies are about.\(^{534}\)

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\(^{528}\) The Mission became an outlet for rations. Little Flower, located at Charles Creek, was very close to the adopted residence, near the Old Telegraph Station, of many *Mparntwe Arrernte*.

\(^{529}\) O'Grady, *Francis of Central Australia*, 47. O'Grady writes that on one occasion when McGarry discovered *Arrernte* men gambling, “He tore into them and refused to feed them after Mass”.

\(^{530}\) Bishop Francis Xavier Gsell MSC, the first Bishop of the Northern Territory.

\(^{531}\) Martin Wilson, “Gsell Centenary, Missiological reflection”, *Compass Theology Review* 40, 4 (2006). This was the opposite of the view held by F.W. Albrecht who saw conversion to Christianity as the basis for survival for the *Western Arrernte*. Henson, *A Straight-out Man*, 84.

\(^{532}\) O'Grady, *Francis of Central Australia*, 58.

\(^{533}\) O'Grady, *Francis of Central Australia*, 54. Bob, the senior *Arrernte* man at Charles Creek Little Flower Mission, tried to give McGarry lessons in *Arrernte*, but it appears he was a poor student.

\(^{534}\) O'Grady, *Francis of Central Australia*, 42.
It is notable that while Moloney was busy baptising *Arrernte* people it was McGarry who was doing the catechesis. The missionaries were relying on a white, single layman from Sydney, who had no formal theological training and no skill in speaking *Arrernte*, to introduce the Gospel to the *Arrernte*. McGarry was relieved of his catechetical role, however, after the OLSH Sisters arrived in 1938 and took over the school he had started.

Margaret Heffernan indicates that a rift was developing between the missionaries and the *Arrernte*. She recounts the movement into Alice Springs of her family and their association with the Little Flower Mission under Moloney. Accessing OLSH Parish historical records, she read of the role her family played in the burgeoning relationship with the Mission:

> I read that our family leadership sent my grandfather [Brandy McMillan] and his mate Tim Golder along with other senior Arrernte men to help find a way to straighten out the new church leaders. In the writings the priests said our men came to the priests because they thought that the church would know about sacred knowledge and ancient ceremonies.

Heffernan’s offers a compelling insight into the developing relationship: “The priests and missionaries started a small Catholic mission at Charles Creek to give out rations. And they started a school to teach us about their God.” Implicit in this recollection is Heffernan’s view that the *Arrernte* men were seeking parity with the man they came to call *ngkarte* Moloney. As a result, a committee of senior *Arrernte* men was formed. She continues:

> The committee tried to get the priests to understand Arrernte sacred traditions. The priests were invited to ceremonies. They gave the priests some of their sacred objects, their churingas [atywerrenge], and tried to get them to understand our ceremonies and rituals. But the priests didn’t seem to want to hear the stories or understand our ancient wisdom.

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538 *Ngkarte* was the name given to Carl Strehlow as a man of God at Hermannsburg/Ntaria and was applied to priest and pastors of all denominations as time passed.
539 Which Heffernan adds were later sold in Sydney, a fact agreed to by O'Grady in *Francis of Central Australia*.
McGarry saw that his role was to operate at the coalface in order to establish a strong relationship with the *Arrernte* people. He was the personification of the Mission, a man of remarkable charity and capacity for hard work. However, he could not tolerate some of the initiation practices and sought to forbid them. O’Grady records an incident concerning a very brutal type of initiation corroboree scheduled to take place in the near future. Frank told him that this would not be allowed to go on under any circumstances. Some days later, after evening instruction at the Mission, Bob told Frank that he had spoken to the others about the forbidden corroboree and all had agreed with him. “That one corroboree no good,” Bob said. “You talk proper good one there, Mr McGarry. Him finish now, properly.”

There are two issues emerging here. On the one hand, there is the authority that McGarry assumed he possessed to interfere in *Arrernte* ceremony, which may represent a corollary of his control over rations, and the benefits of living under the care of the Mission; and on the other hand there is the response of the *Arrernte* through Bob, who appeared to concur, but who apparently permitted the ceremonies to continue anyway – behind the hill as it were.

The consequence of the interplay between the control exercised by the Mission and the independence tacitly negotiated by Bob was that the *Mparntwe Arrernte* were able to construct a religious life for themselves in the contact zone. McGarry established a model that many succeeding missionaries appeared to adopt. This model was that effective evangelism was based as much on charitable work as it was on preaching or catechesis. In *Arrernte* terms, he looked after them (*amntarnareke*). It must also be acknowledged that the *Mparntwe Arrernte* readily attended Mass and showed a great desire for baptism and membership of the new Catholic community. This model of mission, personified in McGarry, meets the criteria of the aphorism attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi, “Preach the gospel, and if necessary, use words.”

541 Bob was the senior *Arrernte* man at Little Flower Mission in its first days.
542 O’Grady, *Francis of Central Australia*, 45.
543 O’Grady, *Francis of Central Australia*, 41. Bob (possibly Bob Palmer) specifically asked McGarry if the *Arrernte* could conduct the ceremonies behind the hills. The practice of conducting *Arrernte Altyerre* ceremonies behind the hill continued at Santa Teresa.
544 OLSH, archives with permission. Section 31, “Alice Springs – Santa Teresa: Report on OLSH service in Central Australia”, 157. The first OLSH Sisters said that a large number of *Arrernte* attended Mass, and how the men sat on one side of the aisle and the women and children on the other, thus maintaining traditional cultural separations.
Moloney and McGarry recognised that *Mparntwe Arrernte* placed considerable value on *atywerrenge/totemic objects*, although they did not themselves see their religious significance. They acknowledged that the relinquishing of *atywerrenge* was problematic for the *Arrernte*. They also calculated the pecuniary value *atywerrenge* had in the wider world and used the proceeds of sales to support their mission work. Harmsen, however, suggests that it is possible that the *Mparntwe Arrernte*, apart from the rations or money they received, participated in this trade because they may have seen the handover as a religious exchange. She writes:

An additional factor is the tremendous value which *Arrernte* people put on religious knowledge and behaviour in the pre-white era. They were apt at enlarging this disposition to include white men’s beliefs and rites as well, up to the point of attempting what may be termed *mutual ceremonial exchange*.546

The *Mparntwe Arrernte* had experienced the impact of white settlement, with its full fierceness, cushioned after 1935 by the solace of the Catholic Mission. The missionaries provided care, compassion, medical assistance and rations to hungry and desperately ill *Arrernte* people, while expecting, first, acceptance of baptism and some compliance with Catholic ways. Harmsen concludes: “To the *Arrernte* mind, conversion to Catholicism doubtlessly seemed a bonus: ‘the gain of an extra array of ceremonies, songs, rites and knowledge to supplement what they had inherited from their forebears.’ And being a people with a strong religious tradition, they took this new faith equally seriously.”547

When the Little Flower Mission began, the fate of the *Mparntwe Arrernte* was still uncertain. The health of the population was appalling, living conditions atrocious and their station in white society was marginalised. The population was in decline and Dr Charles Duguid, who conducted a medical survey Alice Springs in 1934,548 was ashamed at the appalling health conditions and the prevailing attitudes of the white inhabitants of the town.

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546 Harmsen, “You gave us the Dreaming”, 79. Here Harmsen is in line with Carl Strehlow’s conclusion that the *Arrernte* (both *Eastern* and *Western*) were inquisitive and capable of adapting their *Altyerre* to include foreign elements.
547 Harmsen, “You gave us the Dreaming”, 78.
In summary, a pattern had been established at the Little Flower Mission at Charles Creek: divine compassion and Christian charity were the impetus for Mission, while salvation of souls and baptism lay at the heart of the Mission program. By 1938, 171 Mparntwe Arrernte had been baptised into the Catholic church.\(^{549}\) By comparison Carl Strehlow, having commenced his work in 1894, “had baptised 46 adults by 1920”.\(^{550}\) Catholic evangelisation was heavily focused on the children. Because the missionaries often had little regard for the religious nature of Arrernte ceremonies, they paid minimal attention to Arrernte traditional rites. In this ambivalent situation, much original Arrernte religious life continued, while elements of Catholicism were absorbed. Meanwhile the Mparntwe Arrernte population decline had been halted and a future seemed possible.

### 6.4 Catholic Mission Phase 2: Towards Assimilation at Arltunga

After seven years at Charles Creek, in 1942 the Little Flower Mission was forced to move to Arltunga, 100 kilometres to the east of Alice Springs. Now, as originally planned by Gsell, the Mission was to be protected from the contagion of proximity to white settlement. The reasons for the move, however, had more to do with politics than theology.

On February 19, 1942 the Japanese attack on Darwin, and later on other locations in the Top End of Australia, led to a second wave of the European occupation of Central Australia. The Civil Administration of the Northern Territory relocated from Darwin to Alice Springs, while the Australian Army established a transport supply depot to equip the defence effort from the town. A contingent of the United States Defence Force was also stationed in Alice. The town, with a combined population of Indigenous and non-Indigenous of less than 1,000 in 1939,\(^{551}\) was swamped by an influx of military personnel during the war so that the population of Alice Springs was swollen by the addition of 8,000 Australian and American troops.\(^{552}\) The Alice would never be the same again and the lives of Aboriginal people would be impacted in

\(^{549}\) Harmsen, “You gave us the Dreaming”, 78. This is a considerable number considering that there were probably about 400 Arrernte living in the vicinity of Alice Springs at the time.

\(^{550}\) Anna Kenny, The Aranda’s Pepa, 88. The comparison is 171 over 3 years at Charles Creek compared to 41 over 26 years at Hermannsburg.


many ways. Immediately the Army had designs on the Little Flower Mission site at Charles Creek as suitable camp grounds and training areas for the troops. Soon after the arrival of the troops there was an outbreak of meningitis at Little Flower. The Army, fearing contagion of the troops, found the excuse to quickly advise of the need for the transfer of the Mission and its residents.

In September 1942 the Administrator of the Northern Territory offered to relocate the Mission to the abandoned mining settlement at Arltunga. Despite the fact that this was not Mparntwe Arrernte country and had been deserted 50 years previously, because it was barren and arid, lacking secure and safe water supplies, the Catholic diocese responded with alacrity. Bishop Gsell of the Northern Territory diocese was delighted: “Times are certainly not propitious for forming new stations, but this is so extraordinary and providential an occasion, never perhaps to occur again, that it would be suicidal to refuse.” Gsell’s swift and grateful response supports the general conclusion that the Catholic Church in the Northern Territory had adopted a collaborative relationship with the government, as deputy Prime Minister McEwan had hoped for in his New Deal for Aborigines. Gsell understood that the government was offering to financially support the Mission in ways never before considered possible. Hearn reports, “This is eminently just and fair, accepting a principle of subsidising social services which has not yet found acceptance in the Australian community at large.” The Mission required adequate and just funding in order to meet the needs of the Arrernte living under its care and Gsell had every right to be pleased with this change of heart.

Through 1942 and into 1943 there was much travelling on the rutted roads between Alice Springs and Arltunga. The Army provided the dwellings and did all the heavy lifting of the Army huts which were to make up most of the early buildings, although housing for Arrernte families was not included. Having originally been evicted from their own country in Alice

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553 One of these impacts was receipt of equal wages for Aboriginal men employed with the Army and respect offered to the working Indigenous men by non-Indigenous Australians from the South who did not share the prejudices of Centralians of the time.
554 This site is now occupied by the Anthelke Ulpa ye Aboriginal Town Camp, affiliated with Tangentyere Council.
555 Heffernan, Gathering Sticks, 47. Heffernan reports: “When the army tested the creeks and wells they found the water full of cyanide left over from the gold mining days.”
556 Harmsen, “You Gave Us the Dreaming”, 90.
557 This can be contrasted with the Lutherans at Hermannsburg, who were being treated as suspicious enemy aliens at the same time.
Springs by government edict in 1928, the Arrernte were now to be exiled to another people’s country. By late 1943 the entire Mission had been relocated and settled in Arltunga.

At Arltunga “in 1945, a dormitory system for girls was introduced, partly as the result of working adults leaving their children behind at the mission and partly due to the advent of assimilation policies”. Now with a community of approximately 200 Arrernte Catholics at Arltunga, it appears that the Religious superiors of the MSCs and the OLSH Sisters respectively made an ongoing commitment to appoint an increasing number of missionaries to Central Australia. Pye provides a list of twenty-two MSC priests and twelve MSC brothers, along with fifty-three OLSH Sisters, who staffed the three phases of the Mission between 1935 and 1988. In the final tally it was a significant commitment. The Mission nurtured its flock within a fold. There were two coincidental consequences resulting from this approach: assimilation prospered and the OLSH Sisters were in a strong position to introduce the young people to Catholicism.

While the policy of Protection had been in place when the removal of mixed-descent children began, the emerging policy of assimilation continued the awful policy of removing children of mixed descent from their parents. At Arltunga six to eight children were removed. According to Harmsen’s clerical informants, the missionaries, while not supporting the policy, did little to stand in its way. She reports the response from one of the priests at the time, that “we’ did not approve of the abduction of the part-coloured kids but that ‘we’ could do nothing about it and also said that he had told the Arrernte people that he personally had nothing to do with the operation.” This official Mission account is questioned by Veronica Perrurle Dobson who says she saw children being loaded onto Army trucks and many years later reported her view that “the Sisters were helping to load the children on the truck, poor things”. The Mission, now responsible to Bishop O’Loughlin, who succeeded Gsell in 1949, appears to have become an agent of the government policy.

559 This was specifically Eastern Arrernte country and foreign to many Mparntwe Arrernte people.
560 Harmsen, “You Gave Us the Dreaming”. 101. Hearn, “A Theology of Mission,” 23, argues that this practice of leaving the children in the dormitory while the parents worked on nearby stations was the principle aim of the Arltunga Mission. He says that this was the continuing understanding in the operation of the dormitory at Santa Teresa.
561 Pye, Santa Teresa and East Aranda History, 11–18.
562 Harmsen, “You Gave Us the Dreaming”, 97. Eight is a significant number out of 200 total Arrernte residents.
563 Harmsen, “You Gave Us the Dreaming”, 98.
564 Bowman, ed., Every Hill Got a Story, 146.
The Arrernte women who had been in the dormitory described how they learned to be Catholic by living a Catholic routine: “they learnt to behave in a proper Catholic way, which implied sitting quietly, listening to the priest, memorizing the liturgy, prayers and hymns, etc. This is the ritual … just as songs, stories and dances formed ceremonial aspects of Arrernte Law.”\textsuperscript{566} The legacy of this instruction remains firmly entrenched in the Catholic devotional attitude of many older Arrernte women even in 2018.

It appears that the missionaries at Arltunga were disinclined to engage in serious religious Catholic education with the Arrernte adults or dialogue with Altyerre. One MSC said “There wasn’t any effort to teach them anything deep in spirituality. But they had very great faith. Up to a quarter of them did not have any religious beliefs apart from their own superstitions. We did not interfere with them.”\textsuperscript{567} The missionaries appeared to operate on the assumption that the Arrernte would become Catholic by osmosis, a slow inexorable drift into Catholicism by virtue of association. However, by concentrating on the external elements of Catholic ritual, the priests, brothers and sisters encouraged the Arrernte to select those elements of Catholicism that fitted their existing world-view. Not knowing Arrernte, not being able to preach in Arrernte, not being able to understand the essentials of Altyerre that guided their flock, the priests and religious sisters were unaware of the continuing commitment to Altyerre by the Arrernte Catholics.\textsuperscript{568}

In a reflection that speaks to a refrain common among both non-Indigenous members of OLSH Parish and female members of Ngkarte Mikwekenhe Catholic Community\textsuperscript{569} as to why there are so few Arrernte men engaged in modern Catholic practice, Heffernan remarks:

> The Catholic priests thought our belief system was a poor thing for savage pagans that needed to be forgotten. They thought our families needed to be swallowed up in the rich tradition of their own Catholic faith. They believed they could save our children’s souls by converting them. This was very sad for the men and over time some of the men drifted away. But because our families needed the protection of the Catholics and the practical help they offered the old men kept their families close to the safety of the

\textsuperscript{565} Liturgy which was in Latin, personal communication, Therese Ryder, January 18, 2018.
\textsuperscript{566} Harmsen, “You gave us the Dreaming”, 104.
\textsuperscript{567} Harmsen, “You gave us the Dreaming”, 105.
\textsuperscript{568} This approach can be compared to the Lutheran approach of F.W. Albrecht, who learnt fluent Arrernte within two years and preached in Arrernte soon after he arrived. He also trained Arrernte men as evangelists and eventually as ordained pastors.
\textsuperscript{569} Ngkarte Mikwekenhe translates as Mother of God.
church. There were fewer conversations between the priests and the Arrernte leadership though and the Arrernte Advisory Committee seemed to fade away.\textsuperscript{570}

Note the similarity between the situations at Hermannsburg and Alice Springs for the Western Arrernte and the Mparntwe Arrernte in the face of the Lutheran and the Catholic Missions. Both Arrernte groups had limited options. Surrounded by dangerous foes – rampant pastoralism in the Western MacDonnell/Tyuretye and acquisitive commercialism in the township of Alice Springs/Mparntwe – both groups needed protection and stayed connected to the Mission. But the possibility of a productive religious interchange between the Arrernte men and the missionaries was damaged and Altyerre was forced underground. The fact that today the visible face of Eastern and Mparntwe Arrernte Catholicism and to a degree Western Arrernte Lutheranism is predominantly female lends support to this conclusion.\textsuperscript{571}

Harmsen argues that “By the late 1940s, such Catholic momenta as first and Holy Communion and the sacraments of baptism and marriage had taken firm root within the Arrernte community.”\textsuperscript{572} M.K. Turner and Kathleen Kemarre Wallace, having grown up in Arltunga and Santa Teresa, were later both married at the Mission. In fact, in their day there were multiple marriages at Santa Teresa.\textsuperscript{573} Today, however, it is extremely rare for any Arrernte person to be married in the Ngkarte Mikwekenhe Catholic Community (NMCC) in Alice Springs, although baptisms, requiem masses, reconciliation and the sacrament of anointing are still frequently conducted.

In summarising the Arltunga Mission experience Harmsen writes:

\textsuperscript{570} Heffernan, Gathering Sticks, 40.
\textsuperscript{571} There are distinct differences between Western Arrernte Lutheranism and Mparntwe Arrernte Catholicism. Of course, the most significant is the ordination of Western Arrernte pastors commencing with Moses Tjalkabota. Wenten Rubuntja’s brother Eli Rubuntja was another. In this manner the Lutherans privileged the Western Arrernte men and the Catholics denied the Mparntwe Arrernte men a meaningful role, leading to the emergence of a predominantly female-led NMCC in modern days.
\textsuperscript{572} Harmsen, “You Gave Us the Dreaming”, 104.
\textsuperscript{573} Recently old film footage taken by Fr Tom Dixon in 1953–54 has been rediscovered and converted to DVD. Footage from this film show young Arrernte women at Santa Teresa dressed in white wedding frocks standing outside the Church. The Stone Houses, Maya Newell and Mary Flynn, (Funded by the Australian Government with ‘Atyenhenge Atherre’ Aboriginal Corporation).
The missionaries had expected that conversion to the Catholic belief would automatically render traditional *Arrernte* beliefs (‘superstitions’) redundant. But they had not properly understood the fact that *Arrernte* Law and Catholicism, on a profound spiritual level, can be perceived – and in fact were thus perceived by the *Arrerntes* – as additional, not mutually excluding belief systems.574

By 1953, the *Eastern* and *Mparntwe Arrernte* had experienced colonialism firsthand, including assimilation mitigated by the softer, more charitable hand of the priests, brothers and sisters and many lay missionary workers. The lack of consideration by the missionaries that *Altyerre* Law offered any competition to the Catholic truth, and indeed that it should be relinquished, did not, however, prevent the *Arrernte* from moulding a Catholic faith that was inclusive of their *Altyerre* beliefs.

6.5 Catholic Mission Phase 3: Santa Teresa

6.5.1 Government and Mission Collaboration

In 1950 Bishop O’Loughlin applied to the government for a lease of a 480 square mile block 80 kilometres south-east of Alice Springs as a replacement for Little Flower Mission at Arltunga. There were two principal reasons for the transfer. First, the water supply at Arltunga had never been reliable or of good quality, and as *Arrernte* families began to settle in the Mission it was stretched beyond capacity. The Mission at Arltunga occupied a lease of only 10 square miles, which as Pye says was “totally inadequate”575 for a population of 200. Second, government policy was now more open to direct intervention in the care of Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory, and so the Commonwealth government was prepared to grant a one-quarter portion of the Phillipson Block to the Catholic Church. It was granted in 1952 and soon the *Arrernte* were on the move again. The new Mission would be called Santa Teresa.

The transfer occurred when assimilation, as established by Deputy Prime Minister McEwan, was the goal of government Aboriginal policy. The Native Welfare Conference of Federal and State Ministers of 1961 defined assimilation in these terms:

574 Harmsen, “You gave us the Dreaming”, 110.
575 Pye, *Santa Teresa and East Aranda History*, 17.
The policy of assimilation means that all Aborigines and part-Aborigines are expected to attain the same manner of living as other Australians and to live as members of a single Australian community, enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same customs and influenced by the same beliefs as other Australians.576

The Mission appeared to continue to move in step with government assimilation policy. In hindsight, an informed observer might ask if Altyerre could survive assimilation. At that time in 1952, however, in the decade after the conclusion of World War II, Australia was maturing as a nation and Aboriginal missions could no longer remain outside the notice of the wider community. Aboriginal people were seen to be the nation’s responsibility, and their futures were to be guaranteed by the application of sufficient government effort to ensure not just their survival but their flourishing. Education, the equivalent to that offered to every child in the country, was seen as appropriate. Housing should be designed and provided to promote family life, and Aboriginal people should have paid jobs like every other Australian. The specific factors advancing assimilation at Santa Teresa through the 1950s to the 1980s were the provision of a much higher standard of education, housing, health and employment.

The major way education promoted assimilation was initially through a continuing commitment to the dormitory system. For a short time there were both girls’ and boys’ dormitories at Santa Teresa. The girls’ dormitory operated until 1968; the boys’ dormitory was more short-lived. Hearn says that the boys’ dormitory opened in 1958577 and Harmsen that it was still operating in 1964.578 She notes that “[i]nformation concerning the boys’ dormitory is scarce indeed, but we know for certain that the boys received a pretty Spartan upbringing”579 and that the daily regime was supervised by a member of staff who had been in the navy. Margaret Heffernan most recently has updated an understanding of the boys’ dormitory. Her brother was a boarder in the 1960s. Unlike the homely girls’ dormitory, she says “It looked more like an old jail …”580 She reports that “the boys did not get much love. Floggings was more the order of the day.”581 The short life of the boys’ dormitory is probably a reflection of the fact that this

578 Harmsen, “You Gave Us the Dreaming”, 130.
579 Harmsen, “You Gave Us the Dreaming”, 129.
580 Heffernan, Gathering Sticks, 104.
581 Heffernan, Gathering Sticks, 104.
sort of cruelty to boys was not a part of Arrernte culture, where boys were/are given significant personal autonomy until the time of their seclusion in the young men’s camp as they prepare for initiation. In the end the Ltyentye Apurte Arrernte community, which tolerated the girls’ dormitory, would not tolerate what was to them unnecessary discipline of boys, even when meted out in the name of education.

Placing the girls in the dormitory ensured 100% attendance of the girls at school. The girls were not allowed out except after Mass on Sundays and during school term breaks. Even at Mass inculcation of Western behaviours continued. Heffernan comments on the Mass routine: “I think the masses were designed to teach us patience too … The older girls, the ‘best girls’, would be keeping an eye on us, practising their nun look.”582 Through separation in the dormitory the girls were limited in exposure to their elders, and the use of Arrernte language in the dormitory was forbidden by the OLSH sisters. Therese Ryder is one who583 tells, with a twinkle in her eye, of the role of a “look out” dormitory girl who was stationed at the window to warn the other girls – who were engaging in the forbidden Arrernte discourse – that Sister was coming and that of course Sister learned two words of Arrernte, yaye apetyeme (Sister is coming)!

In the period of assimilation, as the objective appeared to be to ensure that Aboriginal people gained the skills necessary to survive and compete in wider Australia, proficiency in English was required. The Arrernte needed to be taught Australian English. There are two main models of bi-lingual education, Immersion and Transfer bi-lingualism. In Santa Teresa an Immersion bi-lingual approach was preferred.584 Many non-Indigenous educators, however, and activists, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, intent on preserving and maintaining Aboriginal languages and cultures, were in favour of the Transfer model.585 Reynolds reports that when bi-lingual education was offered at Ltyentye Apurte Catholic school, members of the school board, particularly the senior Arrernte men, decided that they actually wanted English only (Immersion) education in the school, since it was the responsibility of the home and the community to teach Arrernte to the children.586 Now years later, when Arrernte students who had experienced the dormitory-based education look back, they recognise the threat that

582 Heffernan, Gathering Sticks, 104.
583 Therese Ryder, personal communication, August 21, 2018.
584 Immersion entails the exclusive use of the target language, English, at school, both in the classroom and in the informal aspects of the school day.
585 The Transfer model entails the continuing use of the vernacular in the school with a gradual transfer as students progress through classes to the target, English.
586 Reynolds, personal communication, September 18, 2017.
Immersion presented to the survival of Arrernte language. Older Arrernte consulted in Alice Springs bemoan the modern form of Arrernte spoken by younger speakers. Government assimilation policy fitted well with the effort by the missionaries to offer the Catholic faith to the Arrernte. The Arrernte were being trained to live in the white world outside the Mission. It was assumed that English, rather than Arrernte, would be of much greater use in their future lives in an assimilated nation.

Schooling was not all negative. Therese Ryder recalls that she learnt to paint landscapes in the Namatjira style at Santa Teresa from Sister Marie Therese Hillas, where Kathleen Kemarre Wallace also learnt to paint.587 Margaret Heffernan reports that she “liked and respected nuns and priests”,588 saying that “Sister Marie Therese was my favourite. When it was her turn to look after us she always got out one of our story books to keep us happy.”589 Having entered the dormitory at about age eleven, she says she moved out of the dormitory when she was married at age twenty, and that this was the normal situation and many girls were married from the dormitory. The dormitory restrictions on the girls’ use of Arrernte had an inevitable effect upon a complete learning of the complexity of Arrernte language and the richness of the culture expressed through Arrernte. In a long commentary on her experience in the OLSH dormitory from 1963 to 1966, Agnes Palmer told of her dismay at being cut off from her culture and being imprisoned in an alien culture. She said: “It tore me apart. Not being able to use my language not being able to use myself as a person of different colour …”590 On the other hand, Ryder tells us that she completed Grade 6 and then moved on to cooking, sewing and domestic science classes – and of course her beloved painting.591 Both Therese and Kathleen Kemarre emerged from the dormitory to become in later years widely acclaimed artists.592 Here, through their art, the education that the girls received was to be adapted to the continuation of their Arrernte identity.

Margaret Heffernan, however, indicates in her memoir that Catholicism, at least a distinctive component of it, was being implanted in the Arrernte girls. Commenting on the behaviour of the dormitory girls when assigned tasks such as washing and ironing the priests’ and nuns’ clothes,

587 Green, ed. Pmere, Country in Mind, 20. Kathleen Kemarre Wallace reports the same sentiment. She says that Mr Sawjack was the painter in residence at Santa Teresa who taught the girls to paint. She also pays tribute to the influence of Albert Namatjira. Green, ed. Pmere, Country in Mind, 22.
588 Heffernan, Gathering Sticks,100.
589 Heffernan, Gathering Sticks,101.
590 Michael Bowden, “Will they be Aboriginals as we are today?” (Master of Education thesis, Darwin: Northern Territory University, 1995), 99.
591 Therese Ryder, personal communication, January 18, 2018.
592 See Green, Pmere, Country in Mind.
washing dishes and milking the goat herd, which all the girls disliked and avoided as much as possible by subterfuge, she says they were punished. Her concluding comment is telling: “we were learning the Catholic Guilt thing.”

Heffernan is a perceptive observer of the impact of the Mission. Looking back on her experience she was able to discern the powerful and debilitating effect of living at Santa Teresa:

It affected the way you looked at things and saw the world. Later on, you sort of looked down more on the world of the camps. You started thinking the church way and the dormitories was the best way. That the way the priests and nuns thought about the world was better than our Aboriginal culture.

The girls’ dormitory closed in 1968 following Bishop O’Loughlin’s decision that dormitories on all Catholic Missions in the Northern Territory be systematically closed. In Santa Teresa it seems that O’Loughlin, as a result of continued dialogue with Arrernte people who were strong in expressing their needs and rights, and consistent with his policy of enhancing the role of nuclear families, was seeking to promote the agency of parents in the caring and rearing of their children. The character of the Mission had changed since the fathers, many of whom had at Arltunga been absent working on cattle stations, now resided in Santa Teresa. Families were now to do the job of assimilation.

The second element assisting the assimilation policy occurred when the Mission decided to house the increasing Arrernte population at the Mission. Appropriate buildings to replace lean-to wurlies were required. In the mid-1950s Fr Tom Dixon MSC settled on the idea of building stone houses as an alternative to the flimsy shed-type accommodation. An issue emerged on

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593 Heffernan, Gathering Sticks, 101.
594 In the early days at Santa Teresa the Arrernte lived in shanties and “lean-tos” known as camps.
595 Heffernan, Gathering Sticks, 101.
596 Harmsen, “You Gave Us the Dreaming”, 128.
597 Hearn, A Theology of Mission”, 151.
598 This may be contrasted with Kathleen Kemarre’s childhood where she reports she grew “out bush” up in the alwekere, the women’s camp made up of mothers and mother’s sisters and aunties and younger boys and girls, not nuclear families. Wallace, Listen Deeply, 14.
599 Dixon is the only recorded MSC priest who made any major effort to learn to speak and understand Arrernte. Dixon was stationed at Santa Teresa for just over two years. Marist brother Leo McVeigh made significant advances in learning Arrernte in the early 1970s.
600 Harmsen, “You Gave Us the Dreaming”, 128, note 40. Br Ed Bennett states that the project was the idea of Fr Dixon. Also in Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MISACOR) website, https://www.misacor.org.au/index.php/emagazine/current-news/541-msc-movie-connection-3 (accessed January 23, 2018) “Dixon organised the local men to build houses to replace them. Local stone was chipped by hand
how to respond to traditional Arrernte cultural requirements when a resident of a dwelling died. Before white settlement, Arrernte people would desert the place where the deceased resided, burn her meagre belongings and allow the spirit of the person who had passed away to return to her totemic place/atywerenge in her apmerel/country. Dixon responded to this problem by suggesting that families swap houses. Soon a new cultural practice emerged where Arrernte people smoked the dwelling of the deceased and, after a period of mourning, the house was reoccupied by another family. Harmsen quotes an Arrernte woman from Santa Teresa who says that Arrernte saw a similarity between the cleansing smoking of the houses and the use of incense in Catholic ritual.601 This is further evidence that the Arrernte were able to establish religious overlaps/interactions between ancient Arrernte practices and Catholic ritual.

Health care, a third element of assimilation policy, initially concentrated on infant mortality. Every effort was made to entice expectant mothers to birth their babies in the hospital at Santa Teresa and to train the new mothers in Western mothercraft practices. While this was a positive policy and ensured a significant decrease in infant mortality and a subsequent increase in Eastern and Central Mparntwe Arrernte population numbers, one of the potentially culturally destructive issues emerging from this practice was to remove young women from the care of significant older Arrernte women in matters of childbirth.602 Some missionaries were aware of these implications: for example Sr Naomi Fogarty OLSH worked as a nurse at Santa Teresa and promoted cultural respect and engaged traditional healers (ngangkeres) where she could.603 Kathleen Kemarre Wallace reports that in the days before the confinement in hospital “when babies were born, we used to hold the baby in cleansing smoke … It’s to help keep away bad spirits.”604 There were also practices associated with how to deal with the afterbirth and the

with the locals given rations while they worked on their own home with an additional cash allowance when they worked on someone else’s.”

601 Harmsen, “You gave us the Dreaming”, 148, note 95: An Arrernte lady in her mid-fifties explained this: “How the Catholic faith and our culture, The culture and our beliefs both … You know, related. We learned more about it and we said: Ah! Yeah! When... when father incensed all our – the things ... the new blessing of the house. Ah well! The incense related to the smoking of the house that we moved out! And the smoking of the incense of the house when the people are coming into their houses. Like the incense representing the people going out. And that’s what our smoking represents.” (Italics in the original).

602 To re-establish cultural birthing practice the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress Health Service (Congress) has established the Arlwerekere Service in Alice Springs, where young women are supported in their confinement by both trained midwives and Aboriginal birthing assistants.

603 Reynolds, personal communication, December 5, 2017.

604 Wallace, Listen deeply, 82.
Both these practices could become problematic in this new situation, where births occurred in a sanitised environment, possibly further compounding cultural loss.\footnote{Wallace, \emph{Listen deeply}, 82.} Finally, employment policy at Santa Teresa meant that men and families moved away from periodic cattle work on nearby stations into full-time local work. Because the Santa Teresa lease had developed into a small cattle station, some men with previous experience in the cattle industry now had their own station on which to work. Other Arrernte men were employed in construction as the Mission slowly established a new township. The church, presbytery, convent, dormitory, storage facilities, etc. had to be constructed and water supply, power station, reticulation, and sewerage services laid out. Constructing houses for the Arrernte residents occupied up to fifty men and women in the first decade after the transfer.\footnote{The point of Kathleen Kemarre’s comment is to see these practices restored in some appropriate manner.} However, in the drought years 1959–1966, the sheep flock was consumed for meat and the remaining cattle were agisted at Mt Gambier in South Australia. Some fourteen of the now unemployed Arrernte men moved north to work in a forestry project in the Top End of the Northern Territory.\footnote{Harmsen, “You gave us the Dreaming”, 127.} For the women, employment emerged at Santa Teresa in several areas: in the hospital, where in 1966 two Arrernte girls were trained as nurse aides;\footnote{Harmsen, “You gave us the Dreaming”, 129.} in the school, where Arrernte women were employed as teacher aides;\footnote{Harmsen, “You gave us the Dreaming”, 129, note 55.} and in retail services, as the community became more self-reliant and stores opened.

### 6.5.2 Not Prepared for Self-Determination

A watershed in Australian public policy in Aboriginal affairs occurred in 1967. The Referendum of that year altered the Australian Constitution by empowering the Commonwealth government to make laws for Aboriginal people – a power which had been exclusive to the States in the original Federal agreement. This allowed the Commonwealth to establish the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and so permit Commonwealth money and programs to influence the nature of government action regarding all Aboriginal people in all States and the Territories. Of course the Commonwealth government already had this power in the Northern Territory, but it is clear from the multifaceted developments in Aboriginal policy that occurred in the Territory during

\footnote{Kathleen Kemarre Wallace was one of the first of these young teaching assistants and she went on to gain full teaching qualifications.}
the 1970s and early 1980s, particularly on former Mission settlements, that the constitutional amendment provided the impetus for the changes that occurred in the Territory as well. In the Northern Territory the Wave Hill Walk-off by the Gurindji in 1966 raised Land Rights as an objective of Aboriginal agitation. Subsequently the Gove Bauxite mining application by Nabalco, which was opposed by the Yolngu of the Gove Peninsula, gave rise to the famous Bark Painting produced by Yolngu artists from Gove (Yirrkala). However, the Blackburn Decision in *Milirrpum v Nabalco Pty Ltd* (1971) ruled that the Aboriginal inhabitants had no right to stop the application. The erection of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra in 1972 highlighted the marginalisation of Aboriginal people in their own country. The Whitlam Labor government was elected in 1972 with a commitment to Aboriginal self-determination which saw the beginning of Federal legislation in response to the land rights movement, culminating in the 1976 Aboriginal Land Rights Act, Northern Territory. Assimilation was transformed in public policy to Self-determination or Self-management with cascading implications for Aboriginal settlements and former Missions such as Santa Teresa. Unsure of the future, the Church reluctantly ceded responsibility for the operation of local government functions to an elected Council comprising Arrernte members of the Ltyentye Apurte community.

“The Great Australian Silence”, so aptly described by Stanner in the pre-1960s, was replaced by a wide-ranging clamour for justice for Indigenous people. The apparently ordered, predictable, peaceful pattern that had characterised life at Santa Teresa Mission through the late 1950s and early ’60s began to unravel as roles and function previously controlled by the missionaries were transferred to Indigenous control. But while assimilation might have been a dead letter legislatively, within the Catholic Church old assimilationist ideas remained strong.

According to Hearn, of all the Catholic missions in the Northern Territory, Santa Teresa was arguably the least prepared for these transitions. Hearn describes the operation of Santa Teresa Mission in the 1970s as a “theocratic society” and an “ecclesiastical monarchy” ruled over by Bishop O’Loughlin’s hands-on approach. Hearn describes the situation at Santa Teresa this way:

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611 The Land Rights Act was introduced by the Whitlam government and enacted by the succeeding Fraser Liberal government.
All activities, religious and secular, are controlled by the priest superintendent with the help of a purely executive staff ... The staff are widely diverse in religious commitment, but are selected, maintained or dismissed in such a way that the ecclesiastical monarchy is not disturbed to any substantial extent. Consultation of the aboriginal [sic] people is informal and unstructured.614

The priests in charge were poorly prepared for their complex responsibilities. Peter Hearn wrote about his own training: “Although I was formed in post-Vatican II theology and studied some units of anthropology of Australian Aborigines at a university, studies in missiology, just becoming available at that time, were not part of my training. I was ordained in 1976 and had presumed I would join MSC parish ministry.”615 As Hearn points out, O’Loughlin and the MSCs were confused and fumbled their way to inept policies which were inherently self-contradictory.616 According to Harmsen, they continued to believe that “Aboriginal people were not yet ready for so much responsibility; the changes happened too fast; and the influx of government money would corrupt the people”.617

It seems from the record that the missionaries were unable to deal with the changes foisted upon them and began to blame the Arrernte. As Hearn reports, Fr John Clancy MSC, parish priest at Santa Teresa at the time, informed the Northern Territory Catholic Missions Council meeting of 1975 that

the structures were “toppling” because of alcohol abuse, “excessive money”, and “political activism of outsiders” that was “discriminatory and destructive” because “slanted”. In his observations, “Traditional culture has been abandoned by the people rather than destroyed by the missionaries ...” He concluded that “we are playing it by ear”.618

Enormous problems of management emerged and the future for self-determination was clouded over. Hearn again:

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615 Hearn, “A Theology of Mission”, 11. In 1978, with minimal preparation, Hearn was transferred from a teaching position in Canberra to Wadeye.
The late 1970s were a worrying time for all in the Aboriginal communities, a time of social malaise that became entrenched. However, it was concurrently a time when Aboriginal people began to reassert their own cultural identity in the wake, among other things, of the Land Rights Legislation in the Northern Territory.\footnote{Hearn, “Comments on the Gsell Lecture”.}

An unexpected problem occurred as a result of the consolidation of power in the hands of local Liyentye Apurte traditional owners thereby limiting the engagement of Mparntwe Arrernte, Western Arrernte and Luritja people now resident at Santa Teresa. These Arrernte people had totemic country elsewhere but were now effectively disenfranchised and disempowered from participating in local governance at Santa Teresa.

The issues that the now self-determining people had to take account of were varied and complex. They included all of the principal local government functions of as well as matters normally run by State or Territory governments, such as education and health. The Mission had constructed the town, but now the Arrernte were responsible for running it.

The consequences of the new policies were manifold. First, the Arrernte people had been ill-prepared for the complexity of community management by the Church’s “ecclesiastical monarchy” at Santa Teresa and were disabled from assuming responsibility, a form of learned helplessness.\footnote{Fr John Leary was appointed director of the Daly River Training Centre in 1977 (Hearn, “A Theology of Mission,” 240) where he began an analysis of the Liberation Theology of Paulo Freire. He utilised the idea of “learned helplessness” as the major problem confronting colonised peoples. Until this time the issues that had underpinned Ad Gentes and Lumen Gentium of the Second Vatican Council had not been addressed by the Catholic Mission in the Northern Territory. Indeed, the missionaries would have been surprised to have been seen as “colonisers”.}

Second, because of the implementation of equal pay,\footnote{National Museum of Australia, “Collaborating for Indigenous Rights, Equal Wages, 1963–66,” http://indigenousrights.net.au/civil_rights/equal_wages_1963-66 (accessed February 29, 2018).} the newly developed institutions at Santa Teresa were unable to afford to employ as many Arrernte staff as previously and so significant Arrernte unemployment ensued. The equal pay determination also reduced demand for Aboriginal workers in the pastoral industry, causing many Arrernte men working on Centralian cattle stations to re-join their families in Santa Teresa. On the other hand, the entitlement of residents at Santa Teresa to Commonwealth Social Security Benefits put into the hands of local Arrernte amounts of money that they had never been used to handling in the past.
Having money and no work created a problem that has bedevilled Aboriginal communities, as Noel Pearson has consistently argued. David Martin summarises Pearson’s view:

“[T]he “passive welfare” policies instituted in Aboriginal communities over the past three decades, with no demands for reciprocity and responsibility on the part of welfare recipients, have promoted detrimental relations of passivity and dependence which are now deeply embedded within Aboriginal societies.”

Alcohol-fuelled violence spiralled out of control. Even some women became heavy drinkers and families were left parentless, often encumbering grandmothers with responsibility for temporarily abandoned babies and children. *Altyerre* was under threat. It appears that at this time some youth and young adults began reassessing the strictures of culture and kin relationships and some began to start families “wrong way”. Older *Arrernte* people such as Leonie Palmer and M.K. Turner were extremely worried. These distractions meant that the cohesion required for successful community management was missing and the operation of community services, such as the store and the cattle business, faltered.

Yet the *Arrernte* survived. Both the *Ltyentye Apurte* and Alice Springs *Mparntwe Arrernte* are now revitalising communities. Harmsen provides a crucial indicator for recovery – the work of one well-placed pastoral worker toiling in the middle of the battlefield. She writes:

“A practical way in which adherence to the church was strengthened during the rough years at Santa Teresa was the social work performed by one of the nuns, Sr David Allchin, who for twelve years spent most of her time at the *Arrernte* camps, talking

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623 Austin-Broos, *Arrernte Past, Arrernte Present* reports this behaviour also at Hermannsburg.

624 At a gathering of NMCC on March 11, 2018, Leonie Palmer, one of the founders of NMCC, spoke with great sadness about the abuse some women experienced in the early 1980s at *Ltyentye Apurte* from rampant drunks who threatened the welfare of women and their children and grandchildren. She spoke of times where the women sought sanctuary in the church as the men walked by and abused them. Harmsen, “You Gave Us the Dreaming,” 159–62, supports this conclusion. M.K. Turner’s references in *Iwenhe Tyerrtye*, 83, to the solution to “wrong-way” marriages by finding totemic association through mother’s mother’s side, also references this situation.
and listening to the women, praying with them, recounting biblical stories and helping the old people clean up around the house.\textsuperscript{625}

Here we see an extension of the work of the OLSH sisters into the fields of pastoral work, counselling, visitation and providing spiritual advice. And the people with whom Sr David was working were predominantly the girls from the dormitory who were now in their mid-thirties, married, mothers, even grandmothers, and those bearing the brunt of the problems confronting Santa Teresa.\textsuperscript{626}

The \textit{Arrernte} women were well prepared for Sr David’s companionship through the process of Catholic education that they had experienced in the dormitory. And here for perhaps the first time they were receiving the gospel message in a form they could integrate and own. At this point Catholicism was called upon as a remedy or salve for the open wound that alcohol was inflicting on the \textit{Ltyentye Apurte Arrernte}. As we reflect on the Healing Spring vignette that commences Part Two, we can see that there is a healthy dose of Catholic piety in the story, yet it is based on \textit{Altyerre} principles. Even without a Sr David for counsel the women were inclined to call upon the everlasting tenets of \textit{Altyerre} to fashion a pathway to healing.

\subsection{6.5.3 Recovery and Restoration}

Today there has been a significant turn-around in the well-being of \textit{Ltyentye Apurte}/Santa Teresa, so that the \textit{Ltyentye Apurte} Community, as it is known, is a place of pilgrimage for many Catholics from other parts of Australia. Visitors are enticed into the desert by the images of a Spanish-style mission church, its iconic, contextualised religious murals,\textsuperscript{627} and its Spirituality Centre, where \textit{Eastern Arrernte} artists design, make and paint crucifixes and other religious artefacts of the highest quality. Many Catholic Colleges from southern Australia send parties of students for immersion at Santa Teresa to enjoy the witness of \textit{Arrernte} Catholicism. Meanwhile, in similar fashion, the Catholic \textit{Mparntwe Arrernte}

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625 Harmsen, “You Gave Us the Dreaming”, 163.
626 Sr Robyn Reynolds was doing similar work with the women associated with the \textit{Ltyentye Apurte} school.
627 Arrernte woman Agnes Palmer, a fully trained primary school teacher, returned to \textit{Ltyentye Apurte} in the mid-1990s and took up a position as a counsellor and spiritual leader at Keringke Arts at Santa Teresa. She was a brilliant artist herself and, calling on the expertise of Cait Wait, a non-Arrernte woman who had formerly run Keringke Arts, these women motivated other Arrernte artists in the community to paint the walls of the church with murals that express the \textit{Arrernte} Catholic understanding of Creator Spirit, of creation, of the Jesus story and of the land upon which the church and former mission stand.
\end{flushleft}
women in Alice Springs have developed a number of cultural ventures such as the Healing Centre/Akeyulerre, the Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe/Children’s Ground Early Education Centre and Ngkarte Mikwekenhe Catholic Community, as vehicles for cultural expression and revitalisation. Religious art and rituals play an important role in the lives of many Eastern and Mparntwe Arrernte today as they have done for thousands of years.

By 1986, at the time of the Pope’s visit, a process of healing was under way both in Santa Teresa and in Alice Springs. In Alice Springs the then parish priest of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart (OLSH) parish, Fr Phil Hoy MSC, had assembled a group of Catholic Arrernte people now resident in Alice to prepare for the event. Simultaneously a great deal of work was done in the field of alcohol rehabilitation and through Nungalinya College628 to activate and support the Arrernte community. The recovery was not just from the scourge of alcohol abuse and community dysfunction. A process of cultural awareness was also in hand. Much culture had been lost in the years since Little Flower at Charles Creek and Arltunga, but, as Harmsen’s research indicates, the idea that ceremony had died out at Santa Teresa was not the full story. She reports: “What I do know, however, is that the knowledge which these men possessed has not been lost but for the past half-decade has been locked up in the heads of a number of persons who by themselves are not in the rightful position to pass this on.”629

This comment converges with the role Wenten Rubuntja played at the time of the Pope’s visit. It aligns with the sentiments of M.K. Turner and Kathleen Kemarre Wallace, who wrote their books both as a product of recovery and with the object of restoration. Kathleen Kemarre speaks ruefully of the death of her grandfathers and the loss of a deep store of Eastern Arrernte knowledge as a result – before it could be passed on. Yet she asks her audience to Listen deeply to her stories and to look with discernment into the depth of law and custom available in her resonant paintings.630

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628 Nungalinya College is a theological college conducted by the Anglican, Uniting and Catholic Churches operating in Darwin for Indigenous Christians drawn from Aboriginal communities throughout Australia.
630 Wallace, Listen Deeply, 170.
6.6 Concluding Reflections on Invasion and Mission

*Mparntwe Arrernte* have never lost their language and after years of exile still live on their *apmere/land*, and even if they do not possess freehold title to their land\(^{631}\) in Alice Springs they express a deep sense of *arntarnatreme/care* for their land. Therese Ryder and others attest that even while in the dormitory they were able to maintain contact with kin and access to *ayeye/story*, *apmere/country* and *Altyerre*. Some members of the Little Flower Mission at Arltunga, like M.K. Turner, spent long periods away from Mission living on their own *apmere/country* and received a powerful education from their mothers and aunts. In other words, while *Altyerre* was threatened it was also drawing sustenance from a variety of sources, including paintings, continuing rituals, story-telling by the elders and more recently the published works of M.K. Turner, Margaret Heffernan and Kathleen Kemarre Wallace.

The argument of this thesis is that *Altyerre* has survived into its present form as a result of its inherent power. Through hard work, determination and inherent resilience, the *Mparntwe* and *Eastern Arrernte* incorporated elements of Catholicism into their world-view, rather than abandoning *Altyerre* and converting to a Catholicism which excluded *Altyerre*. This of course does not mean that their religious ritual practice in church on Sunday is not authentically Catholic, nor that they do not have the greatest affection for the Catholic Church. Here the *Arrernte* are in bonus. They have their ancient tradition and a new set of rituals. Things could have been much worse for the *Arrernte*. They could have experienced complete dispossession. Language could have been seriously damaged, even lost. *Arrernte* land could have been alienated by Aboriginal people of other languages and cultures as happened at Hermannsburg to a degree and at Balgo Hills Catholic Mission in Western Australia where related but not local Aboriginal people became residents, as well as by the white invaders. The vital connection of *arntarnatreme/looking* after by elder generations of younger generations could have been permanently ruptured. Instead *Altyerre* survived and slowly developed new agency.

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\(^{631}\) In 1999 the Federal Court, in a landmark case for an urban area, determined that Native Title had survived in parts of Alice Springs. However, Native Title provides no actual freehold title nor any right to occupy any place with Native Title. The *Lhere Artepe* Native Title body represents the three estate or clan groups, *Mparntwe, Antulye* and *Irilme* that have proved title to the vacant Crown Land in Alice Springs.
Chapter 7: *Altyerre* – Dynamic Change

7.1 *Arrernte* Eclecticism

Since the arrival of white settlers *Altyerre* has been subjected to enormous pressure, as described in Chapter 4. In the Introduction to Chapter 5 it was proposed that *Altyerre* has been through a firestorm and emerged burnt but rejuvenated in modernity. This chapter will show how the *Arrernte* have always been a vital and vibrant people living in a changing world. It will be demonstrated that adapting to change had been their experience for many years before the Invasion by white settlers and by the first contact with Christianity.

Part Two has demonstrated that various commentators on the *Arrernte*/Catholic Missionary interface have noted that the *Arrernte* are a resilient people. Not only have they developed a comprehensive world-view or imaginary, but they have continuously adapted it to various forces impacting them. Carl Strehlow noted before the end of the 19th century that loan words from other Aboriginal languages had found their way into *Arrernte* myths. The early acceptance of German music and instruments632 and the adoption of Lutheran hymns, still sung today by descendants of the first who heard them, was noted by Latz. Carl Strehlow was accepted as *ngkarte* or ceremonial leader and revered to his last breath (and beyond) by people who acknowledged his role as their leader in a new form of ceremony. N.W. Thomas questioned the existence of anomalies, such as to a reference to “immortal virgins”, in *Arrernte* mythology. Harmsen noted that very early on the *Mparntwe Arrernte* seemed to respond quickly and with enthusiasm to a new set of Catholic rituals in a “ceremonial exchange”. Catholic priests in Alice Springs today are still called *ngkarte* by *Arrernte* Catholics. Wenten Rubuntja’s commentary on his painting for the Pope indicates that he sees it as both a Christian and *Arrernte* religious work. The Healing Spring anecdote combines Catholic and *Arrernte* motifs in a simple faith story. Kathleen Kemarre Wallace notes that the world was made by a creator and then tells numerous stories of the little people, *irrentarenyel/spirit-beings*, who made the world in the shape it is – so combining again Catholic and *Arrernte* symbols for meaning.

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632 The multi-talented Kempe brought a violin and flute to Hermannsburg and accompanied the hymns with them.
From the perspective of a perhaps naïve observer it might appear that the *Arrernte* were victims of a cataclysmic collision, and had therefore lost their agency. Their survival and enthusiasm for their life, a life enmeshed in kinship, contradicts this conclusion. How did they do it? The metaphor adopted here is one of dynamic, organic adaptation. From the beginning it has been argued that *Altyerre* is dynamic, ever changing and responding to the new. It was noted, however, that even an expert as informed and relational as T.G.H. Strehlow, because he may have been more focused on objects and rituals, missed the transcendent imaginary of *Altyerre*. He considered that the *Arrernte* religious world-view was so dependent upon *tjurunga* (*atywerrenge*)/totem objects and their association with ceremony, place/*apmere*, story/*ayeye* and people/*tyerrtye mape* that any break in continuous connection would be fatal for *Altyerre*. It is apparent, however, that Wenten Rubuntja, his great opponent in the days of Land Rights, was correct: *Altyerre* was not doomed as Strehlow regretfully believed, but alive.

### 7.2 Transcending Dynamism

This section considers two questions. First, in what ways has *Altyerre* been developed through its meeting with Catholicism? Second and conversely, how has the Catholicism expressed by the *Arrernte* people been shaped by its meeting with *Altyerre*? It is proposed here that the word “dynamism” be used to describe the process whereby modern *Mparntwe Arrernte* beliefs and practices represent a variation from the ancient *Altyerre*. Following Carl Strehlow’s research, it is argued that *Altyerre* has accretions, interpolations or absorptions that are from Christian teaching.

As an example, *Western Arrernte* Lutherans had been taught by Kempe that the word *arrpmurnintja* [*Western Arrernte*] (*arrpmernentye* [*Central/Eastern Arrernte*]) – which would be transliterated in *Eastern Arrernte* as something the same as *aknganentye* – meant the Creator. However, *Eastern* and *Central Arrernte* speakers, like M.K. Turner, define

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633 This thesis has never suggested that T.G.H. Strehlow was not a great lover of *Arrernte* people nor a great champion of the unique qualities of *Altyerre*. All of his academic work and field work and work as a Lutheran/Arrernte translator of the Bible attests to this and none more passionately than *Journey to Horseshoe Bend*.

634 The basis of this assertion is a personal communication on May 12, 2017, with a *Western Arrernte* man (who wishes to remain anonymous) who provided the word *arrpmurnintja*. Gavan Breen was then asked to comment and provided much of the subsequent analysis.
aknganentye as originating from the apmere/land. M.K.’s actual words are: “So that’s the word, aknganeke-arle. Aknganeke-arle is for apmere arrenge, the country of your father’s father, and how you arose and arise out of that country, with everything that’s in it”. M.K. is not saying here the aknganentye means “the Creator”, but that it means the source of each individual’s being or “the Creation”. Western Arrernte Lutherans on the other hand discovered a creator/arrpmurnintja of the creation. The first Lutheran missionaries, as noted above, had found what they thought was an equivalence between the Arrernte idea of creation and their Christian God. Later Carl Strehlow, with his deeper understanding of Arrernte, disconnected creation from the idea of a creator or high god. Kenny reports:

Strehlow had doubts about the high god concept, because he had realised that it had no similarity with the concept of a Christian God and monotheism. He wrote to his editor that “the blacks do not think of their God as an absolutely sacred, sinless being, not even as the Creator of the universe”.

Carl Strehlow also points out a typical Arrernte behaviour when facing missionaries: “Towards a missionary the blacks like to show themselves in a better light and thus give their myths a Christian tinge.” It seems this might be the source of the Western Arrernte acceptance of the term “Creator”. This is an example of the dynamic nature of the Arrernte imaginary in the hands of the Western Arrernte. However, in the case of the Central and Eastern Mparntwe Arrernte, their dynamism does not include the concept of a creator, but remains firmly rooted in their concept of aknganentye/originating from the apmere or the creation.

The hypothesis proposed here is that M.K. Turner and the Mparntwe Arrernte see creation as a sufficiently solid base upon which to build their whole world-view or Altyerre. They see that creation holds it all. And while, in the last three pages of Iwenhe Tyerrtye M.K. also talks of the relationship between her Christian God and Altyerre, she needs to explain how she can hold two apparently opposing ideas without contradiction. For her they are not in

635 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 11.
637 Kenny, The Aranda’s Pepa, 125.
638 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 219–221.
contradiction, but she seems to feel a need to justify the convergence of the two for her non-
Arrernte Christian audience.

Learning a lesson from Carl Strehlow about how the Western Arrernte deferred to him at
Ntaria, any researcher into Aboriginal religion should keep his advice in mind: “A researcher
can simply not develop his own view and then ask a black: is it like this? … The right
question is: What did the old people say about this story?” An exchange between the three
co-authors of Iwenhe Tyerrtye establishes the truth of this warning. In Iwenhe Tyerrtye,
M.K.’s co-author, Barry McDonald Perrurle, engages in a three-way discourse with M.K.
and Veronica Perrurle Dobson on the role that anperrintyrnye/kinship plays in their lives.
Veronica Perrurle says:

My brother has mentioned that some white people he knows, some alherntere mape
(white-fellas) said that our kinship imprisons people in this way. On the contrary, it
was the missionaries that enslaved Arrernte people to the new culture. We lived our
traditional lives, and we had our culture and we had our beliefs, and everything else.
And then white men came. Not being mean or anything by saying this. White men
came. And they got us all together and put us on a mission. Not that they were nasty
or anything, they were trying to do good for us, as we knew. But the thing was, they
took us from a different culture and they taught us their culture and their beliefs. It’s
actually that we were slave to that other culture, not to anperrintyrnye.640

Veronica Perrurle’s response is quite sharp. But note her phrase “Not that they were nasty or
anything, they were trying to do good for us, as we knew.” Her inherent natural politeness
and a wish not to give offence remains. She is emphasising the arntarntareme concept
described by M.K. Turner as a central plank of Arrernte culture. In a sophisticated reply, she
demonstrates that McDonald’s question is one in a long line of questioning that has been
racist, in the sense that Westerners assume that the problem for Aboriginal people is their
abandonment of their culture,641 when she shows in a few words that the problem for
Aboriginal people is the imposition of European culture on them.

640 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 83.
641 As Fr Clancy did at the Missions Council meeting in 1975.
M.K. takes Veronica Perrurle’s discourse further, consolidating the political point about anpernirrentye and its law-making function. Here is an example of the subtlety of Indigenous thinking. Noting how earlier she seemed to sustain seemingly contradictory concepts simultaneously, M.K. is talking about people who marry “wrong way”, which infringes the Law of anpernirrentye. She explains:

The ones who have broken and might be breaking the Law now are just individual persons. They have crossed over just in their own personal way. But the Rule itself has never been broken, it’s still alive. No matter whether you’ve married the wrong way, that child is still that skin name person from those grandparents and those lands. From their own Rule. That can never be changed.642

The important point here is that this discourse occurs in the chapter about the role of anpernirrentye, the third of six sections of M.K.’s book and the core of her world-view. M.K. is confident that her reader is tuned in to her teaching and she is now more confident to expose herself to the challenges of apparent internal contradiction.

Arrernte people are assertive of their ancestral heritage. They are committed to the principal elements of their world-view and they are adroit in their representation of its place alongside the mainstream culture in Australia. However, as a result of long-term participation within the broader community and through respectful relationships with whitefellas, they have progressed from operating in two distinct worlds – at least in regard to their religious practice – and have constructed one incorporated distinctive form of Christianity which remains a totally authentic expression of the Altyerre imaginary.

Consider the term inkata (ngkarte), which is in widespread use by Western and Mparntwe Arrernte. Kenny uses it when describing the role that Carl Strehlow came to hold: “At Hermannsburg in Central Australia, Strehlow’s outer mission became his inner mission, so that the missionary became the inkata/ceremonial chief of, in his view, freely baptised Christians.”643 Strehlow’s outer mission may be described as evangelisation, while his inner mission was pastoral care of and ministry to an established church of believers. It took

642 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 83.
Strehlow many years to establish his inner mission. Fr Moloney at Little Flower used a different methodology from Strehlow, one he had inherited from a Catholic theology of mission with emphasis on replacement of the old with the new religion. He spent little time but intense effort on baptism in his outer mission and quickly established a flock, so now the baptised had become members of the Church and were the focus of his, the OLSH Sisters, and McGarry’s care. Looking at it from the Arrernte perspective, perhaps what occurred was that the Mparntwe Arrernte, in a sense, domesticated the missionaries. Having accepted the priest as ngkarte, the Mparntwe Arrernte formed a role for him as carer, or in M.K.’s terms, one who looks after (arntarntareme). The ngkarte is not then accepted as a teacher so much as a carer – while maintaining a ceremonial or ritual role. The Mparntwe Arrernte have a special understanding of ngkarte. Today all the priests at OLSH church in Alice Springs are addressed as ngkarte as a mark of deep respect and also, it may be argued, as a way of bringing the priest under Arrernte influence, even control, so that Ngkarte (God) might arntarntareme/care for them!

7.3 Christian Theology in the hands of Altyerre

Wenten Rubuntja’s discourse at the end of his book the town grew up dancing places Jesus in an Arrernte creation framework:


Jesus has two places – his father’s father’s place is Heaven and his mother’s father’s place is the world. The relationship through his father’s father is called Aknganentye. Jesus is related to Heaven through his father’s father. The world – his mother’s father’s country – is what we call Altyerre ... That’s a true story – just like that little

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644 Rubuntja and Green, the town grew up dancing, 173.
baby was born on Christmas Day – well, he is related to this country through his mother’s father. This place where the little one was born is called Bethlehem. His traditional country is Bethlehem, where he grow up – and the River Jordan as well. That’s his Altyerre, his atyemey’e’s [mother’s father’s] and his granny’s [mother’s mother’s].

Jenny Green comments:

Wenten is his own theologian, retelling the story of Jesus and explaining the afterlife in ways to draw on his Arrernte heritage. He uses the terms Aknganentye, Altyerre and kwertengerle and applies Arrernte principles such as the relationship a person has to country through their four grandparents, in his interpretation of the Christian beliefs that he first encountered as a child in Alice Springs. In his telling of the story he emphasises kinship, and his belief that Jesus had rights to two countries through his inheritance – “this world”, for which he is kwertengerle through his mother, and “Heaven” which is his traditional Aknganentye country through his father. Thus, Wenten draws a parallel between Christian beliefs and Arrernte law.

Wenten’s discourse is not only about the afterlife but also about the cyclical nature of the Arrernte world-view. This piece is about where Jesus came from and explains creation in an Arrernte setting. It demonstrates that Wenten sees the world through an Arrernte lens. What he sees is real and true – “That’s a true story” – if a little different from what another person from a different culture or religious tradition would be seeing at the same time. More importantly, Wenten is making meaning of the world through use of concepts that he is familiar with. As a young man, Wenten attended Lutheran, Catholic and other religious services conducted by itinerant Christian missionaries and derived a Jesus narrative drawn from all these sources. Arguably Wenten’s eclectic Christian-Altyerre religion is the lens he used to discern meaning out of life in the close confines of white-occupied Alice Springs where he always lived. For him it was the means whereby events and relationships were interpreted so that they could be managed or controlled.

Rubuntja and Green, *the town grew up dancing*, 173, 174.

Rubuntja and Green, *the town grew up dancing*, 173.

Wenten spent time living at Amoonguna, a settlement 16 kilometres to the east of Alice Springs which was set up in the late 1950s as a transitional settlement for Aboriginal workers recruited to work in labouring jobs in Alice Springs. Wenten was the senior cook in the communal kitchen for many years. He also travelled widely as
Wenten’s account has nicely captured every culture’s understanding of every child’s heritage, that she has a mother and a father with different genealogies. He uses his own cultural matrix to construct a satisfying interactive genealogy that helps to accommodate the Christian belief of Christ being both fully divine and fully human – as the Nicene Creed also seeks to achieve – so making it available to his culture. In Wenten’s theology, life-force emanates from the utnengel/spirit, through atywerrenge/totemic objects of the apmere/land, all of which are eternal. And even more fittingly, ancestry from father’s father’s line is stronger than the ancestry from mother’s father’s line in Arrernte tradition, which seems to approximate the situation Wenten discerns in Jesus’ relationship to the Father (God) and to Mary his human mother. Wenten has established a dynamic, imaginative synthesis of Christianity and Altyerre.

There have been a number of attempts to join Aboriginal religion and Christianity. Perhaps the outstanding example emerged in the publication in 1997 of Rainbow Spirit Theology, from a symposium of Aboriginal Christian elders, led by George Rosendale, which sought to collect and share their accumulated wisdom at the interface between Christianity and their ancient religious traditions. The Rainbow Serpent myth emerged through the symposium as a myth shared by many Aboriginal people, not as a devil but as a creator spirit, to be found across the east coast of Australia and in parts of Queensland and the Northern Territory.

Rainbow Spirit Theology has been questioned by some commentators. Paul Albrecht, Lutheran pastor from Hermannsburg, when asked in the ABC Compass program to comment, said:

did almost all Arrernte people at the time. Nevertheless, it remains correct to say that he lived all his life at Alice Springs/Mparntwe.

648 Catholic Aboriginal writer Betty Pike’s book The Power of Story (Melbourne: John Garratt Publishing, 2011) is an example. Pike has been published widely in Outlook, Summit, Nelen Yuba, and EarthSong.


650 Paul Albrecht is a Lutheran minister who worked for many years at Hermannsburg. He is the son of F.W. Albrecht who included Alice Springs in his pastoral outreach when Wenten was a boy. On the whole Paul Albrecht has a theology that has moved on from his father’s. He acknowledges the battle his father had to appreciate the role of Altyerre and its utility in the Arrernte imaginary. Hearn in A Theology of Mission often quotes Paul Albrecht as an example of an innovative missionary at the frontier, adapting effectively to the issues that emerged in the mid-1970s.
Rainbow Spirit theology I feel is the blind leading the blind, it neither puts forward Aboriginal religion as I understand it to be and it falsifies the Christian position … The whole thing doesn’t add up either from an aboriginal [sic] point of view and from a Christian point of view, it’s just a nonsense. It’s syncretism, you’d have to call it heresy.

Rev Bill Edwards was also somewhat critical of this new theology. Edwards had been superintendent and Presbyterian minister at Ernabella mission from the early 1950s until the 1970s. He then became a roving Uniting Church minister for the Pitjantjatjara lands in the far north-west of South Australia and later an academic at the University of South Australia, lecturing in Aboriginal Studies. He is a paramount authority on the interface between Pitjantjatjara theology and Christian theology. In 2001 Edwards delivered the Charles Strong Memorial Lecture on the topic of Aboriginal Spirituality. He commenced his lecture with a comment about Rainbow Spirit Theology:

In my review article of the book, Rainbow Spirit Theology, I commended the attempt to express the Christian message in terms meaningful to Aboriginal people. I also expressed some criticism of the text as an ‘Australian Aboriginal theology’. My concern was that the Aboriginal concepts presented did not appear to reflect traditional understandings, but rather focused on statements commonly used by people who have lost some of the knowledge of their Indigenous languages and their cultural underpinnings. I suggested that a deeper exploration of traditional language and concepts will offer a more substantial contribution to a wider interpretation of the Scriptures and to the contemporary Australian search for meaning.

Wenten Rubuntja’s theology provides the deeper exploration that Edwards is hoping for. Wenten expresses his securely grounded commitment to Altyerre without diminishment by

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651 Syncretism refers to a process of borrowing or combining of religious concepts, symbols and ways of worship between dissimilar faith traditions with the aim of reconciling both. While this idea is a benign one, in almost every case until the implementation of principles enunciated at Vatican Two, Christian missionaries saw syncretism as an illegitimate process undermining the integrity of the Christian message and it was frowned on.


654 It is hoped that this thesis, in Edwards’ words, offers “a more substantial contribution”.

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Christianity. While his theology is influenced by his contact with Christianity, it nevertheless powerfully expresses his *Arrernte* traditional world-view. While it might appear superficially to be a form of *Rainbow Spirituality Theology*, his approach, responding to Bill Edwards’ concerns, could be described as imaginative dynamic incorporation coming from an intuitive, culturally grounded theology based on *apmere/land*, *aknganentye/born from father’s father’s country and Altyerre*.

Can Paul Albrecht’s accusation of syncretism be levelled against Wenten’s approach? Or put another way, is syncretism a charge that might condemn an approach which combines or amalgamates distinct religious systems into a new religious form that seamlessly contains elements of its different sources? Here Albrecht seems to claim exclusivity for pure tradition and revealed truth. Such a view condemns not only ancient *Altyerre* but the modern imaginary of a dynamic *Altyerre* as well. Wenten, however, would be dismayed if he was not regarded both as fully Christian and as an elder/akngerrapate of his *aknganentye* and *Altyerre* at the same time. For him this syncretism goes further than the collection of dissimilar ideas roughly aligned. In a sense Wenten’s life experience, both profoundly *Arrernte* and succinctly Catholic, has been a thorough organic journey whereby his *Altyerre* has formed itself into an innovative imaginary drawing on all its sources authentically. This may be a deeper richness rather than a heresy. The mystical imaginary transcends its component parts.

Another example of the dynamism of *Altyerre* comes from the first pages of Kathleen Kemarre Wallace’s book *Listen deeply* where she describes the creative role of the *irrerntarenye/spirit-beings* and one big spirit who created the world in the beginning. She was born at *Uyetye*, near Santa Teresa. As a young child she grew up in the *alwekere/women’s camp* with all her mothers and aunties and other young girls and boys as they travelled from waterhole to waterhole across their *apmere/land*.655 When her family moved from the bush she was lodged in the dormitory at Santa Teresa. As a young woman she was formally educated as a teacher and ultimately became a teacher-aide and then classroom teacher in the *Ltyentye Apurte* school. At the Mission she learned her Catholicism well. At the same time, what characterises her life-story is her existential *Arrernte* identity – her *Altyerre* imaginary.

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655 Many of the stories included in her book are travel stories recording the mythical journeys of ancestors across the country near *Ltyentye Apurte/Santa Teresa.*
Kathleen Kemarre Wallace describes the origin of things this way:

Arrernte people believe that there was a spirit long before anyone or anything existed and that this spirit made the world first, then the stars, and then the people. Well we call this Altyerrenge; it’s the time which was the beginning … Everything that exists today was made first in the Altyerrenge – the grasses and earth, and seeds, the trees for shade and food – so that the country would have everything that Arrernte needed.656

This discourse is resonant of the first creation story in Genesis 1. It appears that Kathleen Kemarre has from her Catholic mission experience interpolated, in a subtle and sophisticated manner, the Hebrew creation myth into her Arrernte version of the creation. She continues: “The Altyerre beings brought the earth into being and gave the Arrernte body and spirit so that life could have a form.”657 Once the world has been given, then Altyerre is able to manufacture/shape/form the tapestry of existence. Now anpernirrentye/kinship, atywerrenge/totems or sacred objects, utnenge/spirit, apmere/country and law/atywerrenge658 are all in place. All of this information is provided on one short page of Listen deeply. Here cosmogony is quickly transformed into cosmology: her view of creation provides the background for the intricate delineation of the principal features of her Arrernte cosmology – how the world became and remains an ordered place.

At this point it is important to consider again the significance for the Arrernte of their place of conception and its link with their view of creation. The critical link between place of conception and a person’s existence, a form of personal identification,659 is commonly described as “conception totemism”. Simply put, conception totemism is the premise that Arrernte existence is emplaced in apmere/country and in sacred objects/atywerrenge representing that country. Apmere is filled with utnenge/spirit which instils and animates the life of every human. While conception totemism was one means whereby an individual was able to build a sense of identification, there were other sources for this as well. M.K. Turner

656 Wallace, Listen deeply, 21.
657 Wallace, Listen deeply, 21.
658 Atywerrenge has a number of meanings. As well as totemic sacred objects it also means traditional law and as Breen, personal correspondence, January 4, 2019, says it has an overarching meaning of sacred. See Eastern and Central Arrernte Dictionary, 332.
identifies herself as Kemarre, part of the kinship system, as born from aknganentye her patri-clan, as belonging to her arrende/grandfather’s country, from Akerte near Harts Range/Akerta-renye. It was also shown that her mother’s father provides another marker of self, the true meaning of altyerrende. All three combine to help establish the emplaced being that characterises her Arrernte identity.

Throughout this analysis it has been pointed out that there are differences between the Western Arrernte and the Eastern and Central Mparntwe Arrernte colonial experience. Austin Broos points out that Western Arrernte conception totemism was largely displaced by the Christian accounts of creation:

Between the time of the Invasion and the late 20th century, people like the Western and Southern Arrernte and the Luritja have changed. There could be no better evidence for this change than Christianity’s impact and the diminishing significance of conception. Christianity’s own creationism contested the Western Arrernte’s. Arrernte notions of conception, though, were also contested by sedentary life and the reduction of practical and ritual knowledge it brought.  

Austin-Broos is recounting the Western Arrernte experience of intense contact with German Lutheranism over 140 years. She argues that conception totemism has been diminished by the virtual permanent residence of Western Arrernte people at Hermannsburg Mission over that time. All children living there were seen to be conceived from the utne gel/spirit of that country, the rathepe twins.  

This obviously became a problem of mythical identity overload for the Western Arrernte and they began to use other identity markers more frequently than conception totemism.

The Mparntwe Arrernte, whose direct interaction with Catholic missionary effort is much shorter, seem to have persisted with conception totemism affiliation more successfully. For them a dynamic, imaginative synthesis lies at the heart of their response to Invasion. And so,

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660 Austin-Broos, Arrernte Present, Arrernte Past, 128,129.
661 Carl Strehlow wrote ratapa as did T.G.H Strehlow. See Hill, Broken Song, 459. Austin-Broos, Arrernte, Present, Arrernte Past, 69, uses rathepe. The rathepe were twin boys who in the myth committed matricide. They are the totems of Kaporilja Springs and Manangananga Cave, both very close to Hermannsburg/Ntaria. According to Austin-Broos, 69, all children (including T.G.H Strehlow and Peter Latz) born in the vicinity had rathepe conception totem by association with these places.
Mparntwe Arrernte conception totemism has not been replaced by a Christian belief in the Creator. A Trinitarian Christian theology of creation and Arrernte conception totemism may be seen as compatible, deep, metaphysical attempts to plumb the mystery of Life and to make meaning out of human existence in the light of a universe that defies superficial explanation.

Kathleen Kemarre’s book illustrates this. Her “genesis” discourse in Listen deeply moves immediately to a comment on Arrernte conception totemism. In succeeding pages, she provides an account of conception totemism and specifically the different personifications of the irerrentarenye/spirit-beings that she understands as being responsible for everything that happens to Arrernte people: “After the death of a person irerrentarenye/spirit beings will go back to their grandfather’s country – their father’s father’s country. I will go back to Atnetarrkwe near Uyetye, where the totem of Werirrte-arenye, my grandfather, is.”

In the Foreword to Pmere, Country in Mind, Eli Rubuntja, classificatory brother of Wenten and an ordained Lutheran pastor, wrote: “I’m here because the spirit of my ancestors rests here. I’m in the country where they used to be and their memories are still here.” Chips Mackinolty, in the Introduction to the collection of Pmere, Country in Mind, said in describing the various works of the artists, who almost all produced their paintings in Alice Springs, that they were painting these works because “their relationship to the land has not been broken. It is clear that the paintings have always been more than landscapes … The artists themselves describe the paintings as being directly related to the land, and to the dreaming. They should be recognised for what the artists see them as: part of the living title to land they belong to.”

Fred Myers in his seminal work Pintubi Country, Pintubi Self uses change as a marker of being Aboriginal in the Central Desert:

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662 Wallace, Listen deeply, 24.
663 Eli Rubuntja was for many years President of Tangentyere Council and Co-founder of Yipirinya School, a primary school committed to the maintenance of Arrernie and other Aboriginal languages of Central Australia and teaching bi-lingually from its inception.
664 The earliest Lutheran missionaries established a virtual seminary for Arrernte men to become ordained Lutheran ministers. Their Christian education was extremely thorough.
665 Rev Eli Rubuntja was a disciple of F.W. Albrecht. He worked as his driver for many years and studied theology under him. Albrecht was a conservative, believing that it was impossible for Altyerre and Christianity to survive side by side. Yet Eli demonstrates that he is fundamentally committed to Arrernte conceptionism/totemism while also being fully at home in Lutheranism.
666 Green, ed. Pmere, Country in Mind, 4.
667 Fred Myers, Pintubi Country, Pintubi Self, Sentiment, Place, and Politics among Western Desert Aborigines (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).
If mere survival, mere continuance, is of interest, then the hardest sorts of rocks, such as granite, have to be put near the top of the list as most successful among macroscopic entities … But the rock’s way of staying in the game is different from the way of living things. The rock, we may say, resists change; it stays put unchanging. The living thing escapes change either by correcting change or changing itself to meet the change or by incorporating continual change into its own being.668

Responding to Myer’s idea of living change or organic, continual alteration, it might be pointed out that the firestorm process described in Chapter 4 demonstrates how an Australian tree can be burnt to apparent death, yet survive, either because it has adapted to fire and can withstand it by drawing on deep reservoirs of life, or through its seeds, which after being super-heated are rendered fertile. Myer’s metaphor of organic change fits the modern experience of Altyerre, where Mparntwe Arrernte are able to manage and control change organically in and through their Altyerre. Using this organic, living metaphor, we might see the dynamic fusion of Arrernte Altyerre and a refined, 21st-century Christian Trinitarian creation theology into a wholly satisfying world-view for Mparntwe Arrernte – a world-view that may offer new, deeper, more satisfying answers to fundamental questions of life, pertinent to Christian Arrernte and even Christian non-Arrernte alike.

7.4 Conclusion: An Emergent Altyerre-Christian Theology

Harmsen, after listening to Arrernte informants and reading MSC archives closely, concluded that the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart had at Little Flower and Santa Teresa adopted a “cunning sort of diplomacy,”669 a paternalistic practice whereby they made it appear that they were listening to the Arrernte but were in fact manipulating them. This thesis seeks to tweak Harmsen’s view into subtler shape. It takes a clue from Carl Strehlow’s ethnography, which very early identified the subtlety of the Western Arrernte at the interface between newcomer and Arrernte on the frontier and demonstrated that Western Arrernte were keen to absorb and utilise a variety of new ideas, rites and approaches in their daily and religious lives. Strehlow showed that Western Arrernte were keen readers of those things which they anticipated their

668 Myers, Pintubi Country, Pintubi Self, inside front cover, underlining as in the original.
669 Harmsen, “You gave us the Dreaming”, 94.
interlocuters would be interested in and shaped their discourse accordingly. Rather than being manipulated, it seems the Western Arrernte were capable of making their own imaginary out of the missionaries’ teachings, combining Christianity with their own Altyerre. F.W. Albrecht thought that Altyerre offered no future to the Western Arrernte and told them so. Henson says, “He understood the importance of the ceremonies … but thought it was impossible to reconcile them with a Christian understanding.” An unidentified Arrernte replies, “He wasn’t interested, so we didn’t talk about it to him. Kept that part to ourselves.”670 The Western Arrernte made a hero and a ngkarte out of Albrecht as they did of Carl Strehlow, but they did not slavishly follow either man.

The process of engagement at the frontier by Western, Central Mparntwe and Eastern Arrernte is a tribute to their continuing commitment to the dynamism of Altyerre. All Arrernte had a long tradition of incorporating ideas from the outside. Incorporation is an Arrernte lifestyle. The Eastern and Mparntwe Arrernte were subjected to huge disruptive forces. Their Altyerre values were subjected not just to new ideas, but to contrasting ideas, powerful, aggressive ideas. These forces were apparently overpowering, yet they were effectively resisted. Perhaps their cause was assisted when the Catholic missionaries allowed themselves to become agents of government assimilation policy, thus compromising the trust of the Arrernte, who then, in a manner not dissimilar to the method of the Western Arrernte, adopted a clever policy of concealment in order to retain their identity and vitality.

The result was the development of a unique form of Eastern and Mparntwe Arrernte Catholicism which adopted ritual, devotions and prayer practices from Catholicism and planted them in the fertile ground of the Altyerre tradition. The Healing Spring anecdote confirms this long-standing facility. The written works of Wenten Rubuntja, M.K. Turner, Margaret Heffernan and Kathleen Kmarre Wallace were responsible for the elucidation of a new level of sophistication of Mparntwe Arrernte Catholic thought. However, this progress was based on earlier developments in the oral fashioning of this unique imaginary by Catholic Mparntwe Arrernte people such as Leonie Palmer, Therese Ryder, Teresa Webb, Basil Stevens and Thomas Stevens.

670 Henson, A Straight-out Man, 136.
M.K. Turner thus posits creation as the centre of her religious viewpoint rather than a creator, but in deference to her Christian audience she offers an amalgam of traditional Catholic teaching within her predominant Altyerre world-view: “I’m saying here that I’m strong in Catholicism, and I’m strong in my culture.” Her conclusion bears quoting in full:

That’s what it’s like for me as a Catholic. As a Catholic person, I really love my Land. You asked me a couple of times, alere (son), just how I see God and the Land fitting in with each other. Well, that’s a very hard question. We just see how God created us and God created everything, and how our Creation is to the Land, and how we treat Land in the eyes of those Beings in the Land, you know the Little People of the Land … He created us to look after the Land … God gave us our Land to look after it, to guide it. God will also Himself guide the Little People of our grandfather’s Land so that they can look after us … So that we are just like joint guardians of the country, maybe joint custodians … So that God can see our spirit, given in our own way, and so that He can see in His way, we say it and sing it in a different style to the white people, how we see God.

God as creator is not here central to M.K.’s religion, but the Creation and caring for the Land are. The creator is a given of orthodox Catholicism. M.K. has tacitly accepted that and incorporated the creator into her model. To her God is not a controller or manipulator but a chaperon – “God will also Himself guide the Little People of our grandfather’s Land so that they can look after us”. M.K.’s final point is about arntarntaremel/caring. In the subtlest of ways M.K. has incorporated the creator into the aknganentye/creation. The apmere/land is the centre of her thinking; apmere/land is the source and resting place of utnengel/spirit which is the caring/regenerative/creative centre of all life.

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671 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 220.
672 M.K. incorporates her co-author in the anpermirrentye/kinship system within her discourse. She is doing the same to her reader.
673 Here we see M.K.’s discourse, “God gave us our Land” in close parallel to Harmsen’s thesis topic, “You gave us the Dreaming” and Wenten Rubuntja’s phrase, “God gave us the Dreaming”.
674 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 219.
675 Here M.K.’s comment may be compared to Carl Strehlow’s agonised response on his deathbed, “God doesn’t help.”
The task ahead at this point is to examine Christian creation theology and Christology, particularly with respect to the implications of the theology of the Cosmic Christ, in order to demonstrate the convergence in the development of Christian and Arrernte imaginaries.
Part Three: The Cosmic Christ

Introduction

For the purposes of this thesis, the Cosmic Christ is taken to mean that understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ as implicitly expressed by St Paul, “The fullness of the one who fills all things in every way” (Ephesians 1:23), and as explicitly developed by Teilhard de Chardin in the 20th century, “There is also He who, in his ... being, gathers up the whole of creation [in] His third ‘nature’ of Christ (neither human nor divine, but cosmic)”.

In this understanding, while priority is given to Jesus of Nazareth as the incarnation of God, the person and work of Christ is understood to proceed and be immanent in the whole of creation from start to finish. As Teilhard says, “Christian tradition is unanimous that there is more in the total Christ than man and God.”

In Part Three the focus of research moves from explorations of Altyerre to the theology of the Cosmic Christ in order to prepare for a deeper exploration of Altyerre in Part Four. Chapter 8 demonstrates that there are developing and varied understandings of creator and creation in the Bible, and that these understandings can be seen as pointing to the Cosmic Christ, in whom all things in heaven and on earth were created (see Colossians 1:16), the one through whom all things came into being (see John 1:3). Chapter 9 explores 20th-century theologies of the Cosmic Christ through the writings of Teilhard de Chardin, Karl Rahner and Jürgen Moltmann, with particular reference to the Trinity and to creation. Deep in this theology is an appreciation of the revelation of Christ throughout the history of the Cosmos. Chapter 10 considers the recent eco-theology of Denis Edwards and Elizabeth Johnson and lays further foundations for the ensuing dialogue between Altyerre and Catholic Christianity.

It is not the purpose of this thesis, nor is there space, to provide a detailed study of creation theologies in the Hebrew Bible and Christian tradition. The aim of Part Three is to demonstrate the orthodoxy of the theology of the Cosmic Christ in relation to the theologies of creation, Trinity and incarnation and so set a framework for identifying the deep complementarities in contemporary Altyerre-Catholicism.

Chapter 8: Theologies of Creation

This chapter provides a summary of the progression of Jewish and Christian thought as it seeks to clarify an emerging understanding of the nature of God, particularly as Creator and Spirit. It begins with a consideration of early myths preceding the Pentateuch, followed by a review of monotheistic theology in the Priestly texts, an analysis of relevant Pauline and Johannine texts, some notes on the contribution of theologians in the Patristic period, and concludes with reflections on the divergent views of creation in medieval scholasticism and later mysticism.

In her book *Making All Things New*, Ilia Delio notes that “kosmos, [was] first used in Homer’s Iliad, to mean ‘in good order’ or the order that gives rise to beauty” 678 According to Delio, the Greeks believed that humanity and society were integrated into cosmos in such a way that “cosmos was the source for guiding human action”. 679 Delio suggests that in the Greek construction *kosmos* had a form of consciousness. As will be shown in this chapter, God is seen not only as the external fabricator of the universe but, especially in the Wisdom tradition in the Hebrew Bible and in the Pauline and Johannine traditions in the New Testament, as immanent in the good order of the creation. And so, the Second Person of the Trinity, implied as the Word of God in the Hebrew Bible, called the Son of God in the New Testament, is understood as the Cosmic Christ. This tradition implicitly presents God as God the Creator, God incarnate, and God within the good order of a gifted, conscious Universe.

8.1 Creation Theologies in the Old Testament

This section explores three aspects of Old Testament creation theology: first, that YHWH is a relational God rather than an exclusive God; second, that the God of creation transcends gender, disclosing what we might call feminine and masculine characteristics, but is not contained within such categories; and, third, that God is found immanently in nature, as particularly revealed in the Wisdom literature. The aim here is to demonstrate that the scriptural accounts of God and creation are varied and multi-layered, because such an

understanding then opens a pathway into the theology of the Cosmic Christ and dialogue with Arrernte creation accounts.

8.1.1 YHWH: From Elohim to YHWH – A Relational Inclusive God

The theologies of the Pentateuch bring together accounts of God that emerged over centuries of Israelite experience and reflection. Through the Pentateuch we can see traces of Israel’s religious heritage and traces of a God who is known by different names. In the opening creation account in the book of Genesis, the Priestly editors describe a God called Elohim who is powerful enough and magnanimous enough to be able to create something as immense as the universe and offer it as gift. The Priestly conviction is that God is One, God is powerful and God cares for God’s creation, especially humans and particularly the Israelites, God’s Chosen People. The Priestly editors use many names for God but settled on YHWH as the unique name of their God. Nevertheless, an astute reading of the whole book of Genesis provides a revelation of YHWH as not only a God of Israel but also a God for the nations and for all creation.

According to Konrad Schmid, the first creation account “was written by the Judean Priestly intelligentsia that had been deported to Babylonia. Priestly texts show close familiarity with ancient Babylonian science, cosmology and theology.”680 While evidencing its Babylonian influence, the Priestly Code also reflects an earlier Canaanite heritage,681 establishing a theology of order that provides the basis for religious worship.682

The first account commences: “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters (Genesis 1:1–2).”683 From the outset this first account indicates that the task of God’s creation is to bring order out of formlessness. On the third day

683 All quotations in this thesis are from the Catholic Youth Bible, International Edition (Winona, Minnesota: Saint Mary’s Press, 2000) which uses the New Revised Standard Version (NSRV). In some cases when contributing authors have quoted from other translations these have been left in the original.
God separates the waters from the dry land and named the dry land “Earth”. Separating and naming are ordering tasks that God completes to establish an Earth for humankind. On the sixth day humans are made in God’s image and likeness. This means that humans share in God’s creative work and that the task of humanity is collaboratively to prosper the creation that God has commenced from “the beginning”. Part Four will present Altyerre creation stories which also describe creative spirits shaping the world into meaning.

The second creation story in Genesis is Yahwist, which most scholars suggest was constructed earlier than the Priestly story and is quite different from the first. It could be the necessity to account for the human experience of disorder that prompts the second story. In this story, adam and eve reject God, thus setting up the need for a rapprochement between creator and created. While the first account ends with a day of rest because everything is “very good,” the second account presages the intrusion of sin into God’s very good world and sets up the necessity (and the pathway) for humanity’s return to the God that humanity has rejected. The two accounts then, which appear superficially contradictory, are complementary.

At first reading it appears that the Priestly authors adopted a monotheistic position in regard to the creator God they present. The Priestly code is ultimately concerned to establish YHWH as Israel’s God, the one God and the only God – against all others. Yet while the Priestly code represents God monotheistically, Schmid and Brett argue that the sophisticated nature of Priestly monotheism includes polytheistic strands in earlier Israelite cult. For example, from its Canaanite heritage Israel initially adopts El, the Canaanite name for God, for its own use. Schmid observes: “Exodus 6:3 relates El Shaddai and YHWH to one another, making El Shaddai and YHWH two different modes of revelation for the same God. However, this God is first introduced in the Priestly Code neither as El Shaddai nor as YHWH but as Elohim.”

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685 In representing the names adam (adamah or ish) and eve (ishsha -from ish) the Yahwist authors are indicating men and women (humanity) rather than two specific people named Adam and Eve.

686 The Priestly account is set out in seven days with the Sabbath rest day at its conclusion as a liturgical mnemonic for Israel’s cult.

687 Mark Brett, “*Canto Ergo Sum – Indigenous Peoples and Postcolonial Theology,*” *Pacifica* 16 (October, 2003), 251.

Schmid’s insight is that the name YHWH includes El Shaddai and Elohim. The apparent Priestly monotheism, he argues, is better characterised as “inclusive monotheism”. Smith concurs: “The earliest texts render Yahweh as a divine monarch enthroned among other heavenly beings … All these texts present Yahweh as the preeminent member of the divine assembly.”

The different names for God arguably indicate that the reception of God’s self-revelation is ongoing and variant.

Schmid also argues that there is a critical relationship between the creation detailed in Genesis and the story of the exodus from Egypt. Schmid points to the motif of separation of the land from the waters in the first creation account: “In the miracle at the Sea of Reeds, something similar to the third day of creation happens: the dry ground can be seen … [R]eaders can learn from the miracle and the Sea that the God who saved Israel from the Egyptians was none other than the one who created heaven and earth.”

Schmid argues that there is a clear theological intention in establishing the bridge between creation and liberation from slavery in Egypt:

The Priestly Code strives to synthesise its received traditions into a unified notion of God. The God of creation [Elohim], the God of the ancestors [El Shaddai], and the God of the Exodus [YHWH] are not different deities but one. In each scenario, the character of God as creator is stressed: whether God acts in Israel or Egypt, he does so as the God of creation.

Schmid thus argues that the Priestly code presents the YHWH cult as the final and complete revelation of God with its special covenant with Israel. Using Isaac and Ishmael as representatives respectively of Israel and all others, Genesis 19–21 proposes that “both brothers are bound by a theological importance that can only be understood in terms of an inclusive model containing the two unequal brothers, favouring the younger without either casting off the older or removing him from the care of God”.

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For the purpose of this thesis, the central point here is that in the creation of the world by Elohim, the creation is offered to all humanity according to the various stages of revelation that history brings, with the Creator being named in a variety of ways. And God blesses all.

8.1.2 Myths: Ultimate Meaning through Story

Both creation accounts are examples of myth. In Part One the nature of myth was discussed using the insight of Erich Kolig: “natural phenomena are not what myths seek to explain but are rather the medium through which myths … explain”. The purpose of myth is to consolidate cultural, transmissible truth in memorable form. From a Judaeo-Christian perspective, Elizabeth Johnson explains the Genesis creation myths as “belief in the Creator God [that] delineates the ultimate meaning of the universe, not an explanation of how things work”.

In Arrernte mythology, natural phenomena make meaning out of all creation, including humanity. Trees and mountains, thunder and fire, animals and their adventures, the exploits of mythic ancestors, act as markers and reminders, mnemonics of the imaginary that constitutes the myth. Thus the presence, for example, of a specific landmark or striation on a rock is said to represent the home of a mythical ancestor, or be evidence for its action. The myth is not meant to explain how the mark got there, but rather the presence of the mark confirms the existence and the exploits of an ancestor who has established the foundations for life and for law, for all relationships.

The stories in Genesis/Exodus operate the same way, using historical events and local cosmology. Schmid notes: “P speaks about the past, not the present. Its historical range

693 Kolig in Diane Austin-Broos, Arrernte Present, Arrernte Past, 41.
694 Elizabeth Johnson, Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love (Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2014), 168.
695 It needs to be acknowledged that even in the work of the Arrernte Voices some mythical stories appear to be simple descriptions of the causation of a particular natural feature. Kathleen Kemarre Wallace presents a number of myths which she learnt from her grandfathers and grandmothers that fit this pattern. In her story Apmere Arturte-akertebat ancestors (Listen deeply, 145–49) she concludes, “we don’t know where the altyerre bats went next … we just know what happened to make the special smooth, shiny rocks from the melted flesh of the ancestor bats at Arturte.” This conclusion, however, is deceptive. The power of the story lies earlier in the narrative in the role played by Inkiljaku, Kathleen Kemarre’s nominated ancestor, who defended Arturte against the bat incursion. It is through his courage that Kathleen Kemarre is able to establish her connection to her claimed sacred site Therirrerte. The deep meaning of the story is that Therirrerte is charged with the spirit of her ancestor and she is its inheritor.
696 Cosmology is here defined as a science or quasi-science that seeks to describe the origins and workings of the universe.
covers the time between the creation and Moses. However, P clearly uses this mythical past to sketch the everlasting political and religious organisation of its contemporary world.”

What are the inherent truths within the theologising of the Israelite myths? In the first creation account God’s step-by-step creative process is presented as culminating in a very good, well-ordered cosmos. So, the first truth is the ultimate goodness of creation. The second account describes God’s relationship with the first humans – ensuring that the Garden has all the food they need, that adam has animal companions, and finally that adam has a mate – and then of the rejection of God’s offer through blindness and pride. So, the second truth is that while God’s benevolence is rejected by humanity that is not the end of the story. The rest of the Pentateuch, and indeed the rest of the Hebrew bible, presents the story of salvation and covenant which YHWH offers to all humanity, not just the Israelites.

8.1.3 Traces of the Feminine in Israel’s God

According to Smith, Israelite religion has its origins in Canaanite religion. This section explores one aspect of Canaanite religion that had an influence on Israel, namely the goddess Asherah (asherah), in order to explore traces of the feminine in Israel’s God. Sung Jin Park remarks, “it can be inferred that the Israelites considered Asherah as a consort of Baal according to the Deuteronomistic anti-Asherah ideology that influenced the later period of the Monarchy”. Olyan, on the other hand, argues “that the asherah was associated historically with Yahweh and not with Baal”. The general consensus is that Asherah was a female consort of El or Baal in Canaan and of El/YHWH in Israel. What is significant is that this tradition in Israel reflects an understanding of a feminine aspect of God in its earliest form, an attribute which was slowly subordinated to a patriarchal image of God in Israel’s cult. This

698 It is notable that “man” in the second account is depicted as a tiller of the earth or a farmer, reflecting the agrarian revolution and the food surplus that gave rise to the civilisations of the region. The story reflects a well-ordered, civilised culture, which is in keeping with Israelite society at the time of writing.
699 Smith, The Early History of God, 32.
703 See Smith, The Early History of God, 89.
cult, though, may still be open to a more inclusive understanding of the nature of God. For example, McCarter as cited in Smith offers “the name [Asherah] to be a hypostasis of Yahweh”. 704 By hypostasis McCarter is suggesting that within the nature or essence of God there is a feminine element. 705

While the Priestly code eventually suppressed Asherah, it seems that the hidden “asherah” hypostasis of God continued to manifest the feminine in the God of Israel. For Smith, “The female figure of Wisdom in Proverbs 1–9 is a possible candidate.” 706 Smith points out that Wisdom is characterised by trees: “She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her” (Proverbs 3:18). In the earlier Canaanite/Israelite cult, Asherah was worshipped through poles, representing trees, set up in the sanctuary, a practice later specifically forbidden by Deuteronomy 16:21. 707

In She Who Is, Elizabeth Johnson, in a coverage that takes account of the Wisdom literature written up to 100 years before Christ, posits parallels to Asherah in “the Canaanite goddess of love, Astarte, the Mesopotamian goddess Ishtar, the Egyptian goddess Maat, the Semitic mother goddess at Yahweh’s side in Jewish worship at Elephantine, and the Hellenised form of the Egyptian goddess Isis”. 708 Johnson is pointing to the common understanding in ancient Middle Eastern cultures that the feminine is a valid expression, but not the whole expression, of the nature of the divine.

From this brief survey we might draw a broader image of YHWH that includes feminine qualities associated with giving and sustaining life, for this is the ultimate image of YHWH 704 P.K. McCarter “Aspects of the religion” as cited in Smith, The Early History of God, 87. This conclusion is supported by Winter: “Winter concludes … with discussions on wisdom and the goddess: and aspects of the goddess as feminine characteristics of Yahweh.”
705 Judith M. Hadley, The Cult of Asherah in Ancient Israel and Judah, Evidence of a Hebrew Goddess (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 7, argues that, when speaking about the identification of a cultic object (a tree), “this could lead to the hypostatisation of certain attributes of deity, which in turn become deified”.
706 Smith, The Early History of God, 95.
707 It is notable that in Abram’s first excursion out of Haran, he comes to Shechem, to the oak at Moreh in Canaan (Genesis 12:6). Footnotes in the NSRV point out that the oak may be a terebinth, which is a common small tree in Palestine, written as elah or elim indicating its sacred character. Abram’s early ritual practice acknowledges the sacred in the terebinth, in nature. Kathleen Kemarre Wallace’s story “Mother Tree” is a parallel Arrente example of the idea that trees are filled with nurturing spirit. Wallace, Listen Deeply, 124–27. This story will be examined in detail in Part Four.
derived from the Pentateuch. For example, Second Isaiah, reflecting the same ethos as the Priestly Genesis accounts,\(^709\) continues this more inclusive imagery of the nature of God:

Listen to me, O house of Jacob,
all the remnant of the house of Israel,
who have been borne by me from your birth,
carried from the womb;
even to your old age I am he,
even when you turn grey I will carry you.
I have made, and I will bear;
I will carry and will save. (Isaiah 46:3–4)

In this case, and as in Psalm 27:10, the images for God are both female and male and express not just birth from God’s womb but ongoing care on the part of God for God’s people. Texts from the Pentateuch and the Prophets thus indicate an abiding and evolving sense of the feminine in Israel’s understanding of God. At a deeper level, however, the categories of the masculine and feminine remain human constructions, as do all other images of God, in efforts to describe the ultimately ineffable mystery of God.

8.1.4 Immanence: God in Creation

While Genesis tells the story of a Creator God, the Wisdom literature of the Hebrew Bible presents a God in the spaces, a God who fills and animates human life and all life in the creation, a fully present God continuously enlivening every aspect of creation. The first two creation accounts in Genesis are thus enhanced by the Wisdom creation account in Proverbs 8:22–31 which commences, “The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago.” Here Wisdom asserts that she was there “before the beginning of the earth”. The unity of God and Wisdom is established from the outset – “when he established the heavens, I was there”. Wisdom as co-creator is with God before the beginning talked about in Genesis 1:1. And so, the earth and heaven are framed. The fabric of creation sets limits and provides the ordered foundation of heaven, earth and life. Rejoicing is reserved for last, where we find God “delighting in the human race”. God’s rejoicing is an immanent activity sustaining creation.

Exploring Proverbs 8:22–31, Elizabeth Johnson concludes that Wisdom is “present with God at creation, working as a skilled craftsperson and playfully rejoicing in the result”. Johnson sees Wisdom in the Hebrew Bible as the Spirit of God: “[W]hile later Christian theology tended to connect the figure of Wisdom with Jesus Christ, the earlier tradition more often associates her with the world-enlivening presence of the Spirit.” Johnson understands the Spirit as the mobiliser or activity centre of God. In her work *Women, Earth, and Creator Spirit* she writes:

Speaking about the Spirit signifies the presence of the living God active in this historical world. The Spirit is God who actually arrives in every moment, God drawing near and passing in vivifying power in the midst of historical struggle. So profoundly is this the case that whenever people speak in a generic way of “God,” of their experience of God or of God’s doing something in the world, more often than not they are referring to the Spirit …

Johnson is demonstrating how God is made available to creation as Wisdom/Spirit. In the following section, the discussion moves to how God as Wisdom, and through the testimony of the animals, is revealed in the Earth.

### 8.1.5 Wisdom in the Book of Job

It might be said that pre-Invasion *Arrernte* paid little attention to the problem of suffering, it being subsumed into the inevitability of human existence. But there is no question that Invasion brought suffering crashing into the consciousness of *Arrernte* people. The Book of Job tackles the problem of suffering and the issue of disorder in God’s good creation. The wisdom of Job and his intuitive connectedness with nature mirrors the relationship that *Mparntwe Arrernte* manifest in the sacred *Altyerre*.

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710 Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 141.
711 Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 141.
713 The issue of the suffering born by *Arrernte* in the Invasion will be covered more extensively in the section on Moltmann’s theology in Chapter 9.
The Book of Job addresses creation through the eyes of a non-Israelite, but one who eventually comes to know YHWH. Mark Brett’s view is that the poet/author of the Book of Job inhabits a “social space that was opened up by Priestly theology”. Brett demonstrates that Job uses God’s names interchangeably, moving from El to YHWH. The importance of this aspect of the theology of the Book of Job is that the author can view Israelite theology from the outside and present “a character who is apparently law-observant without need of a law”.

Job’s dilemma takes us back to the issues raised in the second creation account, the arrival of disorder in God’s well-ordered world. Job’s task is to discern how it is that a good God, who ostensibly rewards good with good, and punishes evil with overwhelming power, can permit evil to ruin the life of a demonstrably good person. Brett demonstrates that Job resorts to nature for a response:

But ask the wild beast, and she will instruct you;  
the birds of the air, and they will declare to you;  
speak to the earth, and she will instruct you; and the fish of the sea will relate to you.  
Who among all these does not know that the hand of YHWH has done this?  
In his hand is the life of every living thing and the spirit of all human flesh. (Job 12:7–10)

Brett points to the ironic character of this text. Here “the animals bear witness also to the shadow side of being in God’s ‘hand’” (cf. Job 10:3, 7–8; 13:21). Job begins to challenge God, to question God’s justice in meting out suffering to those whose lives are just and seem not to merit punishment or retribution for any offence against God or neighbour.

From an Arrernte perspective, the same rhetorical question as that asked of the beasts might be asked of the Invasion by Christian missionaries. The Book of Job, then, according to Brett, is a “challenge to those who would make exclusive claims about the revelatory value of Mosaic Law”. Here we find that nature, which is open to every human rather than a

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714 Brett, Political Trauma and Healing, 127.  
715 Brett, Political Trauma and Healing, 129.  
716 Translation in Brett, Political Trauma and Healing.  
717 Brett, Political Trauma and Healing, 130.  
718 Brett, Political Trauma and Healing, 129.
revelation that pertains only to the Hebrew tradition, is called upon as arbiter of how we are to act ethically. The poet is taking the notion of covenant wider than one restricted to the descendants of Abraham into a covenant with “all flesh”: “In his hand is the life of every living thing, and the spirit of all human flesh” (Job 12:10).\textsuperscript{719}

Brett quotes Norman Habel’s observation that “the place of Wisdom is on/in Earth”.\textsuperscript{720} Habel is presenting “Earth” capitalised, as in the first Priestly creation account. While God is the Creator of heaven and earth, that is, of all things, God is here specifically the Creator of Earth, our home and God’s home too. This concept resonates with Sallie McFague’s idea that the universe is God’s body,\textsuperscript{721} and a way to understand this embodiment is through Wisdom and, as Habel notes, especially though the Wisdom of the Earth.

The very nature of the Earth reflects the nature of its architect and builder. Rather than being transcendent, as might be inferred from Genesis 1:1, this architect and builder God is immanent in every aspect of the creation. As Johnson powerfully asserts, this is a panentheistic understanding of God.\textsuperscript{722} Further, if God may be found in the very stuff of creation then God may be seen as experiencing the suffering of nature in God’s-self.

Mark Worthing argues that “The suffering of God is not a new idea.”\textsuperscript{723} Using his own translation of Jeremiah, he presents God as deeply broken: “Is Ephraim my beloved son? Is he a pleasing child? For since I spoke against him, I cannot forget him; I writhe in anguish for him” (Jer 31:20).\textsuperscript{724} Traditional readings of the Hebrew Bible often identify an angry God, indeed a God of wrath who punishes evildoers. In contrast, this prophetic reading sees God in pain and anguish, writhing with pity for the creation.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{719} Brett, \textit{Political Trauma and Healing}, 130.
\item \textsuperscript{722} Johnson, \textit{Ask the Beasts}, 147. Johnson undertakes a careful analysis of panentheism as part of an analysis of Aquinas’ doctrine of God “in all things”. Panentheism connotes God in all things, contrasted to pantheism, that God is all things, or all things are God. Essentially, in panentheism the notion is that all things contain a particle of the divine, but the divine is not entirely contained in all things – God is both immanent and transcendent.
\item \textsuperscript{724} Worthing, “The Nexus Between Divine, Human, and Creational Suffering,” 120.
\end{itemize}
Brett’s conclusion is that “Job’s speech in chapter 12 is pointing to the possibility of ‘natural theology’.” In other words, a panentheistic understanding of God in the world through Wisdom might be available to all people at all times, and the Creator God is not the preserve of the Priestly code or the Judaeo-Christian tradition alone. As Brett argues, the Book of Job and the Priestly code generally offer a theology which provides an understanding of “all living creatures and ‘all flesh’ as blessed with a divinely given spirit of life, and covered by Noah’s covenant”.

In ancient times the Book of Job challenged the experience of unjust suffering by individuals. In modern times, Gustavo Gutiérrez in *On Job* acknowledges that

> God wants justice indeed, and desires that divine judgement (*misphat*) reign in the world; but God cannot impose it, for the nature of created beings must be respected. God’s power is limited by human freedom; for without freedom God’s justice would not be present within history. Furthermore, precisely because human beings are free, they have the power to change their course and be converted. The destruction of the wicked would put an end to that possibility.

If God were peremptorily to annihilate the wicked or eliminate suffering then the whole world would be preordained and freedom itself overwhelmed. And the beasts have told him so. Thus, for Gutiérrez, justice is written into creation and the poor cannot be denied their share. As Brett argues, the implication is that Job takes the image of a suffering world and Creator God further: “Non-Israelites are therefore depicted as capable of relationship with the Creator, of being taught by creation, and of acquiring a legitimate ethic from creation.”

### 8.1.6 Summary

Images and understandings of the Creator God develop and evolve in the course of the Hebrew scriptures. The first creation story depicts how in the beginning there was formlessness upon which God’s creative word brought order. The God of the Book of

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725 Brett, *Political Trauma and Healing*, 135.
726 Brett, *Political Trauma and Healing*, 139.
728 Brett, *Political Trauma and Healing*, 138.
Genesis came to be presented in monotheistic ways that included understandings of feminine, masculine and suffering aspects of God. Drawing upon mythological wisdom and the prophets, Israel embraced a God of many dimensions reflecting many sources drawn from nature and history. Thus, Wisdom became associated with God’s work of creation and remains working continuously in creation long after the universe was sent spinning off into being. God’s response to ‘disharmony’ was/is expressed through God’s pain and continuing, active, healing presence, God’s immanence in creation.

The Book of Job suggests that a practical response to a world that defies ethical logic may be found apart from the Yahwist tradition and in creation itself. Brett suggests “that the strangers’ name for the Creator might be different from Israel’s divine name”. This suggests that there could be answers to these very same theological conundrums in a tradition that might have no naming of a God at all and, since they have no name for God, do not make appeals to that un-named entity through prayer, supplication, sacrifice, offerings or ritual. In Part Four below the rituals of the Arrernte will be shown to be practices that are not an attempt to change the order prescribed in the Altyerre but to fulfil it.

**8.2 Creation Theologies in the New Testament**

**8.2.1 The Cosmic Christ in Paul and John**

New Testament writings unfold the presence of the Word, the source of creation, the Son of God, an itinerant prophet and healer, Jesus of Nazareth, the Cosmic Christ. The life and preaching of Jesus challenge preceding Hebrew representations of God. In Mark’s Gospel, for example, we read that Jesus called God “Abba, Father” (Mark 14:36), and Paul tells his Roman audience that through the Spirit they are empowered to call God “Abba, Father” (Romans 8:16). Jesus, using an Aramaic word for Father, is offering his followers an intimate name for God that was less familiar, although it had been available, to pious Jews. From John, second generation Christians heard that, for Jesus, the “Father and I are One” (John 10:30), and that Jesus will send an Advocate, the Holy Spirit, to sustain believers (John 14:15). Paul developed a deep understanding of the God revealed by Jesus and was able to construct the earliest extant Christian theology of God drawing upon these two threads, the

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729 Brett, *Political Trauma and Healing*, 139.
Hebrew tradition and the person of Jesus, whom he had never precisely met yet, in a mystical way, knew intimately.

The creation account in the Letter to the Colossians is a Christic hymn which reflects Paul’s theology of the Cosmic Christ:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers – all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. (Col 1:15–20)

Reprising the first Genesis account where humanity is made in the image of God, Paul declares that Christ is the “image of the invisible God”. Identifying Christ as the fullness of God, this theology is incarnational – God is both invisible as Creator and visible as Christ in creation. However, unlike the Genesis account, where humanity is created as the culmination of the creation of everything else, the Colossians account has Christ both as the first born and the instrument of the initial creation (more like the figure of Wisdom in Proverbs 8). Christ, for Paul, is explicitly the first born of creation from the very moment of creation – in other words Cosmic. In this way Colossians combines the transcendent character of Paul’s Hebrew God and the immanent character of his understanding of the Spirit of Christ/God present in creation forever.

While traditional Judaism saw the culmination of God’s creation as an ascent towards God through humankind, Colossians is stating that Christ is the firstborn in creation. Creation in its first moment is filled with God and is travelling towards God. This is the highpoint of creation and everything flows on from this moment continuously in and through the incarnate God in Christ. In Paul we can find a descent of God into creation and an ascent of creation
back to God, a circular or reciprocal model. Part Four below will demonstrate how Altyerre anticipates this movement in its notion of cyclical renewal.

The Second Letter to Timothy quickly establishes Paul as a devout Jew when he writes, “I am grateful to God, whom I worship with a clear conscience as my ancestors did” (2 Tim 1:3). When Paul writes “God” he is referring to the God of his ancestors. When he talks of Christ, he is not taking anything away from that God but adding to how he understands God’s action in the world. Paul is specific about God’s action in the world when he depicts God’s grace as “The grace bestowed on us in Christ Jesus before time began, but now made manifest through the appearance of our Saviour Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 1:9–10). Nothing could be more specific: Christ exists before time began.

The same themes emerge in the Letter to the Ephesians. The introductory blessing states: “Blessed be God … who has blessed us in Christ … as he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:3–4). In this letter we find additionally a role for the Spirit. Ephesians promises that believers are “sealed with the holy Spirit” (Eph 1:13). The latent Trinitarian God, implicit in the Hebrew Bible, is emerging in the hands of Paul, the pharisaical Jew who has been mystically touched by Christ.

The Letter to the Romans can be seen as deeply incarnational, soteriological and pneumatological, all leading to a glorious eschaton. Paul addresses creation and salvation through Christ’s Spirit simultaneously: “We know that all creation is groaning in labour pains even until now; and not only that, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, we also groan within ourselves as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom 8:22–23). Paul’s message is that believers in Christ are redeemed through Christ from before the beginning of the world. In Paul’s understanding, God’s freedom is

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732 As Anne Hunt observes, “The Old Testament provided terminology and conceptuality for the threefold experience of God in Jesus Christ.” See Hunt, Trinity, 7.

733 Soteriology is the theology of salvation.

734 Pneumatology is the theology of the Holy Spirit.

735 Eschatology is the theology of the last things: death, judgment and eternal life.
therefore conferred on/in God’s creation, it is inherent. As a result, humans are free to engage with God – or not.

The Gospel of John and the Johannine letters were written perhaps half a century after Paul’s writings. The Johannine prologue – also presented in hymnic form – reiterates Genesis 1:1–2, laying out a succinct summary of John’s creation theology. John commences his Gospel: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God” (John 1:1–2). It could be said that Genesis is about the beginning through the creative Word, while John is about the beginning who is the creative Word, identifying the Word with Christ Jesus. The centrality of the Cosmic Christ is established from the outset.

In the New Testament, through the development of an understanding that the life and ministry of Jesus are radically influenced by the Spirit of God, an idea developed that the Christ-event came about through the influence of God’s Holy Spirit. In the gospels the Holy Spirit is associated with new life; the Spirit is at work in the conception of Jesus (Luke 1:25) and in driving Jesus out into the desert (Mark 1:12) where he lives with the wild beasts. The Spirit of God is also found in nature from whom Jesus draws the strength and inspiration for his life of preaching. The life that the Spirit offers entails more than physical existence. It becomes the source of new birth in Christ. John the Baptist informs his disciples that Jesus “will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Mark 1:8).

The Spirit is the immanent dynamo of the continuing engagement of God in the creation. If the Old Testament speaks of God as Father, and of the Spirit of God, and of the Word and Wisdom of God, the New Testament comes to reflect more specifically on the relations between Father, Son and Spirit, with Trinitarian formulae emerging in the writings of Paul and in the missioning of the apostles at the conclusion of the Gospel of Matthew (28:19). The New Testament theologies of creation inevitably entail a development of the place of the Spirit in creation and a deepening understanding of the relationship between Christ Jesus and the Spirit of God.

Lying at the heart of this thesis is an enhancement of the meaning of the Cosmic Christ through a parallel investigation of the Altyerre. The argument of this study is that dialogue between Arrernte and non-Arrernte Catholics on the nature of spirit/utnenge will produce
deeper understandings of creation and the Cosmic Christ for the wider Church and world. These themes will be explored in Part Four of this thesis.

8.2.2 The Patristic Endowment of the Early Church

During the first centuries after the death of Jesus, as the Christian communities became more organised, issues and disputes arose that required leaders and teachers to clarify the faith. In the work of Irenaeus Bishop of Lyon (ca 115–190), one of the first and foremost of these so-called Church Fathers, there is a distinct sense that he was in touch with Jesus of Galilee and that he was commentating on the very earliest traditions passed on by the apostles.

Irenaeus framed an early formulation of the Trinity with a creation connection. In Book 1 of Against Heresies, Irenaeus wrote that the Church believes “in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations of God …” Edwards quotes Irenaeus: “the Father ‘plans and gives commands,’ the Son ‘performs and creates,’ and the Spirit ‘nourishes and increases’.” Here, as with Paul, Irenaeus was linking creation to salvation. It was Irenaeus who proffered the aphorism of the loving “Father creating the world with his two hands, the Son and the Spirit, the Word and the Wisdom”. Irenaeus emphasised the principal role of the Word was to be in creation, and thus seeing salvation as an inevitable consequence of the creation event. H. Paul Santmire, in The Travail of Nature, thus remarks:

Irenaeus then sees the figure of the Incarnate Word who – as the eternal Logos, together with the Spirit of God – is the ever-present life-giving principle of creation history and who – as the Logos become flesh – moves the whole creation decisively toward the goal of fulfilling the original intention of the creation.739

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738 Johnson, Ask the Beasts, 131.
739 Santmire, The Travail of Nature, location 514.
Irenaeus’ logic leads him to consider that there would have been a fulfilment of creation “even had Adam not sinned”. Irenaeus bases his theology on the Priestly theology that all of creation is good and the creation of humanity is very good. While it is possible in Paul’s theology to draw the conclusion that the role of Jesus was to be the necessary saviour arriving in salvation history to redeem humanity from sin, as YHWH did at the Red Sea to redeem Israel from Pharaoh’s grasp, Irenaeus holds that the Incarnation occurred without consideration of the onset of sin in the world. The Incarnation is wired into the architecture of creation and is not the result of human sinfulness, although it addresses sin. It is not an afterthought or a correction of a flawed creation.

This theology does not imply that Christ is not the redeemer. What it does is demonstrate that in the blueprint of creation the Incarnate Word of God reveals the deep nature of God, a God who cares for God’s good creation from the moment of its birth to its final eschatological end in the unfolding vision of God. In this sense Jesus authentically represents the Cosmic Christ who is the overarching goodness of creation. Following Irenaeus, it became established in the Church that Christ, the Word, was the creator in God and equal in being with God.

Over a century later, Athanasius (ca 296–377) also links the Spirit to the Word and sees the Spirit “participating in the one divine act of creation”. A deeper understanding of a trinitarian God is now emerging. Edwards notes, “For Athanasius, creation is from the Source of All, through the Word and in the Spirit.” Athanasius is also responsible for the concept of communion (koinonia) in God and the view that grace is available to the creation through the Spirit. Patristic theology was thus continuing to develop the revelation that the idea that God has three aspects and is eternally joined in a self-communion.

Another question faced by the early Church was whether the Spirit proceeds from the Father alone or from both the Son and Father. The Council of Constantinople declared that “the Holy Spirit was also truly, really, and fully God, stating that the Holy Spirit ‘is Lord and Giver of Life’. He proceeds from the Father. He is worshipped and glorified.” The idea of procession confirms that this continuous creative activity belongs to the nature of God. If the

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Cosmic Christ is to be found in the moment of creation then the Spirit is to be found there also. The implication is that the Cosmic Christ and the Spirit are mutually engaged in the process of ongoing creation.

Augustine of Hippo (354–430) then contributed to a deeper understanding of how the persons in the Godhead related to each other. In *De Trinitate*, Augustine describes these relationships as “each in each, and all in each, and each in all, and all in all, and all are one”. Gregory of Nazianzus (389–390) introduced the idea of *perichoresis* into later Patristic thought, particularly in the Eastern Church, where it was variously used to describe the interpersonal relationships of the three persons of the Trinity as a co-inherence or inter-penetration. God is One but is acting in three processions and interacting within God’s-self.

Initially Gregory applied the image of perichoresis to the two natures of Christ to explain how the divine and human natures of Christ could co-exist harmoniously. Later John Damascene in the 7th century applied the notion to the Trinity where it was used to describe the interpersonal relationships of the three persons as a co-inherence or inter-penetration. Crisp concludes, however, that the term *perichoresis* in both its applications does not elucidate the nature of God very well because, “This is a divine mystery before which theology must give way to doxology.” The Patristic era thus set the foundations for a theology of the Cosmic Christ within a trinitarian God, with the role of each Person in God becoming more clearly articulated.

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746 Crisp, “Problems with Perichoresis,” 140.
8.2.3 The Medieval Synthesis

In medieval Europe male and female mystics experienced remarkable insights into the Cosmic Christ while Dominican and Franciscan friars, utilising theology based on Greek philosophy, continued to develop and debate ways to explain the nature of God.

Outstanding among the mystics, Hildegard of Bingen (1109–1179) developed a nature-based image of God as the “guiding image of viriditas, greenness … expressing the freshness, fertility, and fruitfulness of the life-giving power of the spirit”.747 In Leroy Huizenga’s view, “Hildegard’s vision of the cosmos and man’s [sic] place therein is integral, seeing man as microcosm of the macrocosm”.748 Hildegard was earthy and iconoclastic, prepared to confront patriarchy by ascending the pulpit to preach against abuses within the Church. She also creatively used female images, such as menstruation and love-making, to illustrate her insights into God and nature.

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), on the other hand, applying a philosophical insight derived from Aristotle, thought that God could best be understood as esse or “to be”. As Johnson notes, the existence of God is best understood as “a verb not a noun”.749 For Aquinas, God is the source of Life both in the beginning and continuously thereafter. Santmire summarises: “God, for Aquinas, is the Living God, ‘He Who is’. And this signifies … the immanence of the divine efficacy in all his creatures, functioning at the same time as the cause of their being and their duration.”750 Aquinas comes to represent the Word as the procession of the self-knowing or self-understanding of God, and the Spirit as the self-loving of God. In God, knowing and loving God’s-self are the continuous processions of the nature of God. This conceptualisation reveals the nature of God.

Aquinas’ argument for “participation” takes things further: “while God is in all things,” he states, “it can also be said that ‘all things are in God,’ in as much as they are ‘contained’ or embraced by a living presence which cannot be limited in any way”.751 So, just as “blueness”

747 Johnson, Ask the Beasts, 136.
749 Johnson, Ask the Beasts, 144.
751 Johnson, Ask the Beasts, 147.
might be thought to be present in everything “blue”, and everything “blue” is an expression of “blueness”, so also “being-ness – esse” is present in everything that “is” and everything that “is” is an expression of “being-ness”. Here we find God in a delicate dance (a literal meaning of *perichoresis*) with the creation, but God is not contained or limited by that embrace. God’s Spirit enlivens and animates the whole creation and is bound to it. Aquinas’ argument can be connected to Johnson’s understanding of panentheism: “it [panentheism] honours the immanence or closeness of God, which is frequently overlooked in unipersonal theism which posits God solely as the transcendent cause”.\(^7\) Panentheism powerfully joins the transcendent God to the immanent God.

According to Hunt, Augustine and Aquinas had seen the procession of the Spirit as representing God’s self-love. Their view of the Trinity as “[t]he trinity of love that comprises the loving subject (the lover), the object of loved (the beloved), and a relation or bond of love (*vinculum caritatis*), the love which unites them (De Trinitate 8.14, 9.2; 15. 10)”\(^\)\(^5\) is, according to Hunt, very satisfying. The conclusion we can draw from this relationship between the Cosmic Christ and the Spirit is that the Cosmic Christ is part of the matter of the universe, the Spirit is the life or energy of this matter, and the Cosmic Christ cannot be understood separately from the Spirit of the Godhead.

Theological speculation about the nature of God was to take a leap forward under the impetus of St Francis of Assisi and St Bonaventure, who developed a theology of God in nature. Following Francis’ inspiration, Hunt concludes that “Bonaventure’s Trinitarian theology also explicitly includes creation in its purview”.\(^6\) Continuing to reserve an important role for the mind or the intellect, Bonaventure assisted the process of placing the trinitarian God in God’s world:

> The creation of the world as a kind of book in which the Trinity shines forth, is represented and found as the fabricator of the universe in three modes of expression, namely, in the modes of vestige, image, and similitude … Hence, as if by step like

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\(^7\) Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 147.


levels, the human intellect is born to ascend by gradations to the supreme principle, which is God. (Bonaventure, *Breviloquium* 2.12)\(^{755}\)

For the purpose of this thesis, Bonaventure’s understanding of the Word is important. Hunt observes: “Word is Bonaventure’s preferred term for the second person for it expresses the relations of the second person as exemplar both in relation to the Father and in relation to creation.”\(^{756}\) It appears that the second person, who Bonaventure knows as the Word, is the same person as Irenaeus knows as Christ Jesus and is to be found in an exemplary fashion as God in creation. God as Cosmic Christ does not stand outside nor is to be found apart from creation. Margaret Pirkl observes: “Bonaventure’s teaching leads us to an almost incredible conclusion. Every leaf, cloud, fruit, animal, and person is to be seen as an outward expression of the Word of God in Love! Thus, each creature has its own identity, integrity, and dignity. Each is sacred because it holds something of the Word of God, Christ, in a unique way.”\(^{757}\)

God as Cosmic Christ, in the Franciscan tradition, does not stand outside, nor is to be found apart from creation. Finally, for the purpose of this thesis, it is notable that the medieval awareness of God in nature also joins together feminine images for God and the Cosmic Christ. Complementing the attainments of the Scholastic theologians, the mystic Julian of Norwich (1342–1416) identified God through female analogies. Johnson quotes Lady Julian: “We know that all our mothers bear us for pain and for death … But our true Mother Jesus, he alone bears us for joy and for endless life, blessed may he be.”\(^{758}\) She found the notion of motherhood to sit comfortably beside the image of fatherhood of God. Jesus had used the image of a mother hen in his final lament over Jerusalem before his passion and death (Matt 23:37). Julian took the image further, perhaps in tune with the medieval devotion based on the belief that a mother pelican pierced her breast to feed her young in times of hunger, that God was like a

\(^{755}\) Hunt, *Trinity*, 28. Santmire, *The Travail of Nature*, location 1556–72. Santmire notes that the idea of ascent is of major importance to Bonaventure. While acknowledging the descent of the goodness of God into Creation Bonaventure has an asymmetrical model of ascent which is available only for humans and angels. In other words, Bonaventure, while following Francis, diminishes Francis’s stress on the brotherhood and sisterhood of humanity and nature.

\(^{756}\) Hunt, *Trinity*, 27.


\(^{758}\) Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 181. Julian makes her idea of Jesus inclusively both male and female by use of the contrasting pronoun “he” for Mother Jesus.
mother. Hunt says: “She links motherhood to the very nature of God but she relates it particularly closely to Christ, as the deep wisdom of God and our mother. She explains that ‘our saviour is our true mother, in whom we are endlessly born and out of whom we shall never come’.”

8.3 Conclusion: Knowing God through God’s World

The Genesis creation accounts reveal a passionate and beneficent God in a sophisticated multi-layered image which, while ultimately expressed through monotheism, continues to entail older and earthier images of a God of everyday existence. Israel’s God is like a painting on canvas which has been painted over a previous painting and then been overpainted itself. In refreshing the painting by removing the overlying accretions layer by layer, an image of God becomes more wondrous. Careful restoration preserves the underlying layers and ensures that an authentic, complete, vibrant, multi-image remains available.

From the New Testament, it can be seen that Jesus brings an added dimension to God’s self-revelation. Jesus says to his disciples, “there are many rooms in my Father’s house” (John 14:2), indicating that Jesus’ Father is open to all, not just Israel, not just the virtuous (whoever they might be), and particularly open to sinners, the lost, abandoned, the ill and infirm, the poor and the oppressed. Jesus’ comments on creation did not include long, complicated stories of a creative act, but were based around such simple, grounded images as the “lilies of the field” (Matt 6:28).

Encouraged by the simplicity and earthiness of Jesus’ understanding of the Father, carried in the New Testament writings, the lives, prayers and teachings of the medieval mystics related intrinsically to creation. Hildegard of Bingen’s image of viriditas and Francis of Assisi’s concentration on nature contain no philosophical analysis of the ousia, hypostasis or

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760 Hunt, Trinity, 32.
762 Ousia is a word taken from ancient Greek philosophy meaning the essence of something. In Christian theology it is used in reference to the nature of God. Hypostasis is a similar Greek word which means underlying substance. Ousia is found in the word homoousios, meaning of the same essence, and was the source of much dispute in the first three hundred years of Christian theological determination of the status of the three persons in the Trinity.
perichoresis\textsuperscript{763} in relation to God, but are powerful, reverberating images of life and fecundity that suggest a God who is available to all, a God who, through the Cosmic Christ, is a relational God, one who engages with humanity and all of creation. This is the God found in Altyerre, as will be further explored in Part Four.

Pirkl writes, “The Cosmic Christ can be defined as that aspect of God which pervades all of creation, the Christ who ‘fills the universe in all its parts’ (Ephesians 1:23) … It is basically Trinity-centered and Christ-centered.”\textsuperscript{764} The survey in this chapter has explored the history of the development of an understanding of the divine as the Cosmic Christ, who is incarnate, part of the creation from the beginning, as the Holy Spirit, who is immanent, living in and providing life, energy and impetus to all life continuously, and as perichoretic Trinity, living Love in God’s-self and expressing ineffable Love for God’s world. The following two chapters will explore further developments of Christian theologies of creation in our own time.

\textsuperscript{763} Perichoresis explains the relationship between the three persons in the divine Godhead as if they are in a perpetual dance of Love.
\textsuperscript{764} Margaret Pirkl, The Cosmic Christ.
Chapter 9: The Cosmic Christ within The Trinity

9.1 Introduction

The theologies of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Jürgen Moltmann and Karl Rahner, with particular reference to the place of Christ in the Trinity, are the focus of Chapter 9. While Rahner and Teilhard clearly identified the Cosmic Christ in the work of the Trinity, Moltmann’s major contribution to a deeper understanding of the Trinity lay in his emphasis on *kenosis* or the self-emptying of God. These three theologians offer new understandings of God’s love as revealed in Christ, born out of the world wars they experienced, and the subsequent crisis of Christian faith in the Western world. They provide a bridge to the Church in the 21st century, living in a digital age, facing a global environmental crisis, and searching for spiritual relevance.

9.2 Teilhard de Chardin: Christogenesis

Teilhard de Chardin was a Jesuit, a mystic and a scientist, and indirectly a theologian. His work, commencing in the first decades of the 20th century and through to his death in 1955, challenged Catholic orthodoxy in his time and ultimately helped build a bridge of respectful discourse between evolutionary science and theology.

According to Denis Edwards, Teilhard’s science is based on “the evolutionary law of complexity-consciousness [which] does not stop with the biosphere but continues into the noosphere, the sphere of the human mind and of interpersonal consciousness of love”.\(^{765}\) This is clearly a movement from matter to spirit, but for Teilhard matter and spirit were interconnected: “Matter is the matrix of spirit and spirit is the higher state of matter.”\(^{766}\) Evolution is a process of ever more sophisticated development of matter into spirit, arriving ultimately at the personalised Omega.

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For Teilhard, Christian faith and scientific evidence both pointed towards Omega, the endpoint of evolution. His Jesuit training, his prayer life and his personal experience led him to see Christ in a unique and distinctive fashion. As Edwards puts it, Teilhard developed a view of God not simply as the God above, but as the God ahead, the God who draws all things to their completion in Christ. The incarnation of God in Jesus Christ reveals a God who is radically involved with matter. The risen Christ, sharing in the divine immensity, is at work in the whole of creation.767

Teilhard makes a huge, impenetrable God, within a vast universe of incredible complexity and sophistication, available to ordinary people. In *Hymn of the Universe* Teilhard uses a sacramental idiom to describe the presence of God in the materiality of the universe: “But you, my God, are the inmost depths, the stability of the eternal milieu, without duration or space, in which our cosmos emerges gradually into being and grows gradually to its final completeness …”768 Ultimately, Teilhard “was able to see the cosmic and the Christian not only as converging but as one”.769 Here is an image of a modern Cosmic Christ.

By identifying Christ in the heart of evolution, Teilhard can then propose that a “process of Christification happens through the energy of incarnation, flowing into, illuminating, and giving warmth to the universe of matter”.770 Here Teilhard’s Christ is both the Creator of the cosmos, in the cosmos, and the dynamo of the cosmos. Christ’s identification with the cosmos is so complete that, in his thinking, the creation becomes a third “nature of Christ”.771 For Teilhard, Christ has a human nature, a divine nature and a cosmic nature. The surge or pulse of evolution thus delivers Christogenesis.

Teilhard’s view of redemption or salvation is couched in evolutionary terms. Quoting Teilhard, Edwards observes, “His focus is not so much on Christ bearing the sins of a guilty world as on Christ ‘bearing the weight of a world in the course of evolution’.772 Given that sinfulness and the need for redemption are not significant elements of *Altyerre*, his thoughts

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provide a relief to the concentration on guilt that Heffernan says was a major component of the Catholicism gifted to the Arrernte in Mission.773

While Teilhard’s attention is given to the presence of God in the whole of creation, it should be strongly stressed that for Teilhard the incarnation remains the necessary warrant for belief in a cosmic Christ:

The immense enchantment of the divine milieu owes all its value in the long run to the human-divine contact which was revealed at the Epiphany of Jesus … The mystical Christ, the universal Christ of St. Paul, has neither meaning nor value in our eyes except as expansions of the Christ that was born of Mary and who died on the cross.774

How then do we understand Christ’s actions in the cosmos?

9.3 Karl Rahner: Trinity, Grace and Creation

Karl Rahner offers a theology of the Trinity that includes an understanding of Christ acting within the Cosmos. His theology takes account of, and in places challenges, the Patristic and medieval contributions. For Rahner, as Edwards puts it, “All of creation is united in its one origin from God, in its one self-realization through ongoing creation and in its one future in God.”775 Rahner, according to Vincent Battaglia, was concerned to “re-establish the Trinity as the central mystery of salvation, and a unifying focal point for the doctrines of grace, Christology, soteriology, pneumatology, and eschatology, and therefore at the heart of the Christian faith”.776 Since the focus of this thesis is to identify how Altyerre can reveal the Cosmic Christ, Rahner’s Christology, pneumatology and approach to grace can assist in this quest.

773 Heffernan, Gathering Sticks, 101.
Rahner’s axiom that the “economic” Trinity is the “immanent” Trinity and the “immanent” Trinity is the “economic” Trinity picks up the Patristic notion of *perichoresis* and clarifies it. We have seen in the historical survey in Chapter 8 that God was traditionally understood as transcendent and immanent, a saving presence in the world. What Rahner does is to combine these two understandings of God. The essence of God is both transcendent – beyond the creation – and immanent – available in nature – at the same time. In Rahner’s terminology the immanent Trinity is the Trinity looked at from the inside. Rahner calls the immanent Trinity “God in himself”. *Perichoresis* is about God being God, but, according to Rahner, God is not just looking inward, because God simultaneously looks out of God’s self to creation – in Rahner’s term *ad nos* (towards us) – and this is the economic Trinity, the Trinity in saving action within the creation. He sees the economic Trinity expressed through grace, which is “God’s *salvific activity in us*”. Rahner’s insight is to see these two understandings of the Trinity, the immanent and the economic, as one, each identified with the other. This is Rahner’s “basic axiom (‘Grundaxiom’)”. For Rahner, the saving action of God through grace and the creative action of God inhere in each other.

Rahner once famously observed that “Despite their orthodox confession of the Trinity, Christians are, in their practical life, almost mere ‘monotheists’.” His intention was to clarify the nature of the Trinity in the interest of a more faithful Christian understanding of God. In Rahner’s trinitarian theology God is available from creation. Battaglia writes: “Finding vestiges of the Trinity in creation allows us to learn about the inner life of God by observation of His works and from reflection of humanity in all its diversity.” Battaglia puts Rahner’s position this way: “God has ‘two basic modalities’ of self-communication, and these are the Word (truth) and Spirit (love) and they are not separated nor tied together by divine decree but distinct and interrelated.” As humans we experience these two modalities working together in the creation. For Rahner the Trinity is the overarching experience of God as “a *salvific reality experienced in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.*” Rahner calls this a

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778 Rahner, *The Trinity*, 44.
780 Battaglia, “An Examination of Karl Rahner’s Trinitarian Theology”, 5.
782 Battaglia, “An Examination of Karl Rahner’s Trinitarian Theology”, 4.
783 Battaglia, “An Examination of Karl Rahner’s Trinitarian Theology”, 7.
784 Battaglia, “An Examination of Karl Rahner’s Trinitarian Theology”, 8.
“double mediation of Word and Spirit”\(^785\). In this understanding we see a reflection of Irenaeus’ early account of God’s operation in the world.

Rahner sees the whole of creation, including every human person, as graced. Grace, according to Rahner, means how “in the strictest sense he [God] bestows himself”\(^786\). Everything is gift. For Rahner, “grace is not extrinsic to nature but is none other than the indwelling of the triune God in the human soul, a bestowal of God Himself”\(^787\). This bestowal is God’s action in the world. Rahner here also reflects on the nature and origin of grace which “is to be understood as God’s ‘self-communication’”.\(^788\) We might say that the \textit{esse} (the being or to-be) of God is love represented as grace. The entire world is saved, according to Rahner, not just humanity, by Christ’s action in creation/redemption. Edwards makes this clear: “But, Rahner insists, final salvation is also the final and definitive state of fulfillment of the whole cosmos.”\(^789\) In this way Christ’s work is expressed for the entire creation and for all people regardless of their familiarity with the Christian message. God’s self-bestowal is gratuitous and therefore does not require even acknowledgment by those who benefit from God’s gracious gift.

A principle criticism of Rahner’s \textit{Grundaxiom} is that it “runs the risk of collapsing the immanent Trinity into the economic Trinity”\(^790\). But how else are humans to know this transcendent God? Battaglia solves the riddle this way: “only an absolutely transcendent God can be truly immanent to creation.”\(^791\) What the \textit{Grundaxiom} does is to maintain the mystery of God in the Immanent Trinity and make God available – through the two modalities of Word and Spirit – in the Economic Trinity, and so make the Immanent Trinity available too. Here there is a consequent criticism: “In emphasising God the Father as the \textit{fons Trinitatis}, Rahner risks conceptualising the Son and Spirit as mere economic manifestations of the Father.”\(^792\) Recognising that charges of Sabellianism\(^793\) and modalism might be levelled by

\(^{785}\) Rahner, \textit{The Trinity}, 37.  
\(^{786}\) Rahner, \textit{The Trinity}, 36.  
\(^{787}\) Battaglia, “An Examination of Karl Rahner’s Trinitarian Theology”, 6.  
\(^{788}\) Battaglia, “An Examination of Karl Rahner’s Trinitarian Theology”, 5.  
\(^{789}\) Denis Edwards, \textit{The God of Evolution}, 106.  
\(^{790}\) Battaglia, “An Examination of Karl Rahner’s Trinitarian Theology”, 12.  
\(^{791}\) Battaglia, “An Examination of Karl Rahner’s Trinitarian Theology”, 15.  
\(^{792}\) Battaglia, “An Examination of Karl Rahner’s Trinitarian Theology”, 16.  
\(^{793}\) Sabellianism is a type of Modalism. Developed in the third century, both are regarded by the Christian Churches as heresies since they emphasise that, rather than being a Trinity of equal persons, God is only One person who is revealed in three different “modes”, “aspects” or “masks”.
some, Rahner retorts “there are no created intermediaries”. Each manifestation or modality is completely separate and independent, although One.

Despite these criticisms, Rahner’s theology offers a practical insight into God’s action in the creation. Battaglia summarises: “Rahner’s contribution reminds us that there is a single saving plan encompassing creation, redemption and eschatological plenitude, whose order and possibility is the work of the triune God.” In this way Rahner is completing Paul’s theology, as discussed above in 8.2.1. And herein lies a contribution to this thesis: Rahner takes God out of the narrow confines of the Church and focuses attention on the Trinity in various human cultures and other religions. Battaglia remarks:

Rahner states that the early church was successful in its mission in part because it was able to appreciate the traces of Christian truth in pagan religions. The universal scope of Christian revelation (i.e., God’s self-communication) beyond the visible boundaries of the church, mirrors Rahner’s vision of the universal offer of grace in Christ to all of humanity, whereby movements of the human spirit to the grace of the Spirit may render such persons, under certain conditions, “anonymous Christians” in some real sense.

Rahner echoes Paul’s missionary work in the pagan Roman world. While some have criticised Rahner for the term “anonymous Christians”, in his theology it simply indicates that the Cosmic Christ is present in all human activity and religious traditions. Paul did this with his reference to the “unknown god” (Acts 17:23) in the Areopagus in Athens. According to Rahner, those who are saved do not have to be self-consciously Christians.

In his view the revelation of God may be at least partially available to those who have never had any contact with the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

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794 Rahner, The Trinity, 38.
796 Battaglia, “An Examination of Karl Rahner’s Trinitarian Theology”, 18.
797 Battaglia, “An Examination of Karl Rahner’s Trinitarian Theology”, 18.
798 Battaglia, “An Examination of Karl Rahner’s Trinitarian Theology”, 18. Battaglia writes: “The universal scope of Christian revelation (i.e., God’s self-communication) beyond the visible boundaries of the church, mirrors Rahner’s vision of the universal offer of grace in Christ to all of humanity, whereby movements of the human spirit to the grace of the Spirit may render such persons, under certain conditions, ‘anonymous Christians’ in some real sense.”
Edwards explores Rahner’s influence in discussing the presence of grace and the Holy Spirit in the universe before Christ and before Israel. He asks the rhetorical question: “How can the salvation of, for example, a woman who lived 50,000 years ago in Australia, be related to Jesus of Nazareth?” Does the incarnation occur two thousand years ago in the birth of Jesus or is it an event radically connected with the whole of creation? Edwards, reflecting Rahner, points out “that the Spirit who is at work in grace throughout human history is always the Spirit directed towards Christ”. Does the incarnation extend beyond human history? Edwards, paraphrasing Rahner, says: “It is the Spirit of God who brings about the incarnation, and in this sense the Spirit is the efficient cause of the Christ event.” In Rahner’s theology there is linkage between grace, the Spirit and Christ. Again, this is a faithful explication of the Patristic insight of the Word and the Wisdom working as God’s two hands. Edwards concludes his analysis on this theme: “The Spirit has an inner ordering and direction toward the goal of God’s self-giving in the Word made flesh.” In Edwards’ reading of Rahner, Christ is made available through the enlivening power of the Holy Spirit.

Edwards explains that Rahner’s thought includes the idea that grace is present in the whole of human history and that while that grace is a gift of the Spirit, it “has always been the grace of Christ”. To return to the question of salvation for the Arrernte person living in the MacDonnell Ranges/Tyeretye 50,000 years ago Edwards asks: “[I]s it appropriate for one who believes that salvation comes through Christ to understand that non-Christian religious figures or institutions may constitute participatory forms of mediation in salvation?” He again offers Rahner as an authority: “once it is granted the non-Christian shares in salvation, then one cannot deny that such a person’s religion may have a positive contribution to make to salvation without understanding salvation in ‘a completely ahistorical and asocial way’.” What we learn from Rahner is that we live in a grace-filled universe and have done since the dawn of time. As Edwards says in relation to Rahner’s contribution to our understanding of the Cosmic Christ: “Whenever humans emerged who were capable of religious experience and implicit faith, they emerged into a graced world.”

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9.4 Edwards on Rahner and Teilhard

Rahner respected Teilhard’s work but adopted a different approach.\textsuperscript{807} If Teilhard was inspired by a scientific understanding of creation, Rahner used a more philosophical approach. According to Edwards, Rahner sees God “acting at a metaphysical level through secondary causes, in a way that is not accessible to science, which does not fill gaps in the scientific account, and which leaves science with its own integrity”.\textsuperscript{808}

According to Edwards, rather than see the incarnation as an atonement for sin, Rahner followed the way of Duns Scotus, for whom “God’s plan of creation always had the incarnation of Christ at its centre”.\textsuperscript{809} Rather than follow a biological, physical, psychic (Teilhardian) process to the conclusion of Christogenesis, Rahner follows a Pauline theological tradition that posits Christ at the heart of creation and redemption coincidentally. The emphasis in Rahner’s thought is “that God freely chooses, from the beginning, to create a world in which the Word would be made flesh and the Spirit poured out”.\textsuperscript{810} The incarnation, creation and redemption are freely chosen by God as a gift to humanity. Combining Teilhard and Rahner, Edwards concludes: “The story of the universe and of life on Earth, and everything that science can tell us about its evolution history, is part of a larger story, the story of divine self-bestowal.”\textsuperscript{811}

Rahner’s view of creation is that it is a gift from God and the gift, packaged in the Christ event, is full of God: “What is revealed in the Christ-event, in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and in Pentecost, is a God who gives God’s self to us in the Word made flesh and in the Spirit poured out in grace. God is revealed as a God who bestows God’s very self to creatures.”\textsuperscript{812} Implicit in this statement is that Rahner sees the Spirit as the Spirit of Christ. Traditional Christian belief has been founded on redemption achieved by the death and resurrection of Jesus. One of Rahner’s stumbling blocks with Teilhard’s work was his view that it was difficult to connect “the Teilhardian Christ-Omega with Jesus of Nazareth, and

\textsuperscript{808} Edwards, “Teilhard’s Vision”, 236.
\textsuperscript{809} Edwards, “Teilhard’s Vision”, 241. Irenaeus of course understood this in the second century.
\textsuperscript{810} Edwards, “Teilhard’s Vision”, 241.
\textsuperscript{811} Edwards, “Teilhard’s Vision”, 241.
\textsuperscript{812} Edwards, “Teilhard’s Vision”, 241.
with the Jesus whom Christians seek to love here and now”. Rahner is seeking to ensure that the story of evolution is compatible with salvation history. Edwards describes his thought this way: “This means that the story of salvation is the real ground of the history of nature, and not simply something that unfolds against the background of nature. The evolution of the universe, and of life on Earth, exist within this larger vision of the divine purpose to give God’s self to us.” Edwards’ view is that Rahner seeks to make Teilhard’s Christology more acceptable by linking it to “God’s self-bestowal”.

Rahner stretches the notion of divine transcendence into the “idea of the God-given self-transcendence of creatures”. God gives to creation itself the capacity for self-transcendence. This idea operates throughout his work. What it means is that God’s transcendence is transferred to creation and specifically to humanity, and thus creaturely self-transcendence expresses a form of divine immanence, permitting nature “to become more than it is in itself”. This is a definition of panentheism – the concept of God being in us and we being in God.

Rahner’s position is that “[t]he material universe transcends itself in the emergence of life, and life transcends itself in the human. In human beings, the universe further transcends itself, becoming self-conscious and free and capable of personal response to God’s self-bestowal in grace.”

Whereas Teilhard sees the creation dynamically processing from the biosphere to the noosphere, Rahner sees creation working “through natural selection, through randomness and lawfulness, through all the processes of nature, which it is the role of science, not theology, to discover”. One gets the sense that for Teilhard there is an inevitability about the direction of cosmogenesis whereas, for Rahner, God’s commitment to freedom ensures that evolution is free to progress as it will. Here is a subtle distinction within the eschatological virtue of hope. Is hope absolute certainty or grace-filled knowledge of the totally reassuring embrace of a creator/saviour God? Teilhard might say there is no difference.

So, what of the future? Where is evolution leading creation? What theology of the end times is available as a result of Rahner’s contribution? Here Rahner’s thought seems to spin back to shades of Teilhardian thinking. It was primarily Teilhard who introduced the concept of divinisation to cosmic theology. Here Rahner seems to endorse Teilhard’s insight: “What occurs in the resurrection of Jesus, as part of the physical, biological and human world, is ontologically and not simply juridically, the embryonically final beginning of the glorification and divinisation of the whole of reality.” Recognising the Scotian view that the Word was in the creation from the beginning, that Christ’s redemptive act was written in the script from the moment of creation, Rahner argues that “The risen Christ is the ‘pledge and beginning of the perfect fulfilment of the world’. He is the ‘representative of the new cosmos’. At last matter is resolved in spirit. And so, Edwards concludes, “Rahner holds that we Christians are really the ‘most sublime of materialists’. Matter will last forever and be glorified forever in Christ.”

While there are many points where Rahner and Teilhard do not align, in the end their thinking seems to fuse, with both believing “that the transfiguration of the world has already begun in the risen Christ and is ‘ripening and developing to that point where it will become manifest’. For Rahner “God’s mystery is reflected in the mystery of human existence.” For Teilhard it might be said that God’s mystery in the process of cosmogenesis. And this all occurs in the creation.

9.5 Jürgen Moltmann: Kenosis and Creation

Jürgen Moltmann’s focus on kenosis distinguishes his theology from that of both Teilhard and Rahner. Following Paul, he understands the incarnation as the kenosis or self-emptying of God. Paul told his followers to imitate Christ, who “emptied himself, taking the form of a

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820 Edwards, “Teilhard’s Vision”, 244.
821 The Catholic Encyclopedia, “Blessed John Duns Scotus,” http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05194a.htm (accessed July 7, 2018). The entry reports: “God would have become man even if Adam had not sinned, since He willed that in Christ humanity and the world should be united with Himself by the closest possible bond.”
823 Edwards, “Teilhard’s Vision”, 244.
slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death” (Philippians 2:6–8). The incarnation thus sees God become flesh, part of the creation with all its imperfection. Moltmann’s powerful analysis of the Cross sees the crucifixion of Jesus as the Godforsakenness of God. Somehow, mysteriously, the materiality of the creation with its attendant fallibility enters into God’s eternal life. This self-emptying of God might appear to suggest that God is humbled, but paradoxically, as Paul says, God was exalted. Moltmann comments: “God is nowhere greater than in his humiliation. God is nowhere more glorious than in his impotence. God is nowhere more divine than when he becomes man.”

Moltmann builds a theology of Trinity which echoes Irenaeus’ account of the Word and Wisdom: “The Father utters the eternal Word in the Spirit and breathes out the Spirit in the eternal utterance of the Word. Through the eternal Son/Logos the Father creates the world.” Edwards points out that in Moltmann’s recent work, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, he enters into dialogue with Jewish thinkers and in expanding his work “focuses his attention on the ‘Cosmic Christ’”. Edwards says Moltmann draws attention to “the cosmic Christology of Colossians and Ephesians” for his new approach to nature. In his letters to the Colossians and Ephesians Paul was also developing the first elements of Christian ecclesiology and emphasised the implicit links between Christ and his Church. Moltmann noted that the cosmic nature of the incarnation affects the building up of the Church. He points out that: “It is only a cosmic Christology which completes and perfects the existential and historical ecclesiology.”

The concept of *kenosis* is then linked to a theology of creation by a trinitarian God. Moltmann declares that there is “an immanent tension in God himself [sic]: God creates the world, and at the same time enters into it … The God who is transcendent in relation to the world, and the God who is immanent in that world are one and the same God.” Rahner has similarly dealt with this conundrum in his *Grundaxiom* and through his theology of grace.

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A particular implication of Moltmann’s theology is that humanity can identify with the incarnate God because the suffering that seems to be the very stuff of life on earth is suffering that God also freely experiences, even to a degree beyond human suffering, because God experiences abandonment from God’s-self! The suffering of Jesus on the cross is suffering that goes beyond pain. Jesus experiences terrible pain in the scourging and beating ordered by Pilate. He experiences the pain of humiliation and the vicarious pain borne by his mother who witnesses his suffering. He suffers the horrible death of crucifixion. But as Jesus dies on the cross, Christ’s cry of abandonment comes at the end of this human suffering. His appeal “My God, My God why have you abandoned me?” is an expression of Godly pain, pain within God, beyond human pain, a transcendent pain. On the cross Christ represents God’s transcendence and immanence simultaneously. Yet, despite the suffering and pain, in Moltmann’s approach (and Paul’s) the resurrection is the sure eschatological sign of Christ’s return to the Father and through that return the remaking of the damaged world and humanity’s assured completion in God. As Richard Rohr observes, “resurrection is not woundedness denied, forgotten, or even healed. It is always woundedness transformed.” Or again, Elizabeth Johnson shows how Jesus’ death transforms the human condition, demonstrating that “Redemption comes to mean the presence of God walking with the world through its traumas and travails even unto death”.

Moltmann specifically acknowledges Rahner’s axiom, but adds an element: “Statements about the immanent Trinity must not contradict statements about the economic Trinity. Statements about the economic Trinity must correspond to doxological statements about the immanent Trinity.” Moltmann argues, “In creation, incarnation and redemption, the inner life of God therefore has to be distinguished from the outward acts of God. The inner life only provides the reason and justification of the outward acts.”

From Moltmann we may draw the understanding that humanity does not and cannot earn God’s love. God’s love is grace freely offered. God has experienced the entirety of what it

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835 Moltmann, The Trinity and the Kingdom, 154.
836 Moltmann, The Trinity and the Kingdom, 108.
means to be human. In Moltmann’s theology God is seen entering into the human condition – even to death. The lesson is that God knows what it means to be abandoned, to feel the collapse of being that can be the worst of the pain inherent in the violence and injustice that characterises the experience of too many on this earth. God’s kenotic offering of God’s-self at Calvary, indeed in the incarnation, offers a symbol of the power of God’s love. Our human response in love is an echo of God’s love. In this way Moltmann provides a new understanding of the Cosmic Christ: the Cosmic Christ reflects the absolute self-emptying of God.

In this study, where the notion of creation is the hinge, two contrasting understandings emerge. As Moltmann observes, “Today, a theological doctrine of creation which can responsibly be maintained must first of all come to terms critically with its own traditions and the history of its own influence, before it can face up to the dialogue with the modern natural sciences and the contemporary philosophy of nature.” In establishing this as his platform Moltmann is referring to both his own experience as a German in World War II and the Christian historical tradition that he shares. But adding complexity to Moltmann’s dictum is, from the perspective of this study, the need for and the benefit of coming to terms with an ancient world-view that predates and illuminates the Judaeo-Christian theologies of creation. In other words, from our present situation Christian theology must look both forward to the insights emerging from evolution, palaeontology, astrophysics and the sciences addressing a sustainable future for planet earth, and back to the nature-based world-view of Altyerre which continues to offer a plan of life for all people. Theology, if it is to be complete, must be both fully modern and historically authentic, right back to the wisdom of a people who trace their footprint/impatye to the dawn of humanity on the earth. In Part Four attention will be given to how the Arrernte negotiated a path through suffering in the development of Altyerre.

When Moltmann says that God “humbles himself and takes upon himself the eternal death of the godless and the godforsaken, so that all the godless and the godforsaken can experience communion with him,” he is speaking of creation, incarnation and redemption, the three gifts of God, that are coincidental in the moment of the Big Bang but which are horrifyingly compromised in the experience of the Holocaust. Ancient Altyerre, however, did not

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837 Moltmann, God in Creation, 21.
experience godforsakeness until Invasion brought it to their doorstep in the early 1870s in Central Australia.

Moltmann has more to offer with his understanding of the Holy Spirit. For him the Spirit is found in creation: “The Father is the creating origin of creation, the Son its shaping origin, the Spirit its life-giving origin. Creation exists in the Spirit, is moulded by the Son and is created by the Father. It is therefore from God, through God and in God.” In Moltmann’s theology of creation, salvation and eschatology God’s presence is in God’s creation, in the world saved by God’s action and in resurrection providing a hope-filled future.

Moltmann’s understanding of Christ in God is systematic. As Edwards points out, Moltmann argues for “a differentiated cosmic Christology. Christ’s role with regard to creation needs to be understood in three distinct but interrelated strands: (1) Christ as the ground of the creation of all things (creatio originalis); (2) Christ as the moving power in the evolution of creation (creatio continua); (3) Christ as the redeemer of the whole creation process (creatio nova).” This typology has been taken up by Elizabeth Johnson and will be explored in Chapter 10.

In conclusion, Moltmann sees Christ in trinitarian terms. For him God is One, Christ is God incarnate, God in nature, God in the universe. Christ, the incarnate God, would have been in the world, offering “redemption” to the world whether sin had entered the world or not. In this sense the world is God’s home. Christ, in Moltmann, is always seen as Son or Word, yet always operates with the Spirit. God in the world, for Moltmann, is the Spirit of Christ operating for the sake of God and the sake of the world. Because the creation is good, Moltmann professes that despite suffering in the world, suffering that God experiences as God as well as the human Jesus, that suffering is defeated in the hope of the resurrection. Moltmann understands the Cosmic Christ as God incarnate, God present in the pain of the world, and the risen Christ as the hope of the world.

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839 Moltmann, God in Creation, 98.
9.6 Conclusion

Teilhard, Rahner and Moltmann propel Christian theology into the 21st century. While bursting out of the constraints of modernism, traditionalism and biblicism, they consolidate trinitarian theology and offer deeper understandings of the sacramental presence of God in nature, through the self-emptying of God in suffering, the role of the Spirit in maintaining the creation, and the power of the Cosmic Christ in revealing the true nature of God’s love for creation. As noted in 9.3 above, Rahner feared that “Christians are, in their practical life, almost mere ‘monotheists’.” In the light of the analysis of Rahner’s, Moltmann’s and Teilhard’s work it is now clear that monotheism is an inadequate way of understanding the ineffable source of all. These theologians challenge the faithful to consider that the saving work of God is coincidental with the creation, and that the Spirit of the Cosmic Christ was made available to the entire creation billions of years before the magnificent redeeming epiphany of God in the life, preaching, healing, death and resurrection of Jesus. They set foundations for accepting God’s self-revelation to the Arrernte more than 50,000 years ago, and for appreciating that, in the specific Altyerre engagement with God’s self-revelation, the Arrernte first met God in aknganentye/creation – although the name of God remained anonymous.

841 Rahner, The Trinity, 10.
Chapter 10: Creation Theology and Spirit Christology

10.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to clarify a central element of the theology of the Cosmic Christ, namely the relationship between the Word and the Wisdom of God. Chapters 8 and 9 made the case that elements of Hebrew traditions and Christian theology point to an image of the Cosmic Christ as incarnate in the creation from the beginning. A sophisticated theological synthesis has developed into the understanding that the Word and the Wisdom of God are jointly seen as the source of life and the continuing power for life in the universe. This chapter will begin by clarifying the relevance of the notion of the Cosmic Christ within the scope of Denis Edwards’ Australian insights. Edwards proposes that the interaction between the persons of God can be better understood by identifying Christ as both the Word and the Wisdom of God, but it remains an important task of this chapter to clarify the distinction between Son/Word/Wisdom and Sophia/Holy Spirit/Wisdom at work in the creation.

The second half of this chapter will focus on Elizabeth Johnson’s notions of Deep Incarnation and Deep Resurrection to analyse the full ambit of the Cosmic Christ. Johnson’s theme is the universality of God’s love for the entire creation and all living creatures. Johnson’s synthesis stands beside Edwards’ approach. The two scholars agree in almost all elements of their theologies. Perhaps Johnson slightly corrects Edwards’ emphasis on the primary role of the Spirit through her reliance on Deep Incarnation and Deep Resurrection as the foundation pillars of her eco-theology. Together their theologies provide a framework for exploring the convergence of the Judaeo-Christian world-view and Altyerre, as will be discussed in Part Four.

10.2 Denis Edwards: Spirit and Nature

In his paper “Experience of Word and Spirit in the Natural World”, Denis Edwards asks an initial rhetorical question: “When I walk on a quiet beach, can I see this beach as a place of divine presence? Can I think of a rainforest, with all its interconnected, exuberant forms of
life, as filled with the presence of God”? The answer he gives is an authoritative “Yes”. In this “Yes” he seeks to encourage his readers to a wider understanding of God and God’s inextricable presence and engagement in nature.

Edwards’ earlier book *Breath of Life* undertook an even more ambitious theological task: to explain the relationship between God seen as Creator on the one hand and, on the other hand, the Universe seen as the result of a 13.8-billion-year process of evolution commencing in the Big Bang. While arguing successfully that such a venture is possible, importantly he cautions “against simply identifying the first moment of the Big Bang with the beginning of God’s act of creation”. He seeks not to force a fit between the two systems but to discover moments of compatibility.

Edwards’ theology reflects where he stands within his Australian culture. He acknowledges that language, culture, and psychological factors “play a fundamental role in all our experiences”. These factors also play an important hermeneutical role in interpreting our experiences. For example, Edwards finds himself confronted by three critical concerns: a) climate change and consequent ecological disaster, b) the theory of evolution and its attendant philosophical and theological challenges, c) and nature expressed through beauty and especially in dialogue with the worldviews of Australian Aboriginal peoples. Edwards relies upon Scripture, Patristic theologians such as Basil of Caesarea, Irenaeus and Athanasius, medieval scholars such as Duns Scotus and Aquinas, and lastly Rahner and Moltmann among 20th-century theologians.

The approach of this thesis will be to use Edwards’ findings as tools with which to undertake an analysis of 21st-century Christian theology in dialogue with *Altyerre*. Edwards’ scholarship provides a necessary balance to this study, which has at its heart the quest for the revelation of the Cosmic Christ, because Edwards warns of an over-emphasis upon Christ at the expense of the role of the Spirit. He argues that we must be beware of the tendency that

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“Orthodox theologian Nikos Nissiotis has called Christomonism, a focus on Christ to the exclusion of the Spirit”.845

10.2.1 The Trinity in Creation

Edwards’ representation of the Trinity places particular emphasis upon the role of the Spirit as the Breath of Life.846 He follows Athanasius whose view of the Trinity is that while it is “radically scriptural … [it] is never abstract, but a theology of God engaged with creatures, a God who acts, who creates and saves”.847 It is clear that Edwards’ understanding of the economic Trinity has a central role for the Word “made flesh, the Word of the cross, as the very Word of creation”.848 Again following Athanasius, Edwards sees the “Word of God as governing, establishing, leading, providing for, and ordering creation”.849 His view is consistent with a theme of the theology of creation in this study, where creation is also understood as ordering.

Edwards focuses on a linking role for the Spirit by emphasising the collaborative role of Wisdom with the Word. His approach is subtle. Noting that Athanasius saw God as creating through God’s Wisdom/Word,850 Edwards explores the idea of God as Wisdom as being characteristic of the person Christ: “In Wisdom made flesh, God is revealed as Love …”851 To support his case, Edwards notes that “[Christian] Jewish believers saw Wisdom as God’s self-revelation in Jesus of Nazareth.”852 His emphasis here is upon the continuity of belief from Wisdom literature in the Hebrew tradition to early Christian belief by Jews who had become Jesus’ followers. Edwards also appeals to Paul: “For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:22–24).853
Edwards also appeals to Ambrose of Milan, who wrote that “the Creator Spirit is the author of the incarnation”\textsuperscript{854} to argue that the “Breath of God [the Spirit] and the Word of God act together in creation”.\textsuperscript{855} Summarising this interactive combination of Word and Spirit, Edwards writes:

\begin{quote}
[\text{A}n\text{d] the Spirit can be understood as the \textit{efficient cause} of the Christ event: but the whole history of the Spirit’s presence in grace is directed toward Jesus Christ, and in this sense Jesus Christ is the \textit{final cause} of the Spirit. In this kind of Spirit theology, Word and Spirit are understood as reciprocally related in one economy of salvation.\textsuperscript{856}
\end{quote}

Edwards observes that “texts such as Genesis 2:7 and Psalm 104:30, for example, point toward the concept of the Spirit as the Breath of Life for all things; texts such as John 1:1–5 and Colossians 1:15–20 suggest a theology of Jesus Christ as a Word through whom all things are created”.\textsuperscript{857} In other words, Edwards proposes that Word and Spirit operate in harmony and mutuality with the Father in creation – what might be called a \textit{perichoretic} economy. In this subtle theology both Spirit and Word can be seen as Wisdom. This union of Spirit and Wisdom is not intended to mean that Wisdom is a figure in the Trinity so much as a way in which we experience the work of the Spirit and the Word in the world. While it may seem to offer conflicting views of the way we encounter God, the notion of Wisdom is more an articulation of our experience than a claim on the mystery of God.

\section*{10.2.2 Transcendence, Immanence and Kenosis}

Seeking to clarify the inner nature of the trinitarian God, Edwards then follows Moltmann’s theology of suffering and explores the concept of \textit{kenosis}, the self-emptying of God. While the apparent emphasis in Moltmann’s theology is upon the Cross of Christ, Edwards allows us to see the \textit{kenosis} of God in the very act of creation. Edwards offers an elaboration of the concept of \textit{kenosis} which, in this study, has previously been seen as the self-limiting or self-emptying of God. Edwards suggests that we may see \textit{kenosis} as code for God’s total generosity towards creation, God’s loving-kindness. Edwards looks at the Spirit’s role in

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Edwards, \textit{Breath of Life}, 43.
\item Edwards, \textit{Breath of Life}, 47.
\item Edwards, \textit{Breath of Life}, 81.
\item Edwards, \textit{Breath of Life}, 125.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
kenosis and remarks, “In the event of the cross, the Father and the Son suffer such a separation that the direct relationship between them is broken while the Spirit remains the bond that unites them.” Here is a powerful link between the God who saves and the God who creates, the same Spirit of Love. Edwards references Pannenberg in suggesting that “The Spirit is the ‘principle of the creative presence of the transcendent God’ and the ‘medium of the participation of the creatures in the divine life’.”

This powerful insight also clarifies how God bears the rift in the Godhead that occurs through the crucifixion: it is through the sustaining presence of the Spirit. Here is a theology of healing within God, healing that Jesus preached throughout his ministry and which the history of salvation of Israel had taught to the Hebrew people. In other words, the kenosis of God includes the Cross, which is of the essence of God’s nature from the beginning of the story of creation and salvation.

This theology of the Trinity in creation signifies the abundant perichoresis of God both within God as immanent Trinity and ad nos as economic Trinity. Edwards’ understanding of Athanasius thus signifies:

the wonderful diversity and abundance of creation … God is a spring, ever pouring forth the river from which we drink in the Spirit; God is Light with its internal radiance that enlightens us in the Spirit; God is the Father, eternally begetting the Son in whom we participate by adoption as God’s children in the Spirit; God is the font of Wisdom bringing forth the Wisdom of God, which we received through the Spirit of Wisdom.

Edwards’ theology of the Trinity sustains a powerful link between creation and salvation. He concludes: “the early theologians of the Holy Spirit would see the Spirit as the Breath of God who accompanies the Word of God in both creation and in the work of salvation. In both senses the Spirit is the Giver of Life.” This idea of the Spirit being a continuing source of life, like a dynamo, is the notion of creatio continua: “The Spirit is the bountiful excess of the

858 Edwards, Breath of Life, 77.
859 Edwards, Breath of Life, 127
dynamism of the divine life that animates a world of creatures … The Creator Spirit can be thought of as the power of becoming, the power that enables the self-transcendence of creation …”

God as Word and Wisdom creates the world and God through the Spirit sustains the world.

Karl Rahner taught that there are specific roles for each person of the Trinity and that not just any one of the divine Persons could fulfil the others’ roles. Edwards agrees and supports the early insight of Basil “that it is only in the Spirit that we can come to Christ”, but argues that the Spirit has a further role: “[T]he presence of God [is] at the heart of the universe, a mysterious presence that fills the whole universe yet it is intimately interior to each creature.” Rahner, aware that the naming of God can be a distraction, adopted “Holy Mystery” as an alternative to the use of the word “God”. If the quote from Edwards above was reworked to replace the phrase “the presence of God” with “the presence of Holy Mystery”, then an Arrernte person upon meeting a European for the first time in the 1860s, and hearing this summary would have shrugged and said, “That’s Altyerre of course!” Unfortunately, as Part Two has demonstrated, there were no Europeans ready for this dialogue.

Referencing Rahner, Edwards agrees that self-transcendence is an active power within the creation that enables creation “to become what is radically new”. Here is the consequence of the principle of kenosis in creation where God, who is omnipotent, refuses to intervene in the freedom of the creation to become what it will through its own self-transcendence. This is not to say that God is not active in creation. Indeed, as Edwards argues, “it is the breath of God who breathes life into the whole process”. The Spirit is the agency of relational reconciliation, healing the rupture within God on the Cross and establishing the framework for relations between all creatures. Thus, Edwards establishes that “if God’s being is being-in-relationship and the existence of each creature is a being-in-relation to the divine

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862 Edwards, Breath of Life, 172.
863 See chapter 9 above, and Battaglia, “An Examination of Karl Rahner’s Trinitarian Theology,” 4-5. Edwards notes that Rahner argues successfully “that the incarnation is clearly a case where a divine presence is not merely appropriated to one person, but is proper to the person of the Word”. See Breath of Life, 123–24.
864 Edwards, Breath of Life, 27.
865 Edwards, Breath of Life, 30.
867 Edwards, Breath of Life, 46.
868 Edwards, Breath of Life, 47.
Communion, then this suggests that relationality is at the very core of being.” 869 This relationality is established from the beginning. Creation is not just coming into being, it is continuing being (as a verb). Creation is both creatio originalis (creation in the beginning) and creatio continua (a continuing power sustaining creation).

10.2.3 The Wonder of Nature

Christian theology has always celebrated the wonder and the beauty of God in nature. And Christians see this wonder and beauty as the presence of the Holy Spirit, or as in Teilhard’s case, the presence of Christ in nature. It is upon this other-consciousness that Rudolf Otto’s theory of the numinous is based. The numinous is the experience of the ineffable, beyond anything we experience in ordinary life. 870 This sense of the numinous elicits a sense of a transcendent God, the ineffable Creator of the luminous creation. 871

While this is a genuine response by Edwards to the enormous size, power and density of nature, he has elsewhere provided a pathway to a resolution of this dilemma through Rahner’s theory of self-transcendence. Edwards writes:

Rahner argues that we need to think of the divine act of ongoing creation, then, not simply as the Divine “conservation” and “concursus” of all things, but as the enabling of creation to become what is radically new. He calls this process whereby God empowers creation itself to produce something radically new “active self-transcendence”. 872

The context of Edwards’ thinking in this regard relates to the theory of evolution. Where Teilhard sees creation as progress from alpha to omega – Christogenesis ultimately –

869 Edwards, Breath of Life, 48.
872 Edwards, Breath of Life, 46.
Edwards is recruiting Rahner to explain the innermost, dynamic capacity for matter to move towards spirit. Teilhard, Rahner and Edwards agree that the primary source of this progression is spiritual, from God, so we have a movement from spirit to matter – the creation – and then from matter to spirit – Christogenesis or Omega. In other words, creation has the capacity continuously to improve itself and create more of itself in dynamic motion towards its beckoning end-point.

Creation theologies have tended to emphasise God (unspecified, presumably God as Father or as the One God) as Creator, or Wisdom as accompanying God in creation, or The Word (Christ) as Creator. Edwards, however, places emphasis upon the Spirit as Creator and saviour. Edwards opts for divine cosmic presence through/in the Spirit. In searching for the Cosmic Christ, it is becoming clear that the Cosmic Christ is filled with the Spirit of God expressed as Wisdom and as regenerative life for ongoing creation. Edwards is specific: “The spirit is the bountiful excess of the dynamism of the divine life that animates a world of creatures.”873 Creatio originalis, creatio continua, grace and salvation are to be found in the mutuality of the Wisdom/Word and Wisdom/Spirit.

Edwards holds that the Spirit is the source of divine communion at the very heart of every relationship, including the relationship between the Persons within God. Being-in-communion then is the power of the universe. As will be shown in the following chapters of this thesis, the Arrernte way of talking of being-in-communion is anpernirrentye/relationship, thus indicating a further example of the convergence of the Judaeo-Christian world-view and Altyerre. Here Anpernirrentye is the power source, the dynamo of Altyerre, just as the Spirit is the dynamo of Holy Mystery

10.3 Elizabeth Johnson: Creation and Deep Incarnation

Inspired by the wisdom of the Book of Job, Elizabeth Johnson accepted the challenge of synthesising Darwinian Evolutionism with modern Eco-theology (creation theology) in a process dialogue.874 Johnson’s task is to answer the question: “What is the theological

873 Edwards, Breath of Life, 172.
874 See Elizabeth Johnson, Ask the Beasts.
meaning of the natural world of life?" She answers the question from a distinctively Judaeo-Christian perspective – “Ask the Beasts and they will tell you” (Job 12.7).

In *Ask the Beasts*, Johnson challenges the dualistic ideas that God is beyond and separate from God’s creation, and that time and eternity are different states. In Johnson’s view God can be found in nature – nature and God form a unity – although God is not confined or limited in nature or to be found only in nature. Johnson points out that dualism is a limited understanding of creation and that classical Christian theology “speaks of creation in three senses as *creatio originalis, creatio continua, creatio nova*, that is, original creation in the beginning, continuous creation in the present here and now, and new creation at the redeemed end-time.”

Johnson critiques the dualistic idea of creation as confined to one moment in time, as if God made everything and then turned away. For her, *creatio continuo* opens up the rich prospect that God remains a participant in God’s creation. This presents creation both as a gift in the first instance and as a continuous celebration from the moment of the gift. Johnson’s metaphor – that the creator is “like a singer who keeps the song in existence at all times” enhances this notion of an everlasting celebration. So Johnson says that for “creation to be continuously happening, the creator must be continuously present and active”.

In Johnson’s understanding of *creatio continua*, the Spirit is the active agency of God in creation. She suggests that while the Spirit is active in the present, the Spirit also presages the future: “The spirit is the vivifier, the one who quickens, animates, stirs, enlivens, gives life even now while engendering the life of the world to come.” So she is also addressing the Pauline theology that *creatio nova* is the eschatological inevitability of *creatio continua*. For Johnson this reassurance of an immanent God of the end-times is biblically based, particularly from the Wisdom literature of the Hebrew Bible. God creates, God is present in creation, God’s embrace in eternity is our destiny.

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875 Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 143.
876 Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 123.
879 Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 128.
10.3.1 God: Incarnate, Immanent, Trinitarian

Johnson sees the Incarnation of God made manifest in Jesus as an additional opportunity to meet the transcendent God in human lives: the New Testament image of Jesus Christ as the “image of the unseen God” (Col 1:15) provides a new way of interpreting God’s redemptive love for creation. Jesus, God Incarnate, represents the Spirit of God present in human and cosmic history.

Two immanences of God merge in Johnson’s analysis. She acknowledges that, “while later Christian theology tended to connect the figure of Wisdom with Jesus Christ, the earlier tradition more often associates her with the world-enlivening presence of the Spirit”.880 Like Edwards, her analysis places more emphasis on the older tradition: “Christians confess belief in one God beyond the world (transcendent), with the world in the flesh (incarnate), and within the world bringing it to a blessed future (immanent).”881 These last two are what might be called, at least at first sight, the two immanences of God.

She adopts perichoresis as a metaphor for the loving action of the Trinitarian God, “the three ‘persons’ joined in a perichoresis or circling movement of life, like a divine round dance”882 where this metaphor beautifully consolidates the three “persons” – transcendent, incarnate and immanent – of God. She cannot imagine one “person” of God without the other two, since all three hold the Godhead in an embrace, an eternal dance of love.

Johnson understands the perichoretic God as verb rather than noun – action rather than substance. Therefore, God as Love is not an abstract concept, but an action, Loving: “Love refers not to something God does or an affection God entertains, but who God is, graciousness in person. God is entirely understood as Loving. In formal terms the Spirit is God who is love proceeding in person”.883

Johnson draws on many metaphors for this immanent God. One is Hildegard of Bingen’s “guiding image of viriditas, greenness which runs throughout her work expressing the

880 Johnson, Ask the Beasts, 141.
881 Johnson, Ask the Beasts, 132.
882 Johnson, Ask the Beasts, 132.
883 Johnson, Ask the Beasts, 133.
freshness, fertility, and fruitfulness of the life-giving power of the spirit”.884 God’s love through the Spirit is fecund. God’s Spirit is also energetic and powerful. The Spirit can move mountains. Johnson quotes Jürgen Moltmann: “[T]hrough the Holy Spirit, God’s eternal life brims over, as it were, and its overflowing powers and energies fill the earth.”885 Another metaphor is fire, which “symbolises the presence of the divine in the world’s religions. Lighting lamps or candles and burning incense is a typical ritual act.”886 Water is another powerful image, widely employed throughout the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. As pointed out in 4.2 and elsewhere both fire and water are also powerful Arrernte motifs, of which more will be said in Part Four.

Moving from metaphor in the Bible to mediaeval theology, Johnson enlists Aquinas to support her argument for God’s immanence, because Aquinas saw God as “the plenitude of being, sheer being itself …”887 Aquinas is thus claimed to have construed “the immanence of God in the natural world in such wise that nature can never be thought to be godless”.888

Finally, Johnson refers to Catherine LaCugna, who “mounts a ferocious argument that ‘God’s To-be is To-Be in relationship’.889 The inference of this ontological argument about the nature of God is that if God’s inner relationship, the relationship between Father, Son and Spirit is perichoretic, God’s relationship with the world is of the very same nature, interactive and loving.

### 10.3.2 God in Everything

Johnson also addresses the issue of pantheism versus panentheism. The pantheist says that God is all things, while the panentheist proposes that God is in all things. Johnson summons the support of Aquinas’s argument: “Hence while ‘God is in all things,’ … it can also be said that ‘all things are in God,’ inasmuch as they are ‘contained’ or embraced by a living presence which cannot be limited in any way”.890 Here we find God in a delicate dance with

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886 Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 137.
887 Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 144.
888 Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 144.
the creation, but God not contained or limited by that embrace. God’s Spirit enlivens and animates the whole creation and is bound to it. Johnson’s conclusion, drawn from this understanding, is critical again to this study. She “honours the immanence or closeness of God, which is frequently overlooked in unipersonal theism which posits God solely as the transcendent cause”.891

Pantheism and even panentheism are often associated with primitive religions or nature religions, which have historically been regarded as second-rate compared to the religions, particularly of the West or Jewish and Christian traditions, which posit a High God. Johnson draws on Denis Edwards, who will have nothing of this view. In a radical understanding of God in the natural world Johnson agrees with Edwards who, combining the imago dei of Genesis 1 and the broader and necessary relationship between humanity and all nature in Genesis 2, argues that “no one creature, not even the human, can image God by itself. Only the diversity of life – huge soaring trees, the community of ants, the flashing colours of the parrot, the beauty of a wildflower along with the human – can give expression to the radical diversity and otherness of the trinitarian God.”892 Humanity in this approach is not independent of, but interdependent with and upon, nature. Humanity is both a participant in evolution and a fruit of evolution, a beneficiary of an amazingly complex process.

Johnson discerns the presence of God in the entire creation throughout its history and unfolding. She writes that “in its robust naturalness the world exists due to a continuous act of love on the part of the Creator Spirit who shares the gift of being in an ongoing way, indwelling creation, sustaining its life, cherishing its every crevasse”.893 Johnson, like Edwards, is presenting an ecological theology, placing God front and centre, within and without the entire creation, with particular emphasis on the natural world894 whose origin is well described, according to Johnson, by Darwin’s theory of the Origin of Species. A corollary of that emphasis is that the God of continuous creation is to be found equally in a non-Christian religious framework that is entirely grounded in the physical creation to the

891 Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, 1.8.1, ad 2 in Johnson, Ask the Beasts, 147.
892 See Denis Edwards, Ecology at the Heart of Faith (New York, Maryknoll: Orbis, 2006), 78, in Johnson, Ask the Beasts, 149.
893 Johnson, Ask the Beasts, 150.
894 It should be noted that Teilhard would say the constructed world, product of human endeavour, is equally part of the ongoing dynamic of creation. See Anthony M. Stevens-Arroyo, “Fire and Force: Civilization as Noosphere in the Works of Teilhard de Chardin,” in Comparative Civilizations Review 66, 66 (Spring 2012), Article 7, https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1853&context=ccr (accessed September 28, 2018).
extent that its adherents have developed a sense of a non-material or spiritual existence abiding within matter. For such believers, nature is truly God’s dwelling place.

When talking about a metaphor drawn from The Origin of Species, where Darwin speaks of the “Entangled Bank”, a place where nature demonstrates its marvellous, intricate interconnectedness, Johnson is eloquent: “[T]he inner secret of the entangled bank is the dwelling of God’s spirit within it. Instead of being distinct from what is holy, the natural world bears the mark of the sacred, being itself imbued with a spiritual presence.”895 Many scientists, particularly those of a non-religious persuasion, could question Johnson’s conclusion. She, however, sees that there is no contradiction in believing in the irrefutable science of evolution and ascribing to a religious framework that gives meaning to evolution’s process.

When Christians consider nature as sacred, there the concept of the sacraments emerges. Johnson writes: “Earth is a physical place of extravagant dynamism that bodies forth the gracious presence of God. In its own way it is a sacrament and a revelation.”896 Reflecting an insight commonly associated with Teilhard de Chardin, Johnson is saying that in a sense the Church’s sacraments are filled with God “because to begin with the whole physical world itself is a primordial sacrament”.897 Here we have a further development of a Cosmic Trinitarian theology.

Throughout her analysis of evolution based on the Origin of Species, Johnson is alert to the issue of suffering. In powerful recurring reflections she recalls many examples of creatures suffering. One case is the plight of the second, rejected pelican chick who is sacrificed, in a sense, for the survival of its sister. In another example, observing the apparent playfulness yet viciousness of the kill of a seal by an orca, she recognises that this grotesque kill is actually an important part of the evolutionary process since it removes the weaker seals from the genetic stock, thus enhancing the breed’s overall chances of survival, and it trains juvenile orcas in the hunt, ensuring their breed success at the same time. So, Johnson is alert to and explains in evolutionary terms the all-pervasiveness of suffering in the natural world.

Evolution, she concedes, is based on death and its associated suffering. Each death, however,

895 Johnson, Ask the Beasts, 150.
896 Johnson, Ask the Beasts, 150.
897 Johnson, Ask the Beasts, 151.
promotes and provides a basis for new life. Johnson is preparing the reader for a Christian understanding of *creatio nova*, a blessed future achieved through the death and resurrection of Jesus. *Creatio continua* provides humans with a comforting image of God among us always, both before the birth and after the death of Jesus, through the Spirit of Jesus/God. *Creatio nova* offers a glimpse of that world surrounded in the Spirit of the Trinitarian God’s *perichoretic* eternal embrace.

In this argument, we are challenged to come to terms with human existence in the now. Salvation history, commencing with the entry of God made flesh at a moment in time, alerts us to the notion that nature is reaching out for completion and transformation. Johnson quotes John Haught, who “cautions against settling down with an uncritical view of the natural world as sacrament which can get closed in on itself, ignore suffering, and overlook the promise of what is yet to come”. Johnson is balancing the now and the not yet elements of Faith.

The Hebrew Bible, which in the Priestly creation story highlights “inclusive monotheism” based on Elohim as Creator, with its Wisdom motifs, including the Wisdom of Job who was not an Israelite, and the New Testament witnessing to the Love of God incarnate, provide a revelation of the being of God in the history of Israel, and of all people. Nature, or better the Universe, the home of all of God’s people’s, offers a deep revelation of the being of God. Johnson, channelling Augustine, concludes, “God gave us both books of revelation, and we must learn to read both well in order to glimpse their Author.”

10.3.3 Deep Incarnation

For Johnson, “[t]he incarnation is a cosmic event”. Johnson credits Neils Gregerson with the term “deep incarnation” to describe the “divine reach through human flesh all the way down into the very tissue of biological existence with its growth and decay, joined with the wider processes of evolving nature that beget and sustain life”. Johnson enlists the support of Karl Rahner: “The statement of God’s *Incarnation* – of God’s becoming *material*— is the

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899 Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 151.
900 Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 196.
most basic statement of Christology.” She demonstrates that for Rahner, the Word, the Incarnate God, the Son in the Trinity has become material from the moment of creation.

Johnson finds further support from John Paul II:

The incarnation of God the Son signifies that taking up into unity with God not only of human nature, but in this human nature, in a sense, of everything that is flesh: the whole of humanity, the entire visible and material world. The Incarnation then, also has a cosmic significance, a cosmic dimension. The “firstborn of all creation,” becoming incarnate in the individual humanity of Christ, unites himself in some way with the entire reality of humanity – which is also “flesh” – and in this reality with all “flesh” with the whole of creation.

Johnson observes: “Viewing Jesus as God-with-us in this way entails a belief not at all self-evident for monotheistic faith which Christians share with Jewish and Muslim traditions.”

It is the contention of this study that the Incarnation stretches beyond the Jewish, Christian, Muslim tradition into the Arrernte tradition found in Altyerre. Christ is thus the “first born” for all creation, for all humanity, for all peoples, for all religions.

From deep incarnation Johnson moves to the “idea of ‘deep resurrection’ to extend the risen Christ’s affiliation to the whole natural world”. In the resurrection of Christ, she argues, the whole universe is transformed. The incarnation, the birth, death and resurrection of Christ are all cosmic events. The Cosmic Christ unites the transcendent God of Priestly monotheism and the immanent God of the Wisdom literature in the Spirit-led Christ event, which then transports the universe back to completion in transcendence. As Johnson says: “In the risen Christ, by an act of infinite mercy and fidelity, ‘the eternal God has assumed the corporeality of the world into the heart of divine life – not just for time but for eternity’.”

Here is the realisation of creatio nova, the new creation achieved in great hope. When the women who come to the tomb find it empty, the emptiness is at first confounding. But as the community of Jesus’ followers reflect upon his absence and recollect his words, the

902 Rahner, “Christology within an Evolutionary View,” 176–77 in Johnson, Ask the Beasts, 197.
903 Johnson, Ask the Beasts, 197, quoting Pope John Paul II, encyclical Lord and Giver of Life (Dominum et Vivificantem), §50.
904 Johnson, Ask the Beasts, 197.
905 Johnson, Ask the Beasts, 208.
realisation begins to come that he has risen and that in his rising their world has been irrevocably altered. Paul comes to the same conclusion when he writes to the community at Colossae. According to Johnson Paul’s understanding is that the “same early Christian hymn that recognises Christ as ‘firstborn of the dead’ also names him ‘the firstborn of all creation’” (Col. 1:15).907 Creatio nova is the very stuff of the earliest Pauline theology establishing the Cosmic Christ of the incarnation, the man Jesus made of star dust, as the means whereby suffering and pain are overcome and the reign of God reaches out from eternity to embrace believers in eternity in the present moment.

Support for Johnson’s argument can be found in N.T. Wright’s study of the theology of St Paul. In his analysis of the Letter to the Thessalonians, Wright demonstrates that Paul’s theology presents a “hopeful grief” where the sense of “wrenching loss has within it the strong and clear hope of reunion … The point is that all will in the end be together ‘with the Lord’.”908 Further, referring to the Colossians hymn, Wright suggests that the progress of the hymn has the effect of unifying creation and salvation through Wisdom.909 He writes that Paul “is invoking and celebrating a world in which Jesus, the one through whom all things were made, is now the one through whom, by means of his crucifixion, all things are reconciled”.910

10.4 Conclusion

Johnson’s theme is the universality of God’s love for the entire creation and all living creatures. Johnson’s synthesis stands beside Edwards’ approach. The two scholars agree in almost all elements of their theologies. Johnson’s emphasis on the incarnation and resurrection of Christ balances Edwards’ emphasis which is often on the role of the Spirit, the Breath of God. Deep Incarnation and Deep Resurrection stand as the foundation pillars of her eco-theology. In this way she seeks to authenticate her approach, which continues to offer deep respect to nature. God’s love of nature means that humans, as part of nature, need to conduct their affairs in harmony with nature. Johnson notes that Sallie McFague has named

907 Johnson, Ask the Beasts, 209.
908 N.T. Wright, Paul A Biography (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2018), 220.
909 Wright, Paul A Biography, 287. Wright says that “Wisdom’ is in fact the subtext of much of Colossians.”
910 Wright, Paul A Biography, 290-291.
this the “christic paradigm”.\textsuperscript{911} The incarnation sets the tune for the unfolding of existence. This implies that “liberating, healing, and inclusive love is the meaning of all”.\textsuperscript{912} Johnson therefore posits that “[t]hose who believe in Christ make a wager that love as Jesus enfleshed it in a human way reveals the ineffable compassion of God; this love is the meaning encoded at the core of human life and at the heart of the universe itself”.\textsuperscript{913} We have already seen that M.K. Turner describes Altyerre as “a loving way” and that the concept of arntarntareme connotes care for, loving, cherishing and protecting everything that comprises Altyerre. As will now be shown, Johnson’s sense of the Cosmic Christ’s role in creation and nature suggests a deep convergence with the local blueprint of Altyerre.

\textsuperscript{911} McFague, The Body of God, 161, quoted in Johnson, Ask the Beasts, 201.

\textsuperscript{912} McFague, The Body of God, 161, quoted in Johnson, Ask the Beasts, 201.

\textsuperscript{913} Johnson, Ask the Beasts, 201.
Part Four: *Altyerre* Catholicism

Chapter 11: Beyond Syncretism

11.1: Introduction

The meeting at Manaus of the Amazon River with its main tributary the Rio Negro, named because of its distinctively black water, presents a metaphor for the relationship between the two imaginaries *Altyerre* and the Cosmic Christ. When the rivers meet, they do not mix, but rather they run parallel for 6 kilometres maintaining their own character, because they move at different speeds, with different temperatures and different water density. Eventually they coalesce, mingling the life inherent in each, forming the now mightier Amazon that supports more abundant life in its flood plain before flowing into the Atlantic Ocean. While appearing quite different from each other, the two streams finally become one mighty river that flows into the great ocean. They can do this because they are both constituted of water, a fundamental requirement for life on our planet.

Part Four of this thesis aims to develop a new way of thinking about how *Altyerre*-Catholicism joins two streams to create a greater river. Each is constituted of a network of beliefs and practices, or imaginary, and at first sight the two imaginaries are quite distinct and cannot mingle. And yet they have come together. The argument of this thesis is that together they have created and are creating something newer and greater. Each imaginary enhances the other.

In this thesis an imaginary is taken to mean a deeply structured, foundational and all-embracing description of reality. Imaginaries are open-ended systems of thought that are practical and adaptable. The concept of an imaginary offers a powerful way of thinking about the way a culture or religion lives in both the present moment and the eternal mystery. Both *Altyerre* and Catholicism may be understood as imaginaries.

Part Three explored the development of Christology in the 20th century and an opening up of the imaginary of the Cosmic Christ in the 21st century. In these developments the complexities of Trinity, spirit, creation, incarnation, grace and salvation were re-imagined in
terms of a Christ known through the incarnation and then understood as one with the Spirit of God, one in God, one in creation, one in humanity, one in the past and one in the future. This development continued a trajectory of orthodox Catholic/Christian teaching that dates back to the New Testament and the early Christian communities. In Part Three it was the immanence of Mystery rather than the transcendence of the Trinity that was emphasised.

Part Four returns to a primary focus begun in Part One on the Arrernte imaginary of Altyerre, which in some respects appears to have no direct connection with concepts like a Creator God, incarnation or salvation. It will be argued, however, that at its deepest Altyerre is entirely consistent with these Christian themes, though expressed and lived in a different way, and sometimes a more profound and less reductive way. Altyerre provides the answer to everything about the mystery of existence.

In Part Four the issues of syncretism and inculturation will be examined through the prism of contextual theology. The risk here, however, is that such integration of two imaginaries might be being unfaithful to both Aboriginal beliefs and Christianity, as implied in Paul Albrecht’s critique of Rainbow Spirit Theology noted at 7.3. As noted in Chapter 6, Catholic theology since Vatican II welcomes dialogue between faiths and inculturation, as exemplified in Pope John Paul II’s address in Alice Springs and as stated recently by Pope Francis:

If we go in search of other people, other cultures, other ways of thinking, other religions, we come out of ourselves and begin that beautiful adventure that is called “dialogue”. Dialogue is very important for one’s maturity, because in relation with other people, relations with other culture, also in healthy relations with other religions, one grows; grows, matures.

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914 Contextual theology is “a way of doing theology in which one takes into account the spirit and message of the gospel; the tradition of the church; the culture in which one is theologizing; and social change within that culture, whether brought about by western technological process or the grass-roots struggle for equality, justice and liberation.” Stephen Bevans, Models of Contextual Theology (Maryknoll, New York: 1992), 1.

The argument in Part Four is that the dialogue between Altyerre and Catholic/Western Christianity produces growth and maturity in both. This thesis has drawn on two mission traditions, the Lutheran Mission at Hermannsburg and the Little Flower Mission at Santa Teresa. The focus of this study has been upon the Catholic development of a theology of mission and on the contemporary context of Arrernte Catholics, because this is a particular existential situation of concern. However, the analysis relies on the wider mission experience of Central Australian Aboriginal groups with Christian missionaries of various denominations. Hopefully the implications of the study will find resonance within the Australian Catholic Church and also in the continuing and developing relationships between other Christian Churches and their Aboriginal brothers and sisters.

The interaction between Altyerre and Catholicism/Christianity will be analysed in Chapter 11 under the headings Contradiction, Syncretism, Correspondence, Coherence, Complementarity, Convergence. The argument in Part Four is for coherence, convergence and the development of a new understanding of Altyerre-Catholicism as an emerging single entity rather than a static syncretic hybrid.

Chapter 12 explores several key areas of coherence and convergence. It provides an explanation of the recurring elements of Arrernte beliefs and practices that could be called theological in a Christian setting. Attention is given to key elements of each imaginary: story and scripture, origins and creation, the sacred, salvation and healing; and sacraments and grace.

Chapter 13, effectively the conclusion to this thesis, considers the future of Altyerre-Catholicism, proposing that it is a single imaginary based upon the latent power that lies inexorably flowing in the deep subterranean depths of the land/apmere, as it draws upon the spirit/utnenge of the aknganentye/creation, offering the possibility of a deepening of faith for Arrernte and non-Arrernte Catholics alike. Through further investigation, the issues emerging

916 I thank John Honner for these suggestions, which arose out of Mary Hesse’s insights in her Revolutions and Reconstructions in the Philosophy of Science (Brighton: Harvester, 1980): “Accumulating data plus coherence ultimately converge to true theory” … this formula is both “correct” and “mistaken”, because, “fundamental theories or conceptual frameworks cannot be interpreted as attempts at realistic description of the hidden features of the external world, but rather as particular viewpoints upon the world.” See pp. viii, x, 245.
from this Altyerre-Catholic analysis might be seen to have application to other Aboriginal imaginaries – the Pitjantjatjara concept of Tjukurpa for example within the developing theology of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress – and ultimately might be seen as a gift to the global Christian community. It is even possible that an outcome might be a contribution to Reconciliation between the Aboriginal Nations of Australia and the Commonwealth of Australia, the Australian Churches and the Australian community generally.

11.2 From Syncretism to Convergence

In Part Two it was noted that Rev Paul Albrecht described the fusion of Aboriginal beliefs and Christian beliefs in Rainbow Spirit Theology as “syncretism”, criticising such integration as being unfaithful to both Aboriginal beliefs and Christianity. He implied that, because Rainbow Spirit Theology was not authentic to either tradition, it was a double “heresy”.

Syncretism may be seen as one of six categories of dialogue between religious traditions, moving from Contradiction through Syncretism, Correspondence, Coherence, Complementarity to Convergence. Briefly each may be summarised:

1. **Contradiction** implies that one imaginary cannot be held at the same time as the other, because they are inherently contradictory. This was the view of some, if not all, of the early missionaries.

2. **Syncretism** implies that two separate imaginaries cannot genuinely be brought together, that they undermine each other and that there can be no real connection between them. On this view it is better not to enter too far into dialogue.

3. **Correspondence** implies that elements in one imaginary correspond exactly to elements in the other. For example, if there is “wisdom” in one tradition then there is corresponding “wisdom” in the other. There is a risk here of searching for correspondences which might promote a superficial focus rather than a deep dialogue.

4. **Coherence** recognises differences, but also appreciates that imaginaries can sometimes combine rather than always contradict each other. For example, while the traditional Arrernte stories and the Genesis stories of creation are different in many respects, they also cohere in recognising the giftedness of life and nature.
5. *Complementarity* implies a process of mutuality based on difference. Through complementarity issues that might be a little incomplete in one or the other imaginary are brought to greater fulfillment through association with each other.

6. *Convergence* recognises a growth and maturity that occurs in each imaginary through dialogue and the recognition of coherence. It goes beyond coherence and complementarity because it points to something freshly emerging in the future development of the imaginaries.

Inculturation is an allied concept which describes the process of attempting to fit the rituals of one faith with the ceremonies and beliefs of a different tradition. Inculturation can be understood as superficial or as deeply authentic. In the Arrernte situation, superficial inculturation might be defined as the clothing of essentially Catholic rituals with Arrernte dress. Part Two recorded how Fr Patrick Dodson judged that the inculturation that he witnessed at Wadeye, by not addressing the power differential between the Murrinhpatha and the clergy, was superficial. Deep inculturation, on the other hand, involves a process that addresses power and the authenticity of the inclusion of elements from the Indigenous source in such a way that it finds itself in a valued location in the theology and ritual of the host religion. Later in this chapter an Arrernte smoking ceremony will be analysed in the light of this distinction.

Because of Albrecht’s criticism of syncretism, it is appropriate to reflect on that term. It has a long and chequered history in religious studies. Syncretism, according to Peter van der Veer, is a “transparent, descriptive term, referring to the borrowing, affirmation, or integration of concepts, symbols, or practices of one religious tradition into another by a process of selection and reconciliation”.\(^{917}\) Despite this benign definition, van der Veer concedes that “it is striking how pejoratively the term is often used by defenders of ‘the true faith’. It is seen as a loss of identity, an illicit contamination, a sign of religious decadence.”\(^{918}\) This thesis demonstrates, however, no loss of identity on the part of Arrernte Catholics, and indeed an enhanced set of markers of identity as they synthesise Altyerre with Catholicism.


\(^{918}\) van der Veer, “Syncretism, multiculturalism and the discourse of tolerance,” 197.
Referencing the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), David J. Bosch argues that “all theology was influenced, if not determined, by the context in which it evolved. There never was a ‘pure’ message, supracultural and suprahistorical.” In other words, all theologies are in some way conditioned by their environment. On this view, *Rainbow Spirit Theology* is best described as contextual. Bosch makes an important distinction between contextualised theologies “from above” or “from below”. Bosch’s “from below” theology reflects the context of the marginalised or the poor which will be achieved, according to Bosch, by the social sciences. It is from the margins that *Rainbow Spirit Theology* and *Altyerre*-Catholicism have emerged.

In the view of this thesis, on the basis of analysis of the six points of transition above, *Rainbow Spirit Theology* is not syncretism but an authentic effort by modern Aboriginal Christians to locate powerful elements of the two traditions in a meaningful synthesis, aiming to support other Aboriginal Christians to navigate their way in a dominant society where their spirituality has been historically submerged under the ocean of Christian Mission. *Rainbow Spirit Theology* is best described as coherence leading to convergence.

It will be argued below that the incorporation of *Altyerre* within Catholicism, or the converse, of Catholicism within *Altyerre*, is an ongoing process. Additionally, it is argued that if deep inculturation is endorsed by the Catholic hierarchy, *Altyerre*-Catholicism will not be syncretism but rather the holistic embrace of *Altyerre* within the Catholic Church – true convergence.

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920 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 423. Bosch seeks to address power differentials contrasting elitist theology “from above” and a theology emerging from the poorer masses “from below”. The same terms can be applied in a different manner to understandings of Christ where “from above” represents a high Christology, for example in John's prologue where its focus is on the divine nature of the Word, and “from below” in Mark’s Gospel, which has its focus on the suffering, empathetic humanity of Jesus.
922 Norman Habel assisted the *Rainbow Spirit Theology* project, which was directed by Aboriginal theologians Robert Bos and Shirley Wurst. Robyn Reynolds OLSH was Dean of Students at the time. Personal communication, Robyn Reynolds, December 13, 2018.
11.3 Catholic and Arrernte

M.K. Turner’s stance, with her two feet firmly planted in her two traditions, exemplifies this case. In Part One Turner introduces her Arrernte identity this way: “Akemarre Akertarenye. That’s my proper traditional name.”923 She is describing herself as a “being in relationship”. She exists as a human being because of her relationship to both her apmereal/country and to/in her anpernirrentye/kinship system. In this way she marks herself as an authentic and authoritative Arrernte person.

M.K. also plays the role of liturgical leader at shared Ngkarte Mikwekenhe Catholic Community Masses924 and other sacramental programs925 at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Parish in Alice Springs. M.K. is proud to call herself a Catholic and as far as she is concerned, her religious life is both Catholic and Arrernte.

An exploration of the role of “smoking ceremonies” in Catholic and Arrernte settings may lead to a deeper understanding of the relationship between these converging imaginaries.926 This process will elucidate a theme of religious two-way thinking. Occasionally there are crucial historical events that mark decisive and lasting change. Margaret Heffernan tells of one at Christmas time at Santa Teresa in the 1950s: “The priests led a procession into the church grounds, waving their incense around and blessing the place. A proper Catholic smoking ceremony. The old people liked that.”927 It seems that the link between ancient Arrernte smoking and its role in inculturation in Catholic practice at the Mission may have had its genesis in this priestly practice.928 Certainly, by the 1960s Fr Dixon was “smoking” the new stone houses at Santa Teresa so they could be occupied. Smoking was/is also used to cleanse dwellings after the death of an occupant so that a house could be reoccupied after an appropriate period of mourning.929

923 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 10.
924 Once a month the Sunday Mass for the whole Parish is led by the NMCC.
925 Such as Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday and at Confirmation Masses.
926 The smoking of houses at Santa Teresa after a death of the occupant has been described at 6.5.1.
927 Heffernan, Gathering Sticks, 102.
928 Heffernan uses the two-way metaphor in Gathering Sticks. The term two-ways is widely used in the contact zone between Aboriginal and mainstream Australia, particularly in Northern Australia. In a manner not always clearly explained, it offers a way of understanding the complexity of living simultaneously and successfully in two alien and often opposed worlds.
929 See 6.3
The use of smoke in ancient Arrernte culture is entrenched. M.K. Turner provides an insight into the role of smoke in an ancient preparation of children for life which could be dubbed an Arrernte “baptismal rite”:

After they were born, new little babies would be placed in a coolamon. The grandmothers would then warm their hands in the smoke of the fire and touch the little ones’ mouths. With the warmth from the smoke, the grandmothers’d speak these words: “Don’t talk wrongly, don’t speak wrongly with this mouth. Never swear or say anything bad towards anybody, and don’t speak wrongly towards elders. Let this mouth to be saying just the right things and the right words. Don’t tell other people’s stories, and only speak the truth.” Then they would warm their hands and put their fingers on the baby’s two ears and say “only hear good stories, don’t listen to other people’s conversations, nasty gossip, or comments about others. Don’t repeat these stories.” Then they warm their hand and touch the eyes then and say “use these eyes to see just good things. Don’t let your gaze rest upon whatever it is you’re not supposed to see, or on anything bad. Don’t look at other people’s things and want to have them for yourself. You have to always keep your eyes on your own path.”

This example reflects Arrernte cleansing and preparation for life. Arrernte smoking ceremonies are authentically part of Arrernte culture, existing before contact with Europeans.

In present times on Palm Sunday at the OLSH church in Alice Springs, in order to be cleansed and prepared for the Easter trilogy, the congregation assembles on the front porch of the church. Each year M.K., or one of the other members of NMCC, is called upon to welcome the assembly and to light the fire upon which arrethe leaves will be burnt. Soon white smoke billows from the drum and participants are asked to process through the cleansing smoke as they enter the church. When everyone is assembled in their seats in the church the presiding priest says that the Smoking Ceremony has replaced the Penitential Rite and proceeds to the Liturgy of the Word. This inclusion of an Arrernte smoking ceremony

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930 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 198. Kathleen Kemarre Wallace, Listen deeply, 82 includes a similar account of baby smoking in a “baptism” ceremony, and at Listen deeply, 101, includes a reference to a smoking event in her account of the very famous and widely circulated Seven Sisters story.

931 Arrethe is the native fuchsia.
represents a form of deep inculturation. In this smoking ceremony an ancient Arrernte ritual has been incorporated into a Catholic liturgical service.

On the other hand, most of the regular Sunday NMCC Mass perhaps reflects a more superficial inculturation. The Eucharistic prayer is a mixture of Arrernte and English, using a translation of the Eucharistic prayer which was introduced at the 1973 Melbourne Eucharistic Congress. The congregation, a mix of Arrernte speakers and non-Arrernte speakers, responds in Arrernte. Most of the liturgical greetings and some rituals, such as the “Lamb of God” recital, are in Arrernte and many of the hymns are either original Arrernte hymns or translations of English hymns into Arrernte. It is clear that liturgical inculturation is an ongoing process.

This thesis proposes that, in an effort to challenge the status quo and develop a unique appropriate theology to meet their own Arrernte contextual religious needs, a unique praxis has developed in Central Australia among Mparntwe Arrernte Catholics. Here is discerned the beginnings of the development of an “indigenous theology from below,”932 or perhaps “from within,” by wise, skilled, Catholic Arrernte people themselves. The process is not complete. It remains a work in progress, yet much has been achieved.

11.4 From the Time of the Pope

Before arguing the case that Altyerre-Catholicism is a home-grown product, it is important to acknowledge that since the period leading to the Australian visit of Pope John Paul II in 1986 a small number of Australian Catholic theologians and practitioners worked to contextualise the gospel to Mparntwe Arrernte Catholics. The Pope’s address to Australian Aboriginal people, given at Alice Springs, used Vatican II theology to break open a pathway to recognition of the application of respect for the presence of the Spirit of God in ancient Aboriginal tradition. Through 1986 and the appointment of Fr Phil Hoy MSC as priest responsible for organisation of the Pope’s visit, new advances were made in Church–Arrernte relations. Hoy and other non-indigenous Church personnel (e.g., former lay missionary John Pettit and Sr Robyn Reynolds OLSH) were able to engage respectfully with both Alice Springs and Santa Teresa

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932 Reflective of Bosch’s typology.
As a result of more respectful encounters and dialogue between Arrernte and non-Arrernte church personnel, changes within the church’s life began to emerge. An early development was the introduction of weekday Masses in the Town Camps and Amoonguna. Especially significant was the connection with Nungalinya College, which was at the time conducted in Darwin by the Anglican and Uniting Churches for Aboriginal theology students from the Top End. A small group of Arrernte Catholic were enrolled at Nungalinya at this time and were exposed to powerful leaders such as Reverend Djinyinyi Gondarra, who had studied his theology under the Methodist missionaries in Arnhem Land and had been ordained from a theology that sponsored high levels of engagement in the liturgical, sacramental and clerical leadership of the Church by Aboriginal people. Over the years the connection with Nungalinya has been advanced with cohorts of Mparntwe Arrernte Catholic students attending every year. As a result, new pottery altar-ware was commissioned, altar decorations with Aboriginal colours and motifs were displayed, and soon Wenten Rubuntja’s celebrated painting was hung in the vestibule. Later a Black Madonna was placed on the back wall of the church.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s the local MSC clergy made space for Arrernte language in the Church’s liturgy, using Arrernte translations of the Gospels in the Sunday Mass. Agnes Palmer, a teacher, language expert and cross-cultural facilitator, often read the Gospel in the presence of Fr Holm MSC, who then deferred to her as she delivered a reflection/homily in Arrernte. The Sunday Masses were held in a variety of settings and a Catholic Eucharistic celebration that was taking on a distinctly Arrernte character developed.

Key families involved at this amazing time of change and growth need to be acknowledged: the Turners, Webbs, McMillans, Hayes, Ryans, Alices, Goreys, Olivers and Palmers. These and other strong Arrernte Catholic families became the backbone of the formation of NMCC.
By late 1990s938 the small NMCC Mass centre at South Terrace was well attended every Sunday, with many people having to listen to the service from the courtyard. There was a liturgy for the children, or Sunday School, offered by the Missionary Sisters of Charity.939 *Arrernte* baptisms and first communion at South Terrace and Confirmation at the main OLSH church were held regularly. During this time plans for the construction of a NMCC chapel at South Terrace were drawn up and initial discussions undertaken to seek funding from donors in Southern Australia.940

This account suggests that mainly through the agency of its own members, with the assistance of a select group of non-Indigenous friends and co-workers, a unique form of Catholicism that is here labelled *Altyerre*-Catholicism continues to emerge in Alice Springs.941

Rather than allowing the missionaries to change them by eradicating particular indigenous “ways” in order that the *Arrernte* could be “converted” to Catholicism, the *Mparntwe* *Arrernte* approach to their situation has four characteristics: first, to dig deeply into and hold firmly to ancient *Altyerre* tradition (as in the smoking ceremony); second, to recognise additional ancient *Altyerre* beliefs, practices and wisdom that are compatible with Catholic practices and beliefs; third, to reach out for Catholic rites and incorporate them into *Altyerre*; fourth, to move beyond a superficial syncretism into a powerful, organically complete imaginary emerging as *Altyerre*-Catholicism.

### 11.5 Theology from Two Perspectives

Part Two began with an account of the Healing Spring at *Ltyentye Apurte*, where Mary, the mother of Jesus, appeared to the young man in a dream and told him that he would be healed if he found and drank the water, as yet unknown and undiscovered, trickling from the side of

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938 Chaplaincy to NMCC was in the hands of Jesuit priest Fr Pat Mullins from 1995 to 2001. Mullins was a great supporter of liturgical innovation. In 2007 responsibility of OLSH parish was transferred to the Missionaries of the Divine Word (SVD) with Fr Jim Knight SVD as parish priest and Fr Asaeli Raass SVD as chaplain to NMCC. In 2015 Fr Asaeli Raass was appointed parish priest and Fr Olivier Noclam SVD was appointed chaplain to NMCC.

939 Commonly known as Mother Teresa’s Sisters.

940 This work developed in the period of chaplaincy of Fr Asaeli Raass SVD.

941 There are of course similarities between the inculturation at *Ltyentye Apurte* and *Mparntwe*, but each has its own character: *Arrernte* people move easily and regularly between the two centres.
the hill behind the Catholic church. *Ltyentye Apurte* is not just the site of the Santa Teresa Mission. Links with *kwatye/water* totems in the region of *Ltyentye Apurte* abound and this is the very same location of the story of Mother Tree, a fountain of *Arrernte* wisdom and nurture, told and retold by numerous members of the same community. In the juxtaposition of these elements we begin to perceive the inexorable fashioning of *Altyerre*-Catholicism, where with *Altyerre* elements as the matrix along with Catholic beliefs and practices as contributing constituents, a new imaginary emerges.

Remote-based Aboriginal education is often termed “Two-Way Education”. In remote locations, tradition-oriented Aboriginal people are tasked with the challenge of growing up in two worlds that in many ways might appear inimical to each other but within which they have to be completely competent. Perhaps it should be termed “double-ways education” because the students live in two worlds which can be doubly hard. What is meant is not two separate ways but two reciprocating ways. Perhaps a musical metaphor assists our understanding. A concert pianist creates the most beautiful sound with two hands working in complementary fashion, with the left hand and right hand playing melody and harmony simultaneously. Modern *Altyerre*-Catholicism could be seen as “two-way religion”, with the Cosmic Christ drawn into *Altyerre* and *Altyerre* absorbed in Catholicism, with mutual benefit, richer sound and greater resonance. The final result is One beautiful sound.

In order to better understand the genesis of an *Arrernte* and Christian/Catholic two-way theology, it is useful to investigate the notion of salvation in the Hebrew Bible and compare it with what might be termed salvation in *Altyerre*. Salvation or redemption in the Hebrew Bible has a variety of expressions. One might be summarised as the direct intervention of YHWH as saviour through return to country as evidenced in the themes of Exodus and the return from Babylon. YHWH who saves is YHWH who returns Israel to its own country.

An understanding of salvation and redemption is found in Leviticus 25 and 26, where Israel is warned that, because of God’s generous gift of the Land, Israel must act with

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942 The Mother Tree story, told in Kathleen *Kemarre* Wallace’s *Listen Deeply*, will be examined in detail in Chapter 12, where the *arreparrerenge* carrying the spirit child actually visit *Ltyentye Apurte* looking for an *awenke*.

943 Therese Ryder has also narrated and video-recorded the Mother Tree story.

944 Redemption in Leviticus at one level concerns the redemption of property and slaves, or those subject to indentured labour, to their original owner or to freedom.
justice/misphat. The discourse in Leviticus 25–26 demonstrates a contingent relationship between God and Israel. God’s orders are to be obeyed or powerful retribution will be the consequence. This contingent relationship mirrors the contingency in the creation accounts of Genesis 1 and 2. The prophecy of Amos (5:21–24) re-emphasises the call for justice/misphat within country. As reflected in the Book of Amos, return to country is meaningless if misphat is not practised by the people. Amos would see the Jubilee (Leviticus 25:8–13) where country/land, usurped or lost through indebtedness, was returned to its original owners as a necessary example of misphat. For Amos lavish rituals and ceremonial celebrations, reliant for their staging on the accumulation of excess wealth by the ruling class, were the principal characteristic of sin in the world.

The Arrernte world, conversely, was one of stasis and relative harmony. Since everything is laid out in a timeless template, the usurpation of another people’s land or another person’s property was not part of Arrernte consciousness. An understanding of sin in these dissimilar world-views is quite stark. Altyerre might be conceived of as having no history comparable to Israel’s account of salvation history. Stanner defined Altyerre as “Everywhen”. There can be no history when everything is Now. T.G.H. Strehlow views the Arrernte way of life as “a culture that has woven a seamless web of belief and ritual and social organisation” which might be seen as all occurring in the Now. The experiences of the Arrernte in regard to salvation are quite different from the themes from the Hebrew Bible, which sees God participating in history’s unfolding. Creation/lakganentye is not an event in history but is, as Swain suggests, an “abiding event” or a Given, always was and always will be; creation is not contingent upon an exterior being, and sin is not an offence against that outside force.

In Swain’s understanding there is no binary between God and creation. Arrernte rituals are not performed to seek atonement for sin but rather to celebrate Eternity in the circular moment. Hence the most serious crime an Arrernte person can commit is sacrilege, an

945 Refer to Stanner’s view of the absence of war between groups at 3.3.
946 Nevertheless, “return to country,” where Aboriginal people call for the opportunity to take their children and grandchildren back to country for education and socialisation such as at Children’s Ground/Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe, and “Return of Country,” where Aboriginal people call for land justice and the return of country usurped by the Invasion through Native Title, are powerful themes in modern Australia and stand at the heart of the now pressing need for recognition of Aboriginal Nations in the Australian Constitution. This is an example where the Invasion brings a notion of sin, not originally a component of Arrernte thinking, storming into Arrernte and wider Indigenous consciousness.

947 Hill, Broken Song, 633.
offence simultaneously against apmere/country and ceremony. In the context of Altyerre, one can offend against the creation but not against its creator—because, as has been pointed out, the concept of creator is absent. Conversely, the biblical view of God’s role is characterised through the concept of Kingship/Messiah in Israel and Israel’s return to shalom. The Christian tradition transforms the Jewish idea of Messiah through Jesus whose “Kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). A consequent theme in Christian/Catholic soteriology is that there is an end to history, when those who have endured this “vale of tears” are rewarded in heaven, or punished in hell. There is an implicit tension in this theology between Heaven seen as an “after-life” and the idea taught by Jesus that the “Kingdom of Heaven is among you” (Luke 17:21). For some scholars this is where Christology and soteriology collide. Irenaeus, Scotus and Rahner posit a God who would have been incarnated even if sin had not entered the world: Christ is primarily the ultimate image of Mystery/God rather than primarily a saviour from sin.

The great challenge for Israel was to persevere in justice and integrity. Despite having learnt justice/misphat through YHWH’s saving intervention, Israel often strayed from the path of misphat, requiring the intervention of the prophets, speaking for YHWH and calling the people back. In this way right order was re-established. When an Arrernte person strayed, and it is evident that some did from time to time, there were no prophets to signal God’s dismay—although it could be argued that Rubuntja, Turner, Wallace and Heffernan are modern Arrernte prophets calling Arrernte back to the richness of Altyerre. The Arrernte ethic sought to return things to the state of Altyerre order in the timeless template using the sanctioned rectification of misdemeanour through “payback,” a topic to be discussed in some detail in Chapter 12 below.

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948 The Arrernte word ameke-ameke contains this powerful concept.
949 Gary A. Anderson, Sin: A history (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). Anderson analyses sin as both burden and debt. The concept of debt links to the idea of the redemption of debt in Leviticus. This leads to the idea that sin is a debt to be paid. The ultimate conclusion of Anderson’s argument is that the idea of atonement for sin, as outlined by Anselm for example, is scripturally grounded. The issue for this discussion is to investigate how closely the Arrernte idea of retaliatory punishment conforms to the notion of Atonement, Therese Ryder implicitly addresses this conundrum in her translation of the Our Father to be examined in the conclusion of this thesis.
950 Richard Rohr teaches that Jesus’ notion of the Kingdom of Heaven, being among (within) you, represents a state of consciousness in which there is no separation between God and humans and between humans and other humans. (Richard Rohr Meditation: “The Kingdom of Heaven,” Centre for Action and Contemplation, Meditations @cac.org, 15/01/19, accessed January 16, 2019). If Christians live in this state of consciousness then misphat might prevail in the world now.
Perhaps one of the principle convergences of the Arrernte consciousness and the Christian inheritance is the concept of right order. The Christian tradition emphasises one of the principal themes of Jesus’ preaching of Peace and Love through which he prophesied to Judaism the restoration of right relationships.\textsuperscript{951} Similarly, reflecting on the ancient Greek concept of \textit{kosmos} referred to in Chapter 8, where Delio represents \textit{kosmos} as the pathway to “good order”,\textsuperscript{952} \textit{Altyerre} may be understood as a form of consciousness of the institution of good order throughout the creation, a source for guiding human action. As well as in the payback instance cited above, we have seen how M.K. Turner offers pathways for \textit{Arrernte} to remain connected to \textit{anperi\-nirennte} even after offending against the strictures of the marriage rules, for example. The genius of \textit{Altyerre}-Catholicism is the capacity of \textit{Arrernte} theologians to identify the convergent path between two world-views.

11.6 Conclusion – Convergent Pathways to Transformation

Convergence was defined above as a mature dialogue between independent imaginaries that recognises coherence and complementarity between component parts, pointing towards a synthesis and welcoming new insights into the nature of Mystery. Sixty years after Tjalkabota had recorded that old Western Arrernte men were not daunted by Christianity, Wenten Rubuntja retained the same commitment to the pristine values of \textit{Altyerre}: “These rocks we got to worship. The rainmakers, the caterpillars, or the kangaroo, emus – we got to pray for them.”\textsuperscript{953} Rubuntja, the representative Catholic deputised to paint a gift for the Pope, was the boy who said, “We got baptised for lollies … We went along to every church and got baptised.”\textsuperscript{954} He was the thinker who had understood the substance of the Catholic message and interpreted it in \textit{Arrernte} terms. At the end of a long career in Indigenous affairs, in \textit{the town grew up dancing}, he is declaring the pulsating survival of ancient \textit{Arrernte} beliefs which he layers with Christian beliefs. To “worship” for him means to revere, to regard as sacred, or hold close to one’s heart. “Pray to” connotes the performance of ceremony.\textsuperscript{955}

\textsuperscript{951} This is evident in the emphasis in the gospels on healing of those who had been marginalised from society by their physical affliction and social discrimination.
\textsuperscript{952} Delio, \textit{Making All Things New}, location 441.
\textsuperscript{953} Rubuntja and Green, \textit{the town grew up dancing}, 7.
\textsuperscript{954} Rubuntja and Green, \textit{the town grew up dancing}, 7.
\textsuperscript{955} There are a number of English words used by \textit{Arrernte} this way. Hitting another person can sometimes be said to be “killing” him. And old English word, gammon, which is a form of bacon, is used by \textit{Arrernte} speakers and non-Indigenous Centralian English speakers as meaning false or untrue or ridiculous or to pretend.
These words in Rubuntja’s discourses are, it seems, associated with Arrernte ritual, with its sacramental consequences.

The self-awareness displayed by Tjalkabota’s respondents might be compared to the argument that Jesus would have been incarnated even if sin had not entered the world. As Edwards observes, “once it is granted the non-Christian shares in salvation, then one cannot deny that such a person’s religion may have a positive contribution to make to salvation without understanding salvation in ‘a completely ahistorical and asocial way’. In other words Arrernte who did not have contact with a tradition that specifically understood the concept of “salvation” nevertheless enacted a life-ethic based on the principles that are in fact characteristics of Christian salvation theory as understood today.

The resurrection is the inevitable outcome of the incarnation of the Cosmic Christ. Johnson quotes Ambrose of Milan to make the point that “[i]n Christ’s resurrection the earth itself rose”. In Johnson’s understanding the earth and everything in it, including ancient cultures and civilisations, rose to new life in the incarnation. While it was proposed at 9.4 that Altyerre is a way of understanding transcendence, it might seem, following Rahner, that Altyerre is a concise way of describing the process of self-transcendence by every nation and people. For Johnson, Christ’s death and resurrection signals “the final beginning of redemptive glorification not just for other human beings but for all flesh, all material beings, every creature that passes through death”.

Altyerre provides an essential being-in-relationship connection between land/apmere expressed as rocks/apwerte, animal life and vegetative life, all of which will experience death and decay and return to essential primal matter – star stuff. Johnson’s theology concerns the transformation of all matter through Christ into union with God. Altyerre finds all things, living and inert, ontologically connected through utnengel/spirit to all others – M.K. Turner calls this apmeryanhe – into one magnificent imaginary. Here is discovered the Cosmic Christ and Altyerre as different and convergent pathways to transformation.

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956 Edwards, Breath of Life, 61.
957 Johnson, Ask the Beasts, 208.
958 Johnson, Ask the Beasts, 209.
959 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrye, 22.
Chapter 12: Becoming Altyerre-Catholics

12.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an explanation of recurring elements of Arrernte beliefs and practices that might be called theological in a Christian context: story and scripture; origins and creation; the sacred, salvation and healing; and sacraments and grace. A close analysis of Catholicism and Altyerre will reveal coherence, convergence and transformation into the one shared imaginary. It will be demonstrated that the Arrernte have a deep sense of the sacred and of salvation and this will provide the basis for a balanced appraisal of Altyerre-Catholicism as a distinct and legitimate form of Catholic Christianity.

It has been demonstrated in this thesis that before the arrival of warlperle mapel/whitefellas the Arrernte had no conception of a creator god in the Christian sense, nor of a contingent creation. For the Arrernte, the creation was/is a given, containing in itself the ingredients for the fabrication of a world full of meaning. Yet the lives and the rituals of the Arrernte sought to maintain the settings of the universe to ensure that it remained in good order. Much effort, energy and discipline were expended to ensure that rituals were performed and that members of the next generation were instructed in the ceremonies required to close the circle of Altyerre.

Christian faith is ultimately faith in a creating, loving and suffering God, but can one have Christian faith when in one’s fundamental imaginary there is no concept of God? Following St Anselm, theology is often described as “Faith seeking understanding,” but can one undertake the quest of faith seeking understanding when the object of the seeking is not God? Recall Stanner’s view that “What defeats the blackfellow in the modern world, fundamentally, is his transcendentalism. So much of his life and thought are concerned with The Dreaming that it stultifies his ability to develop.”960 Stanner has rightly summed up that the paramount interest and focus of Arrernte life is concerned with “The Dreaming”. Arguably Arrernte faith could be interpreted as faith seeking understanding.

960 Stanner, The Dreaming, 68.
If the Arrernte were predisposed to “faith seeking understanding”, and recalling that the Arrernte were interested in the new and the possible, it comes as no surprise that in the contact zone between “the black fellow” and “the modern world”, Arrernte men and women became quickly engaged in investigating the implications of the new Christian faith the missionaries were offering. In this continuing search for meaningful answers to the fundamental questions of life, now with the added complication of a new set of ideas and rituals, many choices were made that have occupied the energy of the Mparntwe Arrernte and in a sense maintained them as a vibrant people with a hopeful future.

Margaret Heffernan’s book Gathering Sticks raises the question: “How did the Arrernte survive, what sustained the Arrernte the most, the Church or Altyerre?” Heffernan, born in 1943, a member of the fledgling Little Flower Mission at Charles Creek as a child, dormitory girl at Ltyentye Apurte, founding Chair of Ngkarte Mikwelenhe Catholic Community, lived through virtually the entire period of the Mission. Heffernan grew into her Catholic faith in Santa Teresa, where it might appear that the iconography of Arrernte Catholicism available in the Church precinct at Santa Teresa defines the essence of her beliefs. A visit to Ltyentye Apurte Catholic Church to view the murals and a tour of the Santa Teresa Spirituality Centre, where up to eight talented Arrernte women daily produce beautiful crosses, chalices and patens, decorated with distinctive Ltyentye Apurte dot designs, reveals the modern configuration of traditional Catholicism in Arrernte iconography. Both Santa Teresa and Alice Springs Catholic representations are examples where Catholic belief and practice are apparently inculturated. Importantly, Altyerre-Catholicism is not to be defined merely by art or Arrernte translation in the church’s liturgy, but by a deep spiritual resonance between ancient Arrernte beliefs and practices and more modern Catholic beliefs, devotions and rituals.

M.K. Turner’s Iwenhe Tyerrtye and Kathleen Kemarre’s Listen deeply (both women being stalwart members of the NMCC) depict another world altogether, a profoundly resonant

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961 The fact that Carl Strehlow was able to recruit senior Arrernte men to assist him in the translation of the Bible attests to this openness. Strehlow of course entered into a reciprocal arrangement where he also took down verbatim the ancient Western Arrernte myths and sent them to Europe for further study.
962 About 100 of these items are shipped from Ltyentye Apurte every week to outlets across Australia.
963 In the present Arrernte Catholic context, the notion of inculturation is understood as clothing the substantive Catholic liturgy in language and rituals that reflect the heritage of the people gathered for the celebration. It does not extend to inclusion of (with the exception of the smoking ceremony) practices or rituals that express essential elements of the originating culture or religious belief of the Indigenous congregation.
Arrernte cultural and spiritual world. What M.K. and Kathleen Kemarre are doing, where they are portraying ancient Arrernte faith in modern iconography, is an attempt to ensure its survival for the next generation. One might ask, are these people Catholic or Arrernte? Or with finer nuance, are they mostly Arrernte or mostly Catholic? Are they one or the other, or are they mostly one or mostly the other? This thesis denies the utility of these questions. It seeks to defeat the dualism of such thinking.

The Arrernte people comprising NMCC are here identified as Altyerre-Catholics. They do not think in the categories of being Catholic on Sunday and Arrernte the rest of the time, or any such demarcation into slivers of personality. They have combined their religious traditions and world-views into a seamless whole. This capacity to combine the two traditions began in the Little Flower Mission itself. Margaret Heffernan, in recalling the earliest days of Little Flower in the 1940s, says: “That was how it was in those days. My family taught us about my grandmother’s dreaming on Saturday nights. And on Sunday mornings we learnt about the white fellow Catholic God and listened to the ‘Word of God’.” What follows outlines a process how this separation was overcome and Mparntwe Arrernte constructed their own form of Altyerre-Catholicism.

12.2 Story and Scripture

A Traditional Story/Ayeye taken from Kathleen Kemarre Wallace’s Listen deeply introduces an examination of the relationship between Altyerre and Catholicism in terms of the coherence between Arrernte stories and Christian Scripture. The story is called “Mother Tree”.

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964 Rubuntja and Green’s book, the town grew up dancing, was written nearly ten years earlier than Iwenhe Tyerrtye and Listen deeply and precedes the grassroots flourishing that the latter two demonstrate. Heffernan’s Gathering Sticks, published in 2018, although the product of ten years’ work, has capped this process.

965 Lyentye Aparre Catholicism of Santa Teresa is different from what has been termed Altyerre-Catholicism, which has developed by NMCC in Alice Springs.

966 Heffernan is referring to the practice of Arrernte camping at Atnelkentyarliweke/Anzac Hill, the place Wenten Rubuntja refers to as a dancing ground and sacred place that has become a big temple, the OLSH church site.

967 Heffernan, Gathering Sticks, 84.

968 What follows is an edited version of the story found in Wallace, Listen deeply, 124.
This is a story about a tree which existed in the ancestor days at a time when the Altyerre beings still roamed freely across the land, while they were bringing our world into being. The story begins when two spirits in the Altyerrengge were looking for awenke, a young woman of the right age to have a baby. The spirits carrying the arremparrenge (baby spirit) had travelled a long way. The spirits were worried now they had travelled for a long time, and the arremparrenge needed a place to grow and be born a person. They went to Werirre but there was still no luck for the arremparrenge. There were no girls there at all. They tried Alyathenge again and from there they went back to Arrkernke. It was then that the spirits carrying the arremparrenge noticed some wonderful big trees called ankerre coolabah, at Arrkernke. One tree in particular took their attention. It had a very round hollow in its trunk which presented itself with a little hole as an opening. This is how the baby found itself being grown by a mother tree. While that baby formed in the big tree, the arremparrenge spirit grew in the baby, living in the safe hollow inside the mother tree. When it was old enough the little baby began to crawl out from the safe hollow in her trunk to explore the world around the tree. After crawling about this way and that he went back inside the hollow to be held and protected. This was how the days went on at Arrkernke. The baby boy grew. One day a pregnant dog travelled to Arrkernke looking for a place to have her puppies. She saw this very same tree. You see, the mother tree had roots which made a nice dark cave on the ground. The dog had her puppies in there. As of the baby grew into a boy child, the puppies grew too. The mother tree used to talk to the little boy, telling him what to try next, suggesting things he needed to do so he could grow into a fine, healthy man. That is how his life was for many years as he grew with his mother tree protecting him in her hollow, giving him a place to sleep safely. He would wake up from his rest and learn through his playing the many things he needed to know for survival. She talked to him, explaining that he was a human being and that he needed to learn and do many things in order to look after himself as he grew older and bigger. So that’s what he did. He needed to eat as he grew so he had to learn to hunt for himself. Naturally, the dogs would follow him as they too were hungry and they needed to hunt and catch food. Sometimes the boy used to be naughty and tease those dogs until they chased him. By the time he was twenty, he was prepared to travel out a long way away from his mother tree to look for the best kangaroo to hunt. Even still, he would tease the dogs, who got so wildly angry with him that they tried to attack him again and again. The
young man could run so fast he would beat the dogs back to the safety of his mother’s hollow and she would always close around him to stop the big dogs from jumping up and getting at him. One day he was hunting further away from his mother ankerre tree than usual and he had caught not only one but two kangaroos for himself. This time the kangaroos he carried weighed him down. The dogs were catching up fast so he threw the kangaroos aside too. He lined up the tree and he sped off as fast as he could run towards her. Reaching the tree, he leapt at the trunk where her hollow should have been. He had made a mistake. He had lined up and run towards the wrong tree. It was not his mother tree. The angry dogs caught hold of him and they killed him right there.

In the days when I was first taught this story everyone was aware that it was important to behave respectfully. Living together and protecting one another was the only way we could survive. We were taught that our elders couldn’t protect us if we kept putting ourselves in danger, so it was important to respect what they told us and to behave as they taught us.

The Mother Tree story serves a sacred purpose for Arrernte in teaching wisdom/akaltye anthurre and care/arntarntareme, two fundamental elements at the core of the Arrernte tradition. The tree protects, counsels, cares for and assists the child to grow in independence. In an allusion to cohabitation, cooperation and community, akngwelye akweke mape or dingo puppies share a hollow at the base of the tree. In the story, the Mother Tree teaches and guides the little boy. The child is progressively freed, while the Mother Tree remains as a final point of protection and of continuing advice. In the Mother Tree story there are fourteen places named, with the story finishing where it started, reflecting Therese Ryder’s idea that life is a circle. Life, for the Arrernte, is understood as a search for meaning, understood as shalom in Israel and as the Kingdom [Kin-dom] in Jesus’ teaching.

969 Therese Ryder has characterised Altyerre as a circle (3.3). The idea the Arrernte people are nomads based on their frequent movement from place to place overlooks that all this movement occurs within extremely well-known country.

970 The Kin-dom of Heaven is a reassignment of the term Kingdom of Heaven undertaken by feminist/womanist theologians seeking to diminish the patriarchy implicit in the word Kingdom, without diminishing the power of the concept. See Ada Maria Isasi Diaz in Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2012). When used in an Arrernte context it has that affect, but strikingly it represents the most appropriate way of describing the reign of God through the imagery of anpernirrentye/kinship which lies at the very heart of the Altyerre complex.
The treatment of the Mother Tree story might best be understood as an example of correspondence in the six-fold schema for understanding dialogue between religious traditions. While there are many similarities between traditions, this analysis does not seek to force the similarities into concurrence. In the following discussion, possibilities for this correspondence are further explored.

_Tyangkertangkerte_ is released into freedom by the Mother Tree’s advice. But freedom is nothing if it includes the right to choose not to follow good advice. _Tyangkertangkerte_ chooses poorly. The idea of mothering as the granting of freedom to do right or wrong reflects something like the _kenosis_ that characterises Paul’s understanding of the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Christ. In Christian theology human freedom is a reflection of divine freedom. Humans are made in the image of a God who freely creates to allow humans complete freedom. The central motifs of the Old Testament and New Testament demonstrate that YHWH and the Father grieve over the poor decisions of human beings in both revelations. Christ’s death on the Cross places this eternal theme at the centre of Christian faith. _Tyangkertangkerte_ dies as a consequence of his own freedom – and greed and stupidity. It might be assumed that Mother Tree could not be happy about the result and grieves the outcome. As well as bringing suffering and death to _Tyangkertangkerte_, it could be argued that his liberation by his mother brings suffering to Mother Tree.

_Tyangkertangkerte_’s error was based on not sharing, perhaps the most fundamental of _Arrernte_ values. For _Arrernte_, kinship relies upon reciprocation. Without it there is no society, no community and no future. Jesus taught a corresponding gospel of sharing, most powerfully in the Feeding of the Five Thousand. The parallels between Jesus’ wisdom and the wisdom of _Altyerre_ stories unfold as they are progressively investigated.

_Ayeye Altyerrenge_ (traditional stories from ancient tradition) provide a map rather than a straitjacket. The law is a guide and a topographic map, not the route of a railway network. The difference between a map and a railroad is that one can choose to follow or not follow the map. But one cannot choose not to follow the rail track; it is a fixed route with no deviation. _Altyerre_ law is not broken by the stupid behaviour of individuals. If the train leaves the rail track it crashes, the passengers are injured and the line ruined. Because _Altyerre_ is a

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971 He kills two kangaroos when one was clearly enough for himself.
topographic map, a living imaginary, if one strays from Altyerre it is only the individual who goes the wrong way – the map remains intact, an everlasting world-view and guide for life. The message of Jesus’ parable of the Prodigal Son, which presents God as a Forgiving Father (Luke 15:11–32) where the Father never tried to stop his son from his escape into illusory happiness, is very similar to the message of the Mother Tree in Altyerre. Here there is notable correspondence. 

H. Paul Santmire, in writing about suitable analogies for God, calls on Jürgen Moltmann’s image of “the motherly father”. The behaviour of a Forgiving Father in the parable is apparently not typical of a Jewish father, more like the concern of a mother – which is presumably why Jesus presented his Father in this manner. Jesus was presenting a different image of the nature of God. At another place he would describe His Father as Abba, a deeply personal name connoting intimacy rather than status (Mark 14:36). Throughout his ministry Jesus was leading his followers to a deeper way of understanding Mystery. This story of the Mother Tree might be seen as reflecting divine attributes of motherhood, a theme discovered in the earliest Israelite cults, as shown in Part Three.

The Mother Tree might also be seen as a feminine form of wisdom. Mother Tree explains to the boy that what it means to be human is to be able to care for oneself and others and make good decisions, thus establishing a life of order and of growth in wisdom. The story even hints at Old Testament insights into Sophia/Wisdom. Elizabeth Johnson, referencing Proverbs 8: 22–31, points out that Sophia “existed before the beginning of the world as the first of God’s works” and that earlier in the Book of Proverbs (3:18) Wisdom is seen as “a tree of life”. Johnson notes the fecundity of feminine Wisdom, quoting Proverbs 8:35: “whoever finds me finds life”. The Mother Tree is chosen by the irrerntarenyle/little spirits as a life-giver, as a “tree for life” for the arremparrenge, and notably the life she presents is a life of good order. Ironically, the adult Tyangkertangkerte is resistant to the mutuality and reciprocity that Mother Tree offers and abandons her warnings. Tyangkertangkerte ends up dead, but wisdom is not defeated. Altyerre remains as a guide to life and a solace in difficulty.

973 Johnson, She Who Is, location 2617.
974 Johnson, She Who Is, location 2605.
As argued in Part Three, God is not male or female, mother or father, nor in the sky nor in the earth. God is discovered in Sacred Mystery beyond human imagining yet disclosed in the finite limitations of human reflection. God is found in the way Mystery interacts with material reality, in the care, compassion, patience and self-sacrifice of people who are motivated by Mystery to act with altruism and love. Mystery is also discovered in the quest for life by animals and plants and by the apparent transition from inanimate matter to spirit seen in the evolutionary development of the universe. The thesis argues that Altyerre and the Cosmic Christ, as imaginaries, offer corresponding and increasingly coherent pathways to embracing Holy Mystery.

12.3 Altyerre and the Mystery of God

In Part One it was argued that the word Altyerre, understood by Spencer and Gillen as “dreaming” and by Rev Herman Kempe and the first Lutheran missionaries at Hermannsburg as God, was too profound and complex to be contained by a single English word. Despite this, as Jenny Green points out, Altyerre had been used by missionaries for “God,” although other words such as ingkarte/boss and akngeye/father have also been used.975 It is time to investigate how the word ngkarte developed into the primary word for God in Mparntwe Arrernte discourse.

The Central and Eastern Arrernte Dictionary has the following entry for Ngkarte:

1. God. Ngkarte Mikwe-kenhe The Mother of God (the name of the Arrernte Catholic group in Alice Springs).
2. a priest. Some people use this like the English word ‘Father’ before the name of a priest. ngkarte Maloney = Fr Maloney. Some people do not accept this meaning. They identify it as a Western Arrernte name for a Lutheran pastor or perhaps any minister of religion. Central and Eastern Arrernte people have been associated with the Catholic Church, which usually uses ngkarte to refer to ‘God’.

3. [some speakers] leader, boss (?). Some older people do not accept this as a traditional *Arrernte* word. They say it was first brought into use by early missionaries. See also alartetye, akngerre-pate.

4a. (SE) traditional healer.
4b. (SE) non-Aboriginal doctor.

Anna Kenny gives a clue about *ngkarte* with her entry on *Loatjira* (c.1846–1924), who was “Carl Strehlow’s main informant on Western Aranda culture”. She describes him as “the inkata (ceremonial chief) of Ntaria, ‘the grand old man of Hermannsburg’, and an important ngankara (healer, doctor)”. The two ascriptions, *inkatal*|ceremonial chief and *ngankara*|healer, throw light on the dictionary entries. The word *angangkere* [*ngankara*] is commonly used today by *Mparntwe Arrernte* to describe a traditional healer. Kenny then explains that the “meaning of inkata [*ingkarte*] has changed significantly over the past century. Today it is used for a Lutheran pastor. It is likely that the shift started to occur during Carl Strehlow’s period, because he seems to have been their first white inkata.”

It appears that Carl’s knowledge of *Altyerre* had convinced the *Western Arrernte* that he carried the same power as an *Arrernte* ceremonial leader or *ngkarte* and this was part of the reason why they asked him to become their white *ngkarte*.

Kenny’s references are enticing and suggest, as pointed out in Part Two, a subtle process occurring within *Western Arrernte* culture: the application of known concepts to new, unknown situations, representing meaning-making through adaptation and the innovative application of ancient ideas to new circumstances.

The analysis in Part Two of the practice of mission by both Lutherans and Catholics in Central Australia identified the twin elements of sacred ritual and compassion for the needy that characterised the work of the missionaries. The Lutherans from 1877 concentrated on regularly celebrated Baptismal and Eucharistic ceremonies. The also expressed their Christianity through care and concern for the health and well-being of the *Arrernte* and

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Luritja and the good order of the settlement community. After 1935 the MSC and OLSH missionaries offered the same examples to the Mparntwe Arrernte in Alice Springs. It is arguable that the Arrernte saw the similarities between their own practice of regular, communal rituals and those of the missionaries. In Mark’s Gospel the account of the healing of the leper (Mark 1:40–45) expressed Jesus’ consciousness of his role as healer and through that example provided an insight into the nature of his God. In the Arrernte context the role of ngkarte, ceremonial leader who was also a healer, was being applied to the priest or pastor who cared for the marginalised, the hungry and the infirm. And, as indicated in Parts One and Two, arntartareme/looking after is a replica of Christian charity or service. It could easily be said that Altyerre, through arntartareme/holding, looked after Arrernte people in a manner quite similar to the teachings of Jesus in his parable of the Good Samaritan. Here is where the alternative word angangkere used by Kenny becomes pertinent. Loatjira was a ngkarte/ceremonial leader and an angangkere/traditional healer or doctor; Carl Strehlow displayed all these qualities.

That this is likely an accurate explanation is supported by T.G.H. Strehlow’s own experience when he returned as a young man to Hermannsburg in the 1930s. Now, unhappy with the more interventionist Christianity of Albrecht, the old Arrernte men saw Strehlow junior as the heir of his father’s protection and ritual leadership and called upon him to solve their dilemmas in a rapidly changing and confronting world on the frontier. They came to him and asked:

“Inkata”, … why don’t you stay with us? Your father was our father, too, and under him we were well and happy. Like your father you respect our tjurunga. You belong to us. Your home is Ntaria: you are akarmara [kemarre], you are one of the ratape ancestors of Manangangananga. It is here that you have to be reincarnated. You are a white man but you are also a full Aranda … We have come to ask you to stay with us and be our inkata. We shall then be happy and well, just as we were when your father was our inkata.981

The title ngkarte (Inkata) carried great weight. It was a religious term indicating ritual leadership in ceremony, the source from which came peace and good order and the healing of

981 Hill, Broken Song, 185.
the strife of damaged relationships. Ceremony is the glue of Arrernte culture. Recognising that the ngkarte was also a healer, it is possible to see the use made by Western Arrernte of the transfer of the term from a specifically Arrernte role into a wider one of religious leadership associated with the maintenance of good order characterised by compassion. This could even include the idea that a white man could be ngkarte/priest/pastor. It is also possible that the Western Arrernte saw that these ngkarte roles and capacities were the characteristics of this new being that the missionaries were presenting to the Arrernte, a being the missionaries called God, but who could now be understood by the Arrernte as Ngkarte. This Arrernte version of God, mediated through the life of Jesus and understood through Ngkarte, is not a stern judgmental God, not a warrior God, not a wrathful God, but a caring, holding, compassionate and healing God. This is the image of God that the prophets and Jesus offered to Israel. This understanding is also revealed in Altyerre: a mystery who does not need to be named, indeed is not named, but is known through healing.

Ironically the missionaries, whether Lutheran or Catholic, brought to the Arrernte a God who they presented as a “high” God, a God in the sky, a powerful and omnipotent God. The argument of this analysis is that the proselytising of missionaries mostly failed to establish this “high” God in the religious consciousness of the Arrernte. Instead, however, by the example of their compassion, the God they represented was a God of loving-kindness who could be identified as Ngkarte by the Arrernte. And this was because Ngkarte personified care, compassion, leadership and healing, characteristics well known and well understood by the Arrernte as being essential components of Altyerre.

Part Two demonstrated that one of the great skills of the Arrernte has been to integrate and organically inform Altyerre with Catholic idiom, rituals and devotions. This skill rests upon the inherent capacity of the Arrernte for refreshing their culture through incorporation of foreign ideas and traits. But, importantly, there is another Arrernte factor operating which might be seen as indicating a significant convergence: suffering.

The wonder of a deeper understanding of the incarnation is that Jesus reveals the Cosmic Christ to be so embedded in the creation that God cannot abandon it even when humanity apparently rejects Christ. God experiences total rejection but never abandons God’s people. Arthur Peacocke remarks:
If Jesus is indeed the self-expression of God in a human person, then the tragedy of his actual human life can be seen as a drawing back of the curtain to unveil a God suffering in and with the sufferings of created humanity and so, by extension with those of all creation, since humanity is an embedded, and evolved part of it. 982

The Mother Tree story can be read as one which elucidates the truth that suffering is a component of Arrernte life. Tyangkertangkerte suffers for his stupidity, despite the wisdom of his mother. Mother Tree suffers the death of her son whom she birthed in freedom to see destroyed by his pride. It seems that this story might prepare Mparntwe Arrernte for the idea of suffering as an intrinsic component of life as evidenced by the death of Jesus on the cross where he suffers abandonment by the Father. The Mother Tree story thus offers parallels to key elements of Catholic Christianity and so enables Mparntwe Arrernte to enter into the Catholic imaginary. The two-way process can be recognised as two imaginaries interacting with each other, offering linkages and pathways into a possible combined imaginary.

This conclusion does not necessarily imply that this process from correspondence to convergence is a conscious one on the part of the Arrernte in NMCC. Many Arrernte remained conscious of the integrity of their ancient beliefs, for example as seen at 3.2, the senior Arrernte men quoted by Moses Tjalkabota, who were conscious of their abiding connection and affiliation with their Arrernte principles. This thesis argues that as Invasion and occupation were established, Arrernte were silenced but did not bury their Altyerre affiliation. Later in his life Tjalkabota became an example of this process himself. For more than a generation among the Mparntwe and Eastern Arrernte the stream went underground but kept on flowing, being fed with living water, the ancient imaginary. It did not lose its power or relevance by association and intermingling with Christianity. Robert Bellah supports this contention: “With ancient Australian traditions daily life and mythic life are so closely embedded in each other that you really can’t think of anything being any different.” 983

It could be argued the Mparntwe Arrernte had no choice – they were unable to conceive of a world without a shared and captivating world-view when they met the newcomers to their

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ancient land. When they met Catholicism/Christianity, they were compelled to take it seriously.

*Ngkarte* may not be an ancient *Arrernte* name for God, but it does suggest attributes that Christians recognise in the divine. *Ngkarte* may be better understood as Mystery. If Godliness in *Altyerre* may be perceived as a tradition that both long precedes Jesus and at the same time discloses the eternal Cosmic Christ, by saying “God gave us the Dreaming”, the implication is that *Altyerre* has given *Arrernte* a way of understanding God and expressing the immanence of Godliness: the comprehensive compassion and accompaniment of Holy Mystery in the progress of the universe.

In Catholic/Christian theology the world is understood to be filled with God’s goodness through the work of the Spirit, a concept readily taken up by *Arrernte* from the Mission. And just as *Altyerre* is a “Big Circle” that leads back to *apmere*, the place of *aknganentye/creation* for Catholics/Christians, the Spirit is leading humanity home to the *Kingdom* [Kin-dom]. So, while the Holy Spirit and *utnenge/spirit* are different each has a similar purpose and role.

In the analysis above, the word “God” has been gradually interchanged with “Holy Mystery”. It is proposed here that, while the word “God” will continue to be used by *Altyerre*-Catholics, the word is understandably insufficient to capture the breadth and depth of *Altyerre* and *Altyerre*-Catholicism. Below, in further analysis of *Gathering Sticks*, Heffernan’s aphorism of the “known unknown” as a way of expressing her faith in both Catholicism and *Altyerre* will be examined. The “known unknown” is Heffernan’s way of expressing Mystery. While the word “God” will continue to be used in the following sections, it is done so as an expression of the word in use by *Altyerre*-Catholics. The direction of this thesis is to continue the transition towards adoption of the use of Holy Mystery, or simply Mystery, as the best way of expressing the ineffable that is contained in the ideas of the Cosmic Christ and *Altyerre*.

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984 Robyn Reynolds OLSH recorded these words as they were given to her in conversation with Wenten Rubuntja during the time of the visit of Pope John Paul II. Personal communication, November 13, 2018.
985 Recalling Therese Ryder’s definition.
986 Heffernan, *Gathering Sticks*, 266.
12.4 Aknganentye and Creation

The difference between the primacy of creation for the Arrernte and the primacy of the creator for the Christian has been a constant theme of this thesis. Some of the principal implications of the Catholic/Christian understanding of the Creator, as discussed in Part Three, are the presence and role of the incarnate God in creation and the role of the Spirit immanently sustaining the creation, and subsequently the development of the notion of Trinity. It has also been shown that the Trinity has traditionally been portrayed in patriarchal terms.

In his Trinitarian understanding, Athanasius claims that “Creation is from the Source of All, through the Word and the Spirit”. Santmire suggests we can imagine the “Father, Son and Holy Spirit as Giver, Gift, and Giving”. Using Santmire’s approach, further signs of the correspondence and convergence of Altyerre and Catholicism may be discovered. With the removal of just the one word – “from” – found in Athanasius’s aphorism suggests: “creation is the Source of All, through the Word and the Spirit”. Changing the terms, following Santmire, we can find an Altyerre trinity – creation as Giver, Gift and Giving – and all are One.

For Santmire, the Father is the Giver, the Son is the Gift and the Spirit is the Giving. In the Arrernte trinity the “Giver” is creation/aknganentye, the “Gift” is the apmere/land and anpernirrentye/kinship, and the many other interconnected features of extant Arrernte culture which contain “all”. The “Giving” is the interaction between each component, with an emphasis upon utnenge/spirit which is the source of conception totemism, the creatio continua of Altyerre. This is not to say that the Christian Trinity is the Arrernte Trinity, but that both imaginaries utilise a trinitarian framework. It is proposed here that these correspondences between Altyerre and Catholicism promote the formulation of Altyerre-Catholicism.

In Part One, it was noted that M.K. Turner said of Altyerre, “it’s a loving way”. The Arrernte trinity of Giver, Gift and Giving can be seen as an example of coherence, where

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987 Edwards, Breath of Life, 41.
988 Santmire, “A Sublimely Natural God,” 35.
989 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 85.
M.K.’s loving way hints at the New Testament idea of *perichoresis*, in the sense that all three elements interact in an embrace of Love. Clearly *perichoresis* implies persons in the Trinity in a dance of love, but it is proposed here that M.K.’s treatment of Love within the *Arrernte* trinity is an example of her intuitive, transitional development towards her integrated *Altyerre*-Catholicism.

Understanding the presence of the Cosmic Christ in the universe from the moment of the Big Bang assists contemporary Catholics to identify the depth of Mystery in the heart of nature. The work of the Spirit enlivening and energising the universe as *creatio continua* offers another feature of the immanent presence of Mystery. The Circle of Life and energy in *Altyerre* that moves from matter to spirit and from spirit to matter, and that is the essence of conception totemism, offers a similar mysterious power to *aknganentye/creation* for the *Arrernte*. From Mystery, Life is born. Through Mystery, Life is maintained. In Mystery, Life is reborn.\(^{990}\)

Catholic/Christian theology has a *perichoretic* understanding of the relationship that characterises God and sees the Spirit as the loving and creative power of God. The Spirit is found in creation. Moltmann describes it this way: “In the operation and indwelling of the Spirit, the creation of the Father through the Son, and the reconciliation of the world with God through Christ, arrive at their goal.”\(^{991}\) Here is evidence of the Spirit which Teilhard labels the Cosmic Christ – God in the world. For Catholics and all Christians, God’s presence is in God’s creation, in the world saved by God’s action and in resurrection providing a hope-filled future. This theology elicits *Altyerre* insights, which might also be seen eschatologically. It could be said that for the *Arrernte* the future is entirely predictable and hope springs eternal. *Altyerre* also draws its life from *utnenge/spirit* which, as has been seen from the analysis of conception totemism in Part Two, might also be seen as an indwelling: “The underlying feeling is that everything is actually connected to everything else.”\(^{992}\) That is not to say that the ancient *Altyerre* saw *utnenge* as a person in the Trinity. The word *utnenge* is used in *Altyerre* stories as the spirit of the land that infuses the baby in the womb of its mother. It is this transfer of the *utnenge/spirit of apmere/land* that is known as conception totemism.

\(^{990}\) This is a reflection of Moltmann’s exploration of *creatio originalis, creatio continua* and *creatio nova*.

\(^{991}\) Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 98.

\(^{992}\) Hill, *Broken Song*, 633, summarising of T.G.H. Strehlow’s account of *Arrernte* religion.
Through the filtering of the mission experience, *Mparntwe Arrernte* conjoined a sense of God/Mystery to their ancient imaginary, thus giving assent to Christian faith. Because of its understanding of the goodness of creation (its Godliness) modern *Arrernte* may be seen as articulating a belief in God/Mystery because God/Mystery in their enhanced imaginary is the goodness immanent as *arntarntareme* in *Altyerre*.

12.5 Salvation and Sacred Healing

This section seeks to clarify the concept of salvation in both *Altyerre* and Christian traditions, including related terms like saving, healing and redeeming.

As seen in Part Three, a Christian the universe is filled with the immanent presence of Mystery. The Christian notion of salvation understands Jesus Christ as Lord and saviour, who heals infirmity and forgives sin, and whose death and resurrection promise fullness of life, a Kin-dom of justice, peace and reconciliation, a making whole. The Kin-dom is, in Jesus’ teaching, both present and to-come; some Christians hope for peace and justice now, others hope in a post-death paradise, and others again for both.

Parts One and Two of this thesis demonstrated that the *Arrernte* before Invasion did not share understandings of these essential elements of Christian salvation. *Altyerre* contains no notion of sin similar to the Christian idea of sin and the *Arrernte* do not look for redemption from the consequences of sin, though concepts of wrongdoing and of punishment as a consequence of transgression are well understood. *Altyerre* has no idea of “heaven or hell” – one seen as reward, the other as punishment – for life lived on earth, so in the concept of the life of an individual continuing after death, the exact nature of the role of the individual in that afterlife is barely speculated upon. For *Arrernte* it might be said there is one life that

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993 Salvation is sometimes labelled redemption in Christian theology. Salvation seems the more appropriate word in the context of *Altyerre*.

994 At the point it has become clear that the continued use of the word God is misleading and unproductive. From now on where appropriate “Mystery” will be used where “God” might be expected.

995 The implication of sin for a Christian is that the sinner suffers alienation from God for wrongdoing. Sin for a Christian can be forgiven by acknowledgement and repentance, but unrepented sin might bring eternal punishment. Sinful offences for an Arrernte person might merit extreme physical punishment in the here and now but the Arrernte would not envisage eternal punishment after death as part of *Altyerre*.

996 T.G.H. Strehlow calls it reincarnation (see 12.3 where in his discussion with the *Arrernte* elders they tell him that he will be reincarnated at *Ntaria*) but this expresses an attempt to make the *Arrernte* concept somewhat
keeps on recurring. M.K. Turner writes, “That became utnenge atyinhe arrateke997 from my parents, that’s how my soul arose. And ikwere atherre artweyenget-ntyele, it goes on and on and on, generation upon generation …”998 One is born through the infusion of life through the work of spirits999 and one’s spirit1000 is in a sense eternal, returning to its source upon the passing of the individual and through the performance of sacred rituals.

Kathleen Kemarre Wallace writes that “after death, irrernte-arenye/spirit-being1001 returns to the apmere to reside in their father’s father’s country, at his conception site”.1002 One is born from the land through conception totemism; when one dies, one’s spirit returns to the land to be available for the infusion of new life in future generations, all according to the rules of anpernirrentye/kinship. And so, the idea of the eternal, of continuing life after death is essential to the very nature of Altyerre. Since this is so, can salvation be identified within Altyerre?

The process of handling suffering, expressed through grief, is laid down in Altyerrenge (from Altyerre) stories/layeye. M.K. Turner speaks of the thipe akatwengatwenge/red-capped robin. She says: “Their heads are bright red, just like those two Women in the creation who drew lots of blood hitting each other on the head with sticks.”1003 She describes the mourning ritual engaged in by women only, who in grief over the death of a loved one “hit each other in a special way, through sadness, angkwetye-angkwe, a special mourning”.1004 She explains that cousins do it to each other and that sometimes women do it to themselves and that all this ritualised behaviour is laid down in traditional stories. M.K. concludes, “That’s the sacredness of healing.”1005 M.K.’s traditional story provides a rationale for mourning behaviour which, by expressing deep anguish that is always controlled by the strategic interference of other members of kin, relieves the pain of loss and assists in personal recovery and group reintegration as the utnenge/spirit of the lost one returns to apmere/country.

available to Christians of the 1950s who had a basic understanding of Hinduism and Buddhism rather than attempting a deep analysis of the concept.
997 Literally, “my spirit comes from”.
998 This process is well explained in the story Mother Tree by Kathleen Kemarre Wallace that is quoted above.
1000 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 39, says: “utnenge atherre is the two spirits [one from mother and one from father] in me.”
1001 Irrerente-arenye here refers to the spirit-being.
1002 Wallace, Listen Deeply, 24.
1003 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 58.
1004 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 58.
1005 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 58.
Through this ritual, a grief which might be compared with “godforsakenness” is attenuated and the wider kinship group absorbs the individual’s pain. While grief is expressed, no-one is seriously hurt.

*Altyerre* ritual, through its adaptive capacity, gifted the *Arrernte* with the inner strength to survive the upheaval and suffering of Invasion not anticipated by *Arrernte* culture or existence. As time went by, after the Invasion had become Settlement, the *Arrernte* encountered and accommodated elements of the Christian message and used this dynamic amalgam to build an enhanced imaginary. In this ritual fashion, the “godforsakenness” of Invasion is absorbed by the power of *Altyerre*-Catholicism into *amtarntareme/caring*, which M.K. Turner calls “a loving way”. Perhaps this explains the apparent generosity of *Arrernte* in welcoming the children of the invaders into their country, a welcome many non-Indigenous people have personally experienced.

*Altyerre* ritual coheres with a Christian understanding of God’s saving and healing work present in creation. According to Jürgen Moltmann, “In his free love God confers his [*sic*] goodness: that is the work of his creation.”*Altyerre* is God’s good creation as experienced and interpreted by the *Arrernte*. While ancient *Altyerre* did not name the distinction between God and God’s creation, creation was understood as essentially good in practice. And it is existentially good in practice through *amtarntareme/caring*. In the example given above (*thipe akatwengatwengel* red-capped robin), caring is demonstrated by grieving and additionally by those who look after the mourners by preventing them from seriously hurting themselves. This is a sacred healing, how salvation is achieved.

A possible modern *Altyerre*-Catholic interpretation is how the *thipe akatwengatwengel* red-capped robin story captures the presence of saving Mystery in the activity of the carers of the mourners. The love implicit in the presence of the unnamed Cosmic Christ (the known unknown) informs the actions of the carers and guides them to protect and provide solace to those who are grieving their lost loved ones. In this ritualised behaviour the mundane has been sacralised and salvation inaugurated in the here and now.

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1007 Recall Wenten Rubuntja’s expression concerning “all the little yeperenyes”.
1008 Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 76.
1009 I witnessed this self-hitting behaviour mourning by women at numerous funerals at Ernabella in the mid-1980s.
In an Altyerre-Christian view, every element of creation comes forth in a unique form and then returns to God, the ground of all being. Summarising Christian belief, Rohr writes, “Resurrection is simply incarnation taken to its logical conclusion: what starts in God ends in God – who is eternal.” In Rohr’s view, cyclical wholeness makes us unafraid of suffering (even while we experience it) and thus able to fully appreciate life.

The theology of the Cosmic Christ, as discussed in Part Three, is that Christ would have been in the world, offering “redemption” to the world, whether sin had entered the world or not. In this sense God is truly at home in the world. The Cosmic Christ is God incarnate, God present in the pain of the world, and in the risen Christ, the hope of the world. Similarly, the Arrernte belief in the return of the utnenge/spirit to apmere/land after death provides eschatological hope that life is full of meaning and that suffering is ultimately defeated.

While the Arrernte may not have had a concept of “sin” (as understood in traditional Christian theology), they did and do have a conception of the violation of the “sacred.” For M.K. Turner, the land/apmere is the source of sacredness. Kinship/lanperniirrentye is the woven fabric of sacredness. Nyurrpe/nyurrpe (the two opposed avoidance moieties) is the kinship rule protecting sacredness. Atywerrenge is the sacred Law, and ikirrentye is respect for sacredness. Anthepe and altharte are sacred because they are the celebration of the sacred. It could be said that Arrernte live surrounded by the sacred; they abide in the sacred, they don’t pray to it – they live it. If religion means believing in a transcendent God or gods, or if it means praying to these gods for assistance, or asking for forgiveness for transgression, or praising them for their gift of creation, then, as Stanner suggests, the Arrernte are not religious because in their ancient traditional life they did not behave this way. But if religion means, as the Latin word indicates, a “binding” to the sacred, then the Arrernte are religious. This is because Altyerre binds them irrevocably to each other and to the very stuff of the universe, all sacred.

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1011 The reader will recall from 2.1 the emphasis that M.K. Turner places upon the sacred and its central role in the definition of Altyerre.
1012 Stanner, The Dreaming, 64, agrees with this.
The opposite of the sacred for the *Arrernte* might be thought of as brokenness. Doing something sacrilegious implies rupturing the beauty of the sacred. Life, because it is a gift from the land/apmere, is sacred. Destroying life is an attack upon the sacred. Animal life is not randomly taken in *Arrernte* culture and vegetative life is preserved and nurtured by leaving sufficient roots and plants after each season for replenishment. Trees are honoured and declared sacred and must not be randomly destroyed. The death of a tree, even through accidental burning, evokes grief for *Arrernte*.\(^{1013}\) It is upon this standard of sacred respect for all life that the *Arrernte* way of life is based.

Christianity similarly reveres the sacred.\(^ {1014}\) For the Christian, infringing the sacred covenant and commandments is regarded as sin or brokenness and may bring punishment. For the *Arrernte*, sin may be understood as shame. M.K. Turner addresses the sacred through a special word, *ikirrentye*, which has a number of *Arrernte* meanings, literally respect, but also paradoxically it can mean both shame and the sacred. In fact, shame comes from not having due reverence for the sacred. For M.K, it is seen a “shame thing because you’re not the right skin name person, you haven’t got the right to talk about it”\(^ {1015}\). But M.K. is adamant that “*Ikirrentye* is sacredness”\(^ {1016}\). And the sacredness comes from the kinship system/anpernirrentye and the kinship system comes from the apmere/land. She further explains: “Shame and respect go together, they work together. If you ever do that shameful thing towards other people, that’s not respecting.”\(^ {1017}\). Shame comes from not practising *Ikirrentye/respect*.

*Ikirrentye/respect* covers everything. It is the guiding principle of behaviour and the basis of avoidance. This is because each side is *nyurrpe* for the other. *Nyurrpe* means respectful avoidance. M.K. explains: “you can’t confront, look directly at your father; you can’t confront your mother, that’s really wrong.”\(^ {1018}\) Conversely this helps to explain why the relationship between grandchildren and grandparents is so full of kindness, care and fun. Grandparents and grandchildren are in the same group – not *nyurrpe*. *Ikirrentye* emphasises sacred respect. “Even an old man sitting down there, he’s a sacred person, even though he’s

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\(^{1013}\) When in July 2018 I showed a photo of a thoroughly burnt Ilwempe/white gum to my *Arrernte* friends they audibly gasped as they absorbed the suffering of the sacred.

\(^{1014}\) It is this sense of sacred respect for the universe that Pope Francis evokes in *Laudato Si*.

\(^{1015}\) Turner, *Iwenhe Tyerrtye*, 86.


\(^{1017}\) Turner, *Iwenhe Tyerrtye*, 86.

not a relation.” Even people who are drinkers and cause terrible trouble are still treated with respect. A person who causes social problems can never be banished from anpernirrentye, never put aside. She will always be a sacred person.

How is breaking the norms of the sacred dealt with in the Arrernte world? M.K. says that “Sacred punishment gives Peace.” Punishment has a role to play in the maintenance of good order. To achieve healing, which like caring/arnantarntareme is a fundamental element of the Arrernte way, punishment must be invoked. And because apmere/country is the ultimate source of the sacred, punishment must be performed on apmere/country. The healing occurs through “getting people together, going through a real punishment”.

Detaching the justice system from kin and country is toxic. In spite of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, Aboriginal incarceration rates continue to climb. It seems that the path from offending, through the police cell, into the court and ending in prison is a conveyor belt with, in many cases, the same people recycling the chain of offending. M.K. could well have had that reoffending cycle in mind when she wrote:

The punishment ceremony must take place on the Land … It’s part of living with the Land, and it’s a sacred thing … Death is sacred. It’s sacred to everybody, sacred to every Aboriginal people … So that’s why we’ve gotta have that punishment. It’s a

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1019 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 88.
1020 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 145.
1021 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 146. This process is often termed “to finish up” by Arrernte. In the Hebrew Bible a “blood redeemer” (Numbers 35:19) is seen as an avenger of murder and assault. This an example of correspondence rather than convergence. Arrernte do not rely upon the Hebrew injunction to justify their resolution of misdemeanour through payback.
1022 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, 1987–91. A Commonwealth Government inquiry made 339 recommendations designed to reduce the incidence of Aboriginal deaths in custody. http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/fact-sheets/fs112.aspx (accessed October 25, 2018). The Guardian Newspaper reported on October 25, 2018: “Of the 339 recommendations, 64% were fully implemented, 14% were mostly implemented, 16% were partly implemented and 6% were not implemented at all.”
1023 Australian Government, Law Reform Commission, “Pathways to Justice: An Inquiry into the Incarceration Rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples,” December 2017, reports that “Although Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults make up around 2% of the national population, they constitute 27% of the national prison population. In 2016, around 20 in every 1,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were incarcerated. Over-representation is both a persistent and growing problem – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander incarceration rates increased 41% between 2006 and 2016, and the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous imprisonment rates over that decade widened.” https://www.alrc.gov.au/sites/default/files/pdfs/publications/final_report_133_amended1.pdf (accessed October 26, 2018).
sacred punishment, a sacred event. It gives peace, it’s a great peace between those two
families.1024

There were no “court-houses” in Arrernte ancient society; no “police”; no codified statutory
legislation listing offences and punishments. But Arrernte people lived/live by their Law. The
sacredness of Law carried in the Altyerre complex was so powerful that reliance on all the
paraphernalia of the Western legal system was superfluous, until British law crashed onto
Arrernte lands. The revitalisation of Altyerre, which is the life’s work of Wenten Rubuntja,
Kathleen Kemarre Wallace, Therese Ryder, Margaret Heffernan and M.K. Turner – all the
Arrernte Voices in this thesis – is designed to retake the Arrernte heartland from the
interloper and restore the sacred to the heart of their culture and religion.1025

Kathleen Kemarre’s Mother Tree story highlights the central role of wisdom in Altyerre.
Growing up is learning to be free and learning to play one’s role in the social group. The
drive for independence, exemplified in the brief life of Tyangkertangkerte, is balanced by the
power of the anpernirrentye, the role of kinship and the limits it places upon individuals.
Both personal independence and social constraint through kinship are sacred to Arrernte. If
one harms others or the atywerrenge (sacred) law, then one must go through and accept
punishment. M.K. puts it this way: “Oh we’ve gotta take these people to finish up, they’ve
gotta go through this traditional punishment, we’ve gotta take them.”1026 And then she adds
emphatically, “And that’s one of the best things for our culture.”1027 The result of punishment
is healing and harmony; ultimately things are put back in place and good order prevails;
healing, the binding and cleansing of wounds, their repair and restoration has occurred. M.K.
Turner’s Altyerre relies on healing.1028

In Altyerre the creation is all. M.K. Turner summarises it this way: “we say it and sing it a
different style to the white people, how we see God … It ties in to how we see the Land. It’s
like ‘the Creation of the Creator have put us in’. To be there.”1029 For the Arrernte the

1024 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 146.
1025 The names of these Arrernte leaders are given because they are all published authors who have consciously
assumed responsibility for the future of their Altyerre.
1026 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 146.
1027 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 146.
1028 See Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 132–46, where M.K. deals with healing through the power of plants, song,
punishment and land.
1029 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, 220.
creation, the “Giver” (both “creation” and “creator”) is intrinsically sacred, requiring and providing preservation and continuance. Creation is indeed the source of continuance, providing a program for life and justification for behaviour. This is the “Arrernte Ten Commandments,” but written in the universe rather than on stone tablets.

The Catholic sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is characterised by conversion, penance, confession and forgiveness\(^\text{1030}\) which, it is argued here, are designed to bring healing through the achievement of justice/misphat and peace/shalom. In practice, it is argued here, reconciliation is based on restorative justice – where the offender and the sufferer of the offence meet and the offer of restitution from the offender is accepted by the sufferer – because before absolution/forgiveness by the priest can be conferred and received, the rebuilding of a trusting relationship is required. This is a process of healing, an ongoing grace-filled action, re-establishing harmony and conferring peace.\(^\text{1031}\)

Here is a place where grace, the engagement of Mystery in the operations of the material world, is to be found operationally in Altyerre-Catholicism; the place to discover grace in Altyerre, is in the notion of divine accompaniment.

### 12.6 The Our Father and Accompaniment

Elizabeth Johnson questions Anselm’s Satisfaction Theory of redemption and offers the idea of sacred accompaniment as a radical alternative: “[T]he theology of accompaniment … fosters the idea of salvation as the divine gift of ‘I am with you,’ even in the throes of suffering and death. Redemption comes to mean the presence of God walking with the world through its traumas and travail, even unto death.”\(^\text{1032}\) This section will present an argument for the identification of Mystery expressed as accompaniment by looking at the translation of the Our Father into Arrernte.

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\(^\text{1030}\) The Catholic Catechism, §1422-1424

\(^\text{1031}\) The procedure of ancient Arrernte payback relies on the willing submission of the offender to retributive action by the one (or members of the family) who suffered the offence. By standing in front of the one who suffered the offence and bearing the physical punishment (which is usually muted) the various parties bring restitution and re-establish right order.

In the mid-1980s Catholic Aboriginal people in Broome in Western Australia produced an *Aboriginal Our Father*. In its attempt to capture an Aboriginal vernacular, the *Broome Our Father* differs from traditional English translations. It has been adapted and sung by *Arrernte* Catholics as well as Aboriginal and other Catholic groups around Australia. The *Arrernte* translation of the Broome Our Father is now sung at every *Arrernte* Mass conducted by NMCC.

In the 1970s and 80s *Arrernte* Catholics were well served by Sister Robyn Reynolds OLSH, who was a missionary and linguist at *Ltyentye Apurte*. Reynolds worked alongside the women in composing this (and other) *Arrernte* Gospel songs during those years.

Here are the first two lines of the *Broome Our Father*.

You are Our Father, you live in heaven
We talk to you, Father you are good.

Here is the *Arrernte* version:

*Unte Ngkarte, Unte Altyerre*

*Unte Ngkarte nwernekenhe aneme.*

*Unte* is the *Arrernte* pronoun “you”. So, the first two words read: “You are Ngkarte”. We have seen above that *Ngkarte* has been used to mean something like “deep mystery” or “holy mystery. In the lines above, it might appear that *Ngkarte* is a translation for Father in English. It has been shown that the title *Ngkarte*, when applied to a priest, is an honorific associated with the ritual role priests play and the compassionate care they provide to their communities. Therese Ryder tells me that the Pope is called *Ngkarte* and the cardinals, bishops, priests and...

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1033 The Lord’s Prayer, Missa Kimberley, Diocese of Broome Western Australia. http://acmlismore.org.au/pray/prayers/aboriginal-our-father/ (accessed September 28, 2018). This Lord’s Prayer will be referred to as the *Broome Our Father*.

1034 Robyn Reynolds OLSH, who was living and working alongside Catholic *Arrernte* women at Santa Teresa when these *Arrernte* verses were constructed, throws some light on the translation. “In my memory and understanding the *Arrernte* is of a whole, i.e. one addressing of ‘God’. Oh, how to put it in English (even in words, let alone capturing the meaning!).” Reynolds suggests the translation could be: “Lord God! The ‘Altyerre’ holds the understanding of Alpha and Omega, (‘heaven’ can fit here) God of the Dreaming, God of our origins …” Personal communication, October 13, 2018.
deacons, down through the hierarchy. She says it is because they are representatives of God (Mystery).  

Why then is Ngkarte used in the first line of the Arrernte Our Father? The Eastern and Central Arrernte Dictionary suggests that Ngkarte is an example of a transfer application of an introduced word into Eastern and Mparntwe Arrernte that has taken on the meaning of God/Mystery. It is possibly correct that Ngkarte is not an ancient Eastern Arrernte word, but it appears that it has become a modern Eastern and Mparntwe Arrernte word through the association of the Eastern and Mparntwe Arrernte people with the Catholic tradition, and from the transfer of a suitable term from the earlier Western Arrernte use of the term. The next two words on the first line are Unte Altyerre, meaning “You are Altyerre”. The English version of the Broome Our Father has “You live in heaven”. So, does Altyerre here mean heaven? Therese Ryder composed a translation of the Our Father directly from the common (not the Broome version). Here is her translation of the first line:

Our Father in Heaven – Ngkarte Akngeye anwernekenhe alkerele aneme.

Alkere means sky. The le is locative – in the sky. Alkerele aneme means to live in or be in the sky, clearly a synonym for Heaven in a traditional Christian understanding.

If the Arrernte Our Father, based on the Broome Our Father, wanted to say “in heaven”, it would presumably have used alkerele, meaning “in the sky”. But the translators used Altyerre, meaning that the Mystery referred to in the first two words as Ngkarte is Altyerre, not understood as “Dreaming” but, as this thesis has proposed, as the “fullness of everything”. Altyerre in this analysis is a compendium carrying a wide range of collective meanings. And indeed, in this sense it could mean Heaven, if we take Heaven in the language used by Jesus when he talks of the Kingdom of Heaven.

When Jesus says “the Kingdom of Heaven is among you” (Luke 17:21) and Paul writes that the Kingdom of Heaven is righteousness (Romans 14:17), they are suggesting a state of being rather than a place.  

If Heaven is thought of as a state of “eternal life” (John 5:24), where everyone and everything finds itself in right relationship to every other person and thing in the universe, then we may accept the modification of the Kingdom of Heaven to the Kin-dom

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1035 Therese Ryder, personal communication, October 2, 2018. Ryder used the word “God”.
1036 Robyn Reynolds, personal communication October 12, 2018, confirms that these speculations are close to the actual process that occurred at Liyentye Apurte.
of Heaven, a place where all relationships are in good order and Love prevails.\textsuperscript{1037} This reflects the nature of our \textit{perichoretic} Holy Mystery, who is defined as being-in-relationship or being-in-communion.

In Part One it was noted that Carl Strehlow opined that \textit{Altyerre} meant “eternal”. Drawing on this analysis it is possible to assume that the \textit{Eastern} and \textit{Mparntwe Arrernte}, when translating the \textit{Broome Our Father}, were saying that \textit{Altyerre} means Eternal Life, the meaning of everything. So, the \textit{Ngkarte} who is addressed in this first line, and is referenced as \textit{Altyerre}, is a personification of Mystery (in Christian terms) which is the \textit{Arrernte} expression for the totality of meaning, the emerging imaginary that guides and inspires modern \textit{Altyerre}-Catholics in their daily lives. \textit{Altyerre}-Catholics have come to address Mystery, but they address Mystery in an \textit{Arrernte} framework or context, and the appellation seems to fit well there. The \textit{Arrernte} did not know about “God” in the Christian sense before Mission, so in an effort to make meaning of the new, they began to use the idea of Mystery and found a word that approximated their imaginary. In fact, they chose two, \textit{Ngkarte} and \textit{Altyerre}. \textit{Ngkarte} expresses care and healing and \textit{Altyerre} expresses the totality of eternity and the Circle of Life. Many non-\textit{Arrernte} listening to, even participating or using these expressions, may have missed the sophistication of the \textit{Arrernte} words being used.

The second line of the \textit{Arrernte} translation of the \textit{Broome Our Father} is

\textit{Unte Ngkarte nwernekenhe aneme}

You are our God, you live with us.

This translation is quite different from the \textit{Broome Our Father}, which is

We talk to you, Father you are good.

What has happened here? It is possible that the \textit{Arrernte} translators have simply inserted an extra line to modify the nature of \textit{Ngkarte}. This translation supports the idea of the first line, that \textit{Ngkarte} does not reside in some far-off place in heaven, but is present, in this place with us, in this place, this \textit{apmere}, on earth. Here is an understanding of a transcendent Mystery\textsuperscript{1037}

\textsuperscript{1037} Richard Rohr would argue that this is the place where all dualisms are defeated.
who is immanent in the creation, which Arrernte seem to know first-hand. Mystery lives with us. One could discern an understanding of Mystery as immanent as the Cosmic Christ and reflected in the translation that “God lives with us in the place/apmere.” These dynamic notions of the Cosmic Christ and Altyerre are converging into one.

Recall the first line of the common Our Father translated by Therese Ryder:

Our Father in Heaven

Ngkarte Akngeye anwernekenhe alkerele aneme.

As noted above, alkerele means “in the sky” or “heaven”, but what is Ngkarte Akngeye? Akngeye is the word for Father. Therese is differentiating Ngkarte into identities in the Trinity, an idea she learnt in the dormitory. Ngkarte Akngeye is Mystery as the Father. When the Arrernte Mass begins the priest intones the opening blessing:

In the name of the Father, The Son, The Holy Spirit, Amen.

In Arrernte the whole assembly says:

Akngeye, Alere, Utnenge mwarre aneme.

Alere is the Arrernte word for Son, Utnenge, as we know is Spirit, and mwarre is good. This is an almost literal translation of the words – but perhaps not of the deeper theology contained in the Arrernte translation of the Broome Our Father.

Margaret Heffernan has insights that summarise the issues under scrutiny here. She concludes: “When the church came we heard about God. And it seemed much like the same God that created our own world in the Dreamtime.” Over the years we have talked about Altyerre and the Creator God we were taught about by the missionaries. We think they are the same.” She says: “When we talk about the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – we say Akngeye, Alere and Utnenge. When we talk about Jesus, we say Ngkarte Jesus. Ngkarte is our word for God. We also call priests Ngkarte because they are representatives of God.” This is notably similar to Therese Ryder’s view. Heffernan and other modern Altyerre-Catholics see Mystery as Trinity or as being in relationship. Their word for God – understood as the perichoretic God of three persons in the one eternal dance of Love – is Ngkarte. When they speak of the Father separately, they use Ngkarte Akngeye. When they address the Son, they

1038 Here Heffernan seems to be absorbing “God” into the “dreamtime”. Note Heffernan’s comment, that “we were taught about by the missionaries.”
1039 Heffernan, Gathering Sticks, 265.
use Alere (literally son) or Ngkarte Jesus, and when focusing on the Holy Spirit, they use Utnenge mwarre or Ngkarte Utnenge mwarre.

Arrernte translate the missionaries' God by finding words that approximate the English. Ryder’s Arrernte Our Father, however, takes this process into a new realm when she translates:

And forgive us our sins
Ngkarte alhwarrpe anwerneke awelhaye.

The Eastern and Central Arrernte Dictionary says that the word alhwarrpe means sad, depressed, sorry. When Arrernte use the expression “sorry business,” alhwarrpe is the word they use.1040 When someone passes away close relatives are sad and sorry. Awelhaye is the imperative form of awelheme, to feel something. So, the literal translation is

Lord God/ sorrow/ our/ feel and then ‘be with us in our brokenness’

In this verse Ngkarte is being addressed and confidently asked to “feel our sadness”. This is typically understood as “wash our sins away”, but the emotive meaning of the prayer is to ask Ngkartel/God/Mystery to accompany the sad ones in their sadness. Implicit in the lines is that the rupture of sin causes existential sadness, the pain of the fracture of relationships. It appears that this sentiment of the sufferer of sadness contains a deep knowledge of the nature of Ngkarte. We might say that the author of this line surely knows that Ngkarte not only will, but already is, accompanying Ngkarte’s creatures in their sadness.1041 Ryder has gone beyond translating words and is interpreting the meaning of the forgiveness of sins in her Arrernte world.

A focus on Ngkarte accompanying sad ones in their sadness really comes as no surprise, as the word arntarntareme, meaning caring, holding, nurturing, is constantly called upon by Mparntwe Arrernte. When Mparntwe Arrernte pray the Prayers of the Faithful at NMCC Sunday Mass, they frequently call upon Ngkarte to arntarntareme all the sick, sad, depressed,

1040 Turner, Iwenhe Tyerrtye, devotes an entire section to alhwarrpe.
1041 Therese Ryder agrees that this is the meaning of this line. Personal communication, October 6, 2018.
imprisoned, and alcoholic members of their families. They call upon Ngkarte to walk along with and carry their loved ones in their brokenness – to awelhaye their alhwarpe – implicitly, faithfully believing that Ngkarte is accompanying them. Jesus (Ngkarte-Jesus in Heffernan’s terms), the healer of the leper, the haemorrhaging woman, Simon’s mother-in-law, and the teller of the great parables of the Forgiving Father and the Good Samaritan, is clearly recognisable as the Ngkarte who embraces Arrernte in their sadness.

The last line of the Our Father by Therese Ryder reads:

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and forever. 
Altyerre apmere ngkwinhe, alkngenthe ngwinhe, pwrartyintyeme, 
Lyete ante akwete anthurre.

Ryder assists in pursuing the thesis that Catholicism has been absorbed into Altyerre. The first three Arrernte words of the last line – Altyerre apmere ngkwinhe – capture the sophistication of the process. These words in translation seem to represent, Altyerre – The Kingdom (Kingdom). Ngkwinhe means “yours”. Apmere means “country/place/home”. Altyerre, as has been shown, means “eternal” or “the Eternal”, or “the One”, or “everything”. Addressing the God (Mystery), the prayer is suggesting that we will find Mystery’s home (the Kingdom) in Altyerre – in the eternal, or that Mystery is the Eternal, or as Heffernan says, the “known unknown”. This is clearly translation going beyond dry words. The Arrernte translation reveals both coherence and convergence in Altyerre-Catholicism.

12.7 Sacraments and Grace

12.7.1 Introduction

This section seeks to clarify the interconnectedness of grace, sacrament and the sacred in the interface between the Catholic/Christian world-view and Arrernte consciousness. Sacramental theologian Jean-Marie Chauvet records Augustine’s words: “the sacrament is the visible sacrifice of the invisible sacrifice, that is a sacred sign,”1042 often

recalled as “visible signs of invisible grace.” For Catholics, the seven formal sacraments offer God’s grace in special moments and in everyday events revealing the possibility of the sacred in the mundane. The Eucharist is a meal ritually transformed into a sacrament – a holy gift in material signs. The Catholic Catechism states that “Grace is favor, the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to the call to become … partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life.”  Grace is how humans come to share in the life of God, as the Catechism continues at 1997: “It introduces us into the intimacy of Trinitarian life.” Karl Rahner, the great modern exponent of the theology of grace, in his Grundaxiom teaches that the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity, meaning that the inner nature of God is available through the work of God in the world. Battaglia says that for Rahner, grace “is to be understood as God’s ‘self-communication’, ” affirming the position held here that the esse (being) of God (the immanent Trinity) is Love reaching us as grace (the economic Trinity).

12.7.2 Altyerre – Living as Grace

For the Arrernte Catholics, Altyerre, the answer to Mystery, is found in ordinary life. While “sacred” is a very common English word used by Arrernte, “grace” is rarely mentioned. M.K. Turner hardly mentions it in Iwenhe Tyerrtye, yet the book demonstrates that the Arrernte, as demonstrated throughout this work, hold everything in the creation to be sacred. Land/apmere is sacred, trees/arne mape are sacred, people/tyerrtye mape are sacred, anpernirrentye/connection is one of the most sacred notions in the Arrernte world. Everything, everybody, every part of the universe is connected to every other part and all play their role. Everyone has to know their lines and act with ikirrentye/respect. This is Arrernte law/atywerrenge, which is also sacred. So, creation, which has been defined as Giver, Gift and Giving in this study, might be conceived of as where everything that exists is constantly transformed by grace. But what is the connection between grace and sacrament for the Arrernte?

Margaret Heffernan briefly notes the connection. For Heffernan grace is how the unknown becomes known: “Altyerre means the unknown in the same way God is really unknown.

1043 Catholic Catechism, Part Three, Life in Christ, Article 2, Grace and Justification, 1996.
http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p3s1c3a2.htm (accessed February 5, 2019).
1045 Battaglia, “An Examination of Karl Rahner’s Trinitarian Theology”, 5. See also Rahner, Foundations of Christian Faith, 123.
Altyerre is the creation. This God makes himself [sic] known through Jesus and Mary.”

Heffernan sees the link between Arrernte ceremony and Catholicism in the role of spirit(s): “These spirits have been given special powers through ceremony to carry on ancient law. It’s like the grace of the Catholic sacraments.”

In Catholic/Christian terms, then, in the relationship between the Creator and the created grace might be seen to be the contingent link, where God offers grace and humans receive it. However, Altyerre does not imply contingency between the Creator and the created and therefore it might seem that grace is problematic for Altyerre-Catholicism. The point of Heffernan’s position is that grace is power through the work of spirits. Here are identified two points of Altyerre’s coincidence with Catholic theology, both of which speak of power: the power that is the result of the Body of Christ, which in this study can also be understood as the Cosmic Christ, and the role of the Spirit. By linking the understandings of M.K. and Heffernan it appears that for the Arrernte the sacred seems to intimate grace. In the Catholic imaginary and for the Arrernte Altyerre imaginary, grace may be understood as the capacity to discern the known from the unknown. For both, grace is the self-revelation, through the incarnation of the Cosmic Christ and the work of the Spirit, of Holy Mystery.

Wenten Rubuntja assists in clarifying this process. As pointed out above (7.4) he uses conception totemism in relation to Jesus’ heritage. Jesus has aknganentye/born-place from heaven (father’s father’s side) from the Father; and Altyerrenge/born from earth (mother’s father’s side) from Mary. Jesus as Son of God and son of a woman. Aknganentye is the source of Life immanent from the creation, the Giver. Rubuntja is confirming the unique hypostatic nature of Jesus, the incarnate God, immanently in the Trinity and economically in the world, confirming the unique presence of the divine in the apmerel/place/earth/universe. In this analysis, without explicitly stating it, Rubuntja is declaring that grace becomes Mystery’s self-communication of life and love in the universe, the known world. Grace is how the universe comes to know Mystery.

1046 Heffernan, Gathering Sticks, 266.
1047 Heffernan, Gathering Sticks, 266.
Heffernan has linked grace to the sacraments, but how does this work at the interface between the two imaginaries? In her thesis Reynolds draws on Louis-Marie Chauvet’s schema for identifying key elements of Christian sacraments:

1. sacraments as encounters with Christ;
2. sacraments as symbolic liturgical actions of the Church;
3. sacraments as symbols of and for human meaning; and

Reynolds’ thesis described an inculturated Baptism ritual performed by the Catholic Murrinhpatha members of the Wadeyel/Port Keats–based community, where sacraments were seen as encounters with Sacred Mystery. It might be said that for Mparntwe Arrernte Catholics, divine grace is this sacred meeting place. Paraphrasing Reynolds to make her schema apply more widely, it might be that sacraments are seen as symbolic, ritual meetings with Mystery, providing a lens into meaning by creating wholeness from disparate elements. It might be said that for Mparntwe Arrernte Catholics grace is to be found in the capsule labelled the sacred.

12.7.3 Altyerre – Ritual as Sacrament

Sacraments are visible signs of God’s invisible grace working in the universe. The Catholic Catechism says that “Sacraments are ‘powers that comes forth’ from the Body of Christ, which is ever-living and life-giving. They are actions of the Holy Spirit at work in his Body, the Church. They are ‘the masterworks of God’ in the new and everlasting covenant.” Sacraments are ritualised occasions when grace is in a sense made visible. From section 12.7.1 it is clear that in the Arrernte world the mundane, the ordinary, the everyday can be ritualised and assume greater significance. On the other hand, periodically the Arrernte engage in formal ceremony, the product of eternity, where the time and eternity become one. Ceremonies are celebrated through men’s and women’s secret, sacred events and in public dance and song/antepe and ceremony/altharte. Heffernan tells a story that can be

\(^{1050}\) Henderson and Dobson, Eastern and Central Arrernte Dictionary, 656, demonstrates that there are many forms of Arrernte dance: antepe is women’s dance performed at initiation of young men; altharte is public
characterised as sacramental. It occurred in her *Northern Arrernte* home, near Ti Tree. She recounts the killing, butchering and eating of a kangaroo in the mid-1940s to highlight the ritual power of her cultural inheritance. She says, “it was sacred business”. Here something that is basic, commonplace and regularly repeated is seen as being part of a sacred heritage and is performed in a ritualised manner.

Similarly, Kenny quotes what is clearly, from the details describing the allocation of the meat to kin, a ritualised account from Carl Strehlow’s record of the cooking of a kangaroo near Hermannsburg in about 1905.

Lakalia, who had meanwhile come near, lifted big grey kangaroo Lurknalurkna with ease and laid it on the coals. After it had roasted a little, he took it from the fire, scraped off the singed fur and with a stone knife lopped off the legs and the tail, which he kept for himself, while giving the legs to the young fellows. Then he laid the rest of the meat back on the coals. When this had roasted sufficiently, he spread tree branches on the ground, cut up the meat and laid the individual pieces on the cushion of branches. While leaving most of the meat for the young fellows, he took for himself the spine of the kangaroo (toppalenba), the tail and the fat, and returned to Irtjoata, where he sat down near a stone cave.

Ritual also permeates the procedure in the account of a hunt in 1984 with Peter Nyaningu at his homeland Anilalya near Ernabella in the far north of South Australia.

Peter shot a big kangaroo/*maḻu pulka* and took it to the edge of a sandy creek bed. He lit a fire in a trench which blazed vigorously and meanwhile cut the *maḻu*’s abdomen open and pulled out the intestines. As he sealed the emptied stomach with a stick with each progressive action he repeated word, *alatji, alatji*, which translates as “that’s the way” or “like this”.

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1051 Heffernan, *Gathering Sticks*, 70.
1053 Peter was the first *Pitjantjatjara* man to be ordained in the Uniting Church. Peter had invited me and my family to join him in this hunt. This account was written some years after the event.
He then threw the animal onto the blazing fire. After a few minutes he rolled it over to ensure that it was singed all over and then he extracted it onto the sand. Now he beat the singed fur off the *maḻu*/kangaroo with a shovel and cut off the tail. Peter scooped the trench open and placed the *maḻu* in it with the severed tail alongside. He deftly shovelled the coals over the entire animal so that it was buried in this outdoor oven.

After about 30 minutes he retrieved the animal from the oven and with great speed and expertise started to butcher it. At each cut of the knife or blow of the axe he commented to me what he was doing, *alatji, alatji*. Various portions of the *maḻu* were placed on a bough “table” which had been constructed by stripping fresh branches from nearby living mulga trees. Soon the *maḻu*, still dripping blood and quite raw to my innocent eyes, was totally butchered. The organs were extracted and also laid on the “table”.

Peter had done all the work but as the meal appeared to be nearly ready, numerous family members appeared. Peter offered each person a portion of the animal in what was clearly a regulated order. Notably the children were offered sections of the tail, while the young men were offered the very hot and dripping organs such as liver and kidneys. Some of the young men scooped the hot blood out of the abdomen and drank it. Every feature of turning an animal into a meal and consuming it was culturally laid down from the *Tjukurrpa/Law*. Peter was in his homeland, no butcher, he was a high priest. In his hands the secular had been made sacred. The next Sunday Peter presided over a Communion Service where once again he had little trouble in turning the everyday into the sacred.

The three examples spread over nearly eighty years and located in different but related country tell of the widespread and frequent occurrence of this sacramental ritualised event.

At an even more arcane, ceremonial level, the kangaroo was/is central to totemic cult across *Luritja, Pitjantjatjara* and *Arrernte* country in Central Australia. In 1964 T.G.H. Strehlow reported on his participation in the kangaroo initiation ceremony at Krantji. He reports the

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1054 *Tjukurpa* is the *Pitjantjatjara* synonym for *Altyerre*.
details of the secret, sacred ceremony in order to demonstrate that “the whole rationale of the initiation ceremonies was to recreate the conditions that existed at the beginning of time”. What Strehlow is demonstrating is that Arrernte rituals are indeed sacramental in intent: “Before the invasion of his home country, the Central Australian totemite certainly believed that he ‘possessed the eternal’ in his own lifetime.” Similarly, in the Eucharist, through the words and actions of the priest, the flesh and blood of Christ are remembered as eternally present. Strehlow summarises the kangaroo ceremony this way: “Every full-scale ceremonial festival was, in fact, regarded as an occasion when Time and Eternity became one.” Hill remarks that “Strehlow was affirming the daily spirituality of the Aboriginal men, and how they were all priests because of the nature of their spiritual inductions into integrated beliefs.” It is in the similarity between the Arrernte sacramental rituals and the specific Christian sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist that the sense of intercultural coherence gains force.

What emerges is not a shallow syncretism but an organic incorporation. The coherent characteristics of the Christian and Arrernte rituals are identified and then recognised. They are not seen as foreign to each other, they are seen as different but coherent ways of talking about the same things. Altyerre and Ngkarte are not strangers that need to be squeezed into a new framework, but living concepts that fold themselves into changed circumstances offering mutual refinement and enrichment.

12.8 Always Refining Altyerre

In Heffernan’s account of the “known and unknowable” she observes that “Altyerre means the unknown in the same way as God is really unknown”. Heffernan is representing Altyerre as part of revelation completed in Jesus and Mary. She places Jesus and Mary comfortably, as Rubuntja and M.K. Turner have, within the Altyerre imaginary. In this way Altyerre means even more than heaven. It becomes both transcendent and immanent Mystery. If Rubuntja’s phrase “God gave us the Dreaming” is reversed one might hypothesise that

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1056 Hill, Broken Song, 634.
1057 Hill, Broken Song, 635.
1058 Hill, Broken Song, 635.
1059 Hill, Broken Song, 637.
1060 Heffernan, Gathering Sticks, 266.
1061 Robyn Reynolds OLSH recorded these words as they were given to her in conversation with Wenten Rubuntja during the time of the visit of Pope John Paul II. Personal communication, November 13, 2018. This
the incorporation of Catholicism into Altyerre has allowed Aburnte to find more ways of talking about the ultimate meaning of Mystery. Perhaps it would be appropriate to suggest that Aburnte have discovered in a subtle way that while in the Christian scheme the Old Testament is fulfilled the New, in Altyerre-Catholicism Altyerre might be seen as their Old Testament, with Catholicism and Altyerre informing each other. Just as the Hebrew Bible was an authentic revelation of Mystery for the Israelites and for Christians provides a preparation for Jesus’ followers to ground their faith on a secure and ancient tradition, so Altyerre establishes Aburnte Christian faith in a secure heritage filled with the Mystery of the Cosmic Christ from the beginning. The deep mystery of Altyerre has allowed the Aburnte to delve into and discover the Mystery that is the Cosmic Christ embedded in their own tradition.

Heffernan’s discussion of the “known unknown” argues against Altyerre being comprehended through dreaming. Rather than being comprehended, it is continuously composed as an imaginary through deep thought and reflection by generations passing it on over the ages. She writes: “I’ll only really see the Dreamtime, the Altyerre, when I die. I’ll see Mary and Jesus when I die. I’ll know the unknowable from Altyerre when I die.”

Heffernan believes in a spirit world more cogently than many Christians. She was reared in a belief in utnenge/spirit, arremparrenge/the spirit of a new baby and irrernte-arenye/spirit beings that appear in the Mother Tree story. It is not difficult for her to accept that Mary and Jesus occupy a similar living space as these Aburnte spirits in her now expanded imaginary.

Chapter 12 has demonstrated that what Rubuntja, Turner, Wallace and Heffernan have done for Altyerre-Catholicism is similar to one of the contributions that Rahner made to 20th-century Catholicism: the best, perhaps the only way, to understand God is to appreciate that phrase was referred to in 12.3. In this section the suggestion is to reverse Wenten’s phrase to elucidate the deep meaning of Altyerre.

1062 Heffernan, Gathering Sticks, 267.
1063 Kathleen Kemarre Wallace discusses arremparrenge in her story Tyangkertangkerte. She says that irrernte-arenye/spirits-beings were looking for a place for a new little spirit/arremparrenge to be born as a human. Wallace, Listen deeply, 121. Jenny Green, personal communication, January 11, 2019, provides another definition: “a person's spirit double or spirit friend”.
1064 As both M.K. Turner and Kathleen Kemarre Wallace note that sometimes irrernte-arenye are known as nasty spirits who come from the cold.
God can never be understood but may be known as Holy Mystery. Heffernan comes closest to specifically sharing this insight when she speaks of Altyerre as the “known and unknowable” – a truly mysterious but satisfying appreciation of existence. And so, the thesis argues that Altyerre and the Cosmic Christ, as imaginaries, offer increasingly coherent pathways to embracing Holy Mystery. Paraphrasing creatio originalis, creatio continua and creatio nova, it emerges that from Mystery Life is born, through Mystery Life is maintained, and in Mystery Life is reborn.

Augustine, who is credited with the aphorism “If you understood him, it would not be God”, shares this appreciation.

Heffernan, Gathering Sticks, 266.
Chapter 13: Riches to Share

13.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the process of transformation of a distant, remote God into Holy Mystery, the known unknown, who is available through the integration of the ancient tradition of *Altyerre* with the richness of the biblical tradition shared by all Christians. *Altyerre* has been earlier shown to be Giver, Gift and Giving so redolent of the Trinity. More recently modern Christian theology has identified that the Cosmic Christ is discovered in the creation evocative of the emphasis on *aknganentyel* creation in *Altyerre*. The chapter then proposes a series of steps and a number of cautions to assist the NMCC to carefully continue their progress to religious independence and cultural recovery, ultimately leading to the opportunity for *Altyerre*-Catholicism to become a gift to the wider world.

This thesis is based on the proposition that the mystery of the creation is at least partly, if not fully revealed in the creation itself. *Altyerre* is the *Arrernte* way of understanding creation and all it contains. *Altyerre* is the *Arrernte* imaginary, a carefully constructed yet intuitive account of the understanding that everything is related to everything else. *Altyerre* in a mysterious, dynamic sweep integrates spirit and matter into a recurring cycle of meaning.

The Christian understanding of the Cosmic Christ places the source of mystery in the midst of the universe. A Cosmic Christology understands the eternal Christ as present in the universe from the moment of its inception. In this way transcendence is encapsulated in the immanence of Mystery in matter. As in the imaginary of *Altyerre*, the Breath of God inhabits and connects the entire universe.

Christian theology has its roots in Jewish salvation history. Modern Christians, recognising Jesus as Jewish, have little trouble in honouring the flow in their imaginary from the Hebrew cosmic spirit evidenced in Psalm 104 into the Cosmic Christ of John’s Gospel and in Paul’s letters. Additionally, following Augustine, Christians have learned to look for God in nature and in scripture.\textsuperscript{1067} However, Augustine’s heritage was limited to the Old Testament tradition and Hellenist cosmology in the New Testament. The work of Teilhard, Rahner,\textsuperscript{1067}

\textsuperscript{1067} Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 151.
Edwards, Johnson and others leads to a larger, more dynamic view. Through their insights emerges an understanding of Mystery from additional sources, from nature, from science, from ancient cultures, from philosophy and from the Church’s own tradition and ongoing development in faith.

In Part Three it was argued, following Schmid, that Israel came to know that the God who saves is the God who creates. He says that “readers can learn from the miracle and the Sea that the God who saved Israel from the Egyptians was none other than the one who created heaven and earth”. The ancient Israelites travelled a path of discovery of their God/YHWH, a God they originally understood as a God who saves, to a God who creates. If our saving God/Mystery is incarnate from the moment of (or even before) the Big Bang then Mystery is available in every culture from time immemorial.

Arrernte Catholics, starting from their base in Altyerre where Mystery inhabits every crevice, through missio dei have met and incorporated elements of Catholicism in the formation of their enhanced, convergent imaginary. The Creator God, understood as the “known unknown”, has been incorporated into Altyerre-Catholicism through a process that might be compared to the Babylonian exile and the stimulation it provided, to a re-imagining of Judaism by the priestly scribes. Invasion and mission for the Arrernte have been analogous to the Israelite’s searing experience of exile into Babylon from the energy-source of their religion in Jerusalem. In a similar fashion Invasion has precipitated a process of clarification of what is essential in the lives of Arrernte which has been distilled into Altyerre-Catholicism.

This thesis, particularly the depthing of Arrernte Catholicism, proposes that the God who made the world inhabits the world. If God is in the world then God can be discovered in every cultural tradition on the face of the earth, always to be found in the world, and mystery, never to be completely fathomed, is available to all people at all times in history to the end of time.

Kenosis, which Paul understands as God’s “self-emptying”, can also be understood as God’s free act to create a world into freedom, meaning that while the creation may be seen as a gift

from God it is a gift that comes without conditions. There is no *quid pro quo* in the idea of creation. Creation is gift pure and simple, unalloyed gratuitousness. This implies that the Mysterious gift of creation understood in the Judaeo-Christian imaginaries is available to all. The *Mparntwe Arrernte* who met the Mission found that they were able to absorb Christianity into their *Altyerre* imaginary, but this was not a necessary outcome, nor one required by every person in order to come face to face with Mystery.

This thesis has supported the view that describing God as Holy Mystery appropriately marks our human propensity to search for and grasp inchoately at signs that make meaning out of existence. Humans reaching for meaning, but failing to grasp the entirety of meaning in their fractured lives, construct for themselves imaginaries, detailed scripts that approximate the best that can be conjured. These emergent constructs are ever modified and clarified until they become the data of faith. This is the process of faith seeking understanding that Anselm proffers.

**13.2 The Future of *Altyerre*-Catholicism**

*Altyerre*-Catholicism is an invitation to all to fullness of life, a beckoning to incorporation into the Cosmic Christ, offered by a people who have had everything stolen except their living imaginary. What is clear is that *Altyerre*-Catholicism is a process. It is a pulsating imaginary. Yet it is facing existential threats. Perhaps the most immediate threat is that many of the principal exponents of *Altyerre*-Catholicism are aged and increasingly infirm. Will the next generation of *Mparntwe Arrernte* Catholics share the imaginary in the same way as their older leaders? As M.K. Turner, Margaret Heffernan, Therese Ryder and Kathleen *Kemarre* Wallace age, the life of the tradition that lives in them is endangered. Little has been done institutionally to address the threat. In this conclusion some implications for the future of *Altyerre*-Catholicism and the Catholic Church are presented. Far from being the speculative result of the analysis of the thesis, these proposals represent the intuitive aspirations of these members of the NMCC. It goes without saying that any future steps should be led – in the same manner as it has emerged and been consolidated so far – by the NMCC *Altyerre*-Catholics with support from their trusted advisors and friends.
To its credit, the OLSH parish, with the support of the parish priest Fr Asaeli Raass SVD, has commenced a process of engaging itself in study of and appreciation of the nature of Altyerre-Catholicism. Over the last two years three “Spirituality in the Pub” education sessions have been offered to the parish and wider Alice Springs community. Here, in the company of the women mentioned above, the issues explored in this thesis study have been respectfully canvassed and more widely disseminated. Following these sessions where the concept of Altyerre-Catholicism was first publicly mooted, Fr Raass, when speaking about the Arrernte people in the congregation at the shared Masses of the whole parish, refers to them as Altyerre Catholics.

However, without the formal establishment of an educational and documentation process, this process will remain piecemeal and possibly dependent upon the perspectives and energy of a particular parish priest from time to time. A formal parish commitment to the preservation and enhancement of Altyerre-Catholicism could be the first step to securing the future. This could occur in the form of an agreement between the NMCC and the Parish Council that expresses a statement of acknowledgement of Altyerre-Catholicism as an authentic representation of the Faith of Mparntwe Arrernte Catholics.

Second, the site of the OLSH parish, including the Old Church, the New Church, the Presbytery, the Catholic-Care offices including Gemma House, and the OLSH Primary School, despite being legally purchased, are part of the expropriation of the township of Stuart from Arrernte ownership in 1888–1889. It would be best to recognise the sovereignty of the Mparntwe Arrernte over the site within a specified time-frame. This would reflect the sentiment inherent in the placement of Wenten Rubuntja’s painting in the OLSH Church as a title deed to this “Big Temple” that stands under Atmelkentyarlweke/Anzac Hill.\footnote{Rubuntja and Green, \textit{the town grew up dancing}, 64.} The formal recognition of Arrernte prior ownership could be achieved through a handback to the Arrernte owners followed by a leaseback to the Catholic Church for continuing use and care/\textit{arntarntareme} of the site, along the lines of the handback leaseback arrangements in national parks. Included in the leaseback could be the handover of a designated piece of property within the precinct administered by the Catholic Church, for the exclusive use of NMCC.\footnote{At the OLSH Parish Assembly on November 4, 2017, the chairperson of NMCC addressed the assembly and requested “a place” for the operations of the organisation.}
occupied their own office in the presbytery, and would enhance the sense of status and entitlement of NMCC to their rightful and central place in the Catholic Church.

Third, the establishment of a unit of study in Altyerre-Catholicism at Nungalinya College (or some similar theological college) may well promote the invitation into the fullness of life that is available through Altyerre-Catholicism. A faculty of Altyerre-Catholic theology for Mparntwe Arrernte students – and possibly non-Arrernte participants – could be established in Alice Springs. This of course implies a partnership between Arrernte and non-Arrernte theologians which would address the issue of generational transition. This issue is presently seen as a threat, but it could be seen as an opportunity, given that the older Altyerre-Catholics are motivated to effectively pass on their legacy.

Fourth, as Altyerre-Catholicism becomes further consolidated, opportunities might emerge for members of NMCC to consider whether the introduction of Altyerre-based rituals – such as the Arrernte smoking of babies – could be investigated for inclusion in Altyerre-Catholic liturgy. The specific nature of these developments would be the fruit of the work of the Nungalinya- (or other) based theological program and facilitated by elders.

Additionally, as is clear from the work of M.K. Turner, Margaret Heffernan, Kathleen Kemarre Wallace, Therese Ryder and the many other active persons in the NMCC, the role of women has been paramount in the development of Altyerre-Catholicism. However, there is no designated, formal, liturgical role offered to these leaders of the NMCC. The Nungalinya (or other) initiative could propose a means for establishing a formal place for the theological and practical training of Arrernte female leaders so they can play a leadership role in the liturgical/sacramental life of the Church, for instance in baptisms and funerals. This could also extend to a formal participation in the leadership roles at Eucharist and Confirmation.

Furthermore, recognising the powerful ancient role of dance in Altyerre, a role alerted to this thesis by Wenten Rubuntja from the beginning, the development of Altyerre-Catholic liturgical dance for inclusion in Eucharist, Baptism and Confirmation could be considered.\(^{1071}\) Valuable work has been completed by Teresa Alice,\(^{1072}\) a member of NMCC from

\(^{1071}\) Rubuntja and Green’s book titled the town grew up dancing indicates the central role that altharte/shared men’s and women’s public dance and anthepe/women’s dance play in Arrernte culture.

\(^{1072}\) Also known as Theresa Alice.
Amoonguna Community, whose thesis provides insights into the role of Grandmother’s law in Arrernte education. Teresa says: “I observed and reflected on the pedagogical practices of Arrernte women Elders during our significant women’s ceremonies on country.” An excerpt from her thesis demonstrates the power, significance and centrality of dance in Arrernte women’s culture:

We are taught in a carefully planned sequence, first through the singing and dancing to get the rhythm, then second through the body painting. When singing the old ladies sing the songline for our country. This songline tells the younger women and girls of the journey of our creator women who travelled the country forming the sacredness of the land for the women. It is the story of the formation of the land and through the song we come to understand the importance of being a woman. Sacred and secret songs are sung to remind us that our bodies are sacred to us and are secret, only to be talked about with the right people for us. The song teaches us about the sacredness of our body, just like the land is sacred to us.

It is not being suggested here that secret, sacred women’s business be inserted into Altyerre-Catholic rituals, but that the centrality of dance, song and painting up, after investigation by NMCC elders, could be supported to ascertain how these elements can be incorporated into Altyerre-Catholic ceremony.

Finally, recognising the historic marginalisation of Mparntwe Arrernte Catholic men, noted in Part Two at 6.3 and 6.4, consideration about reincorporation through ceremony might open a pathway for them into the life of the Church today. Obviously, in the light of the comment about women’s dance, the place of men’s dance and ceremony requires special attention. Initially it could be that men-only sessions would be required to investigate Arrernte men’s understanding of Altyerre-Catholicism and their possible willingness to engage in this process.

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1073 Teresa Penangke Alice, Ayeye-ileme Ingketeme-akerte (Following the cultural footsteps of our Elders), Master by Research (MRSBBA) Australian Centre for Indigenous Knowledges and Education School of Indigenous Knowledges and Public Policy Faculty of Law, Education, Business and Arts Charles Darwin University, Darwin, 2016.

1074 Alice, Ayeye-ileme Ingketeme-akerte, 89.

1075 This is an achievable outcome. In the 2018 Australian Football League (AFL) season, before the game at Traeger Park oval in Alice Springs during the Aboriginal Round, a contingent of Arrernte dancers, both men and women, performed/urnterrirreke adharte/public dance. The "Arrernte" genius extends to the capacity to adapt ancient scripts for modern story-telling.
Furthermore, a more insidious threat could be an over-emphasis on Roman Catholic devotional practices. While the Healing Springs story was selected in this thesis as an example of how the twin imaginaries of Altyerre and Catholic devotion to Mary the mother of Jesus have converged to produce the Altyerre-Catholic tradition, reports from Lyentye Apurte Catholic School indicate that religious education classes have been reported to rely on the colouring in of sheets of Mother Mary. While these sessions do offer the opportunity for Arrernte Catholics at Lyentye Apurte to share their faith with the students, these opportunities will be enhanced if units of work based on Altyerre-Catholicism can be developed by Arrernte teachers for use by Arrernte teachers and possibly even by non-Arrernte religious education specialists. In the absence of the development of specific Religious Education units that rest upon the elements of Altyerre-Catholicism suggested in this thesis, Catholic devotionalism may drift into pietism with little connection to the depths of the Altyerre imaginary.

A similar opportunity exists in the Sunday School activities for the NMCC children during the Liturgy of the Word in Alice Springs. The material presented provides no opportunity for the participating children to experience authentic Arrernte theology in the context of the Sunday celebration. The challenge remains for both NMCC elders and non-indigenous Church persons/theologians/educators to find ways forward.

Finally, and in a manner designed to bring both men’s and women’s roles together as they are in Arrernte traditional culture, consideration may be given as to how to use the Arrernte focus on periodic High Ceremony in a manner designed to emphasise the essential elements of Altyerre-Catholic beliefs. This may well include a focus on the idea that Arrernte society is organised in skin groups and that Church gatherings be organised to be representative of skin-based relationships. It could also apply to large sacramental events such as Baptisms and Confirmation. For instance, as Margaret Kemarre Turner and Margaret Kemarre Wallace have personally demonstrated in older age, they have incorporated their Kemarre skin name into the Australian legal name. In baptismal ceremonies it would appear to be a simple process to ensure that the skin name of the candidate is included in her naming and that grandparents, with whom the candidate shares her skin name, are present to confer that name on their grandchildren. The development of a process like this would likely influence the Arrernte concept of “Church”. If there was much time spent working with families of a baptismal candidate to ascertain all the relevant skin relationships and effort was spent by the
local non-Arrernte Church members to assist in gathering these members to the ceremony, this would enhance a more traditional Arrernte sense of ceremonial gathering that might be incorporated into the weekly celebration of Mass. Rather than one replacing the other, each would enhance the other. These approaches already operate informally, for instance when there is a periodic celebration of an anniversary or similar event, and they are always well attended and joyful occasions.

The Wider Catholic Church, in the form of the local parish, clearly has a role to play in addressing some or all of these considerations by:

1. Acknowledging the authenticity of Altyerre-Catholicism.
2. Joining in periodic education sessions run by Nungalinya College (or other College) designed to broaden the knowledge base of non-Arrernte parishioners and build respect for Altyerre-Catholicism.
3. Establishment of Altyerre-Catholicism in the heart of Church practice by entering into a Statement of Agreement.
4. Promoting the concept of handback leaseback.
5. Allocating secure funding for the operation of NMCC.

The Diocese of Darwin could assist OLSH parish Alice Springs by endorsing the objectives listed above and assisting by making funds available and supporting Nungalinya College in its additional task. Since the property of OLSH parish is under the control of the diocese, the proposal of a handback, leaseback agreement would rest with the Bishop and the diocese. For the NMCC Mparntwe Arrernte, the model of Church outlined above will see them become the beating heart of the OLSH Catholic parish in Alice Springs and across the Centre. Historic marginalisation could be corrected and Mparntwe Arrernte might come to feel the respect and appreciation of other residents of Mparntwe whom they have accepted as co-tenants of the apmere/land from which they are born and for which they are bound to care. As this thesis has demonstrated, apmere/land stands at the core of Arrernte identity. By

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1076 Most NMCC Church attenders do not have a car and getting Arrernte Churchgoers to Sunday Mass is a major logistical venture. The recruitment of non-Arrernte Churchgoers to assist in transportation of NMCC members could make a significant contribution to the achievement of the goals of this study. It is acknowledged that OLSH parish has been addressing these issues for many years. The parish website records the commitments of the parish to NMCC for the period 2008 to 2103 at http://www.olshparishalicesprings.org.au/uploads/bulletin/885166317_Arrentre_Relationshhip_presented_on_21st_September_2008.pdf (accessed January 11, 2019).
beginning with a statement about apmerek/land and entering into negotiations in good faith about tenure and shared responsibility, *Mparntwe Arrernte* could be empowered for the next steps in the enriching program of sharing their imaginary with the wider Church and Nation.

### 13.3 The Challenge to Catholicism

The 21st-century challenge for the Catholic Church is to respond to the surge within *Altyerre*-Catholicism for Deep Inculturation, the process whereby not just the externals but the substance of *Altyerre*-Catholicism is legitimated in the ritual life of the Church and the community. This implies a change to the status quo. The old mission paradigm of superiority over the old pagan way has been shown here to be insufficient both for the Arrernte and for the relationship between Arrernte and the wider community. There is an alert here also to the notion of Arrernte ecumenism, the sense of a shared Christianity. This thesis has relied upon an analysis of *Altyerre* which is drawn from *Western* and *Northern* and *Mparntwe* and *Southern* (*Pertame*) Arrernte heritage. Christian Arrernte people of these dialect groups are now aligned with different denominations – some Lutheran, some Catholic and some linked with the Baptist and Uniting Churches – but all are grounded in *Altyerre*. A threat implicit in the proposed future developments might be a privileging of *Altyerre*-Catholicism that could revive the post-Reformation splits between Christian denominations. Wenten Rubuntja’s own comments offered in the beginning of the analysis should assuage any such fear, remembering that he said: “We went along to every church and got baptised.”

A revised path to *Altyerre*-Catholicism could mean that the Catholic Church, both formally and informally, enters into respectful dialogue with all faith traditions, Christian and ancient, so that fundamental beliefs and values may converge, because it is in that convergence that a shared future for all Arrernte Christians can be envisioned.

While renewed respect for *Altyerre* stands at the heart of this process, another critical element is a reappraisal by the Catholic faithful and their pastors of the deposit of Catholic faith that has joined *Altyerre* in *Altyerre*-Catholicism. Remembering Karl Rahner’s concern that most Catholics are in practice monotheists, an understanding of the significance of the Cosmic Christ highlighted in this thesis is critical to the future of the dialogue or multilogue. The immanent presence of the Cosmic Christ in the universe, an ancient and now modern

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1077 Rubuntja and Green, *the town grew up dancing*, 58.
teaching, has offered an enticing image of Mystery in the heart of being, or Being as Sacred Mystery. Mystery is both transcendence and immanence. An emphasis on transcendent Mystery implied a more remote God, whereas focus on Mystery as immanence offers a present and tangible pathway to meaning in a suffering world. The Cosmic Christ revealed in Altyerre-Catholicism offers insights into both immanence and transcendence and is available to all. Possibilities such as have been suggested above may well see a new informed version of Mission with the Altyerre Circle continuing to become more complete.

Should the Australian Catholic Church find this Altyerre-Catholic model a bridge too far, it might look in its own rear-view mirror and reflect upon its Celtic roots. Darren Cronshaw understands the legacy of St Patrick in Ireland to be that “Celtic missionaries were incarnational and embraced Celtic culture”. Cronshaw writes that in AD 601 Pope Gregory I advised “missionaries in England to retain rather than destroy old pagan sites”.

With the emphasis in this thesis being upon the Cosmic Christ, Cronshaw’s comment that “[i]ncarnational mission, by definition, is at home in any receiving culture” is consoling. Patrick and his Celtic successors adopted a strategy that the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Darwin could well reprise: “Evangelism was about helping people belong so they can believe, rather than convincing them to believe so they can belong.” Many Australian Catholics are proud of their Anglo-Celtic ancestry and tradition. This tradition will be honoured as it advances the cause of Altyerre-Catholicism as an authentic expression of the Cosmic Christ, Patrick’s incarnational God. M.K. Turner has even anticipated the link between Irish folk law and her irrentareneye/little spirits:

Irrentareneye’s just described like dwarves, you know? Maybe a lot of people in Ireland knows about those sorts of things. Ireland-aren ye, people from Ireland- nge-ntyele apetyeke mape-arl e, those who migrate here, really knows about those sorts of things, like exactly the same as we do. About leprechaun mape, ye. Yanhe rareye-arteke-arl e apmere arntarntareme. They must be the same, because they look after the land over these as well.

1079 Cronshaw, “Colonies of Heaven,” 2.
The Australian Catholic Church, and many other Christian denominations, are in a demographic transition as migrants from Asia and Africa bring their enlivened models of worship to this country. Within the maelstrom, it is the task of the Catholic Church to hold fast to its deepest tradition stemming from the continent’s very roots. This model of a more inclusive Altyerre-Catholic Church does not threaten the Australian Catholic Church, rather it enhances it.

13.4 Conclusion: An Organic Unity

It has been the contention of this thesis that Altyerre has organically absorbed key elements of Catholicism into its own imaginary so to produce a world-view that satisfies the need for finding meaning in existence, a faith to live by. The lives of so many Arrernte people are characterised by extreme suffering. All of the Arrernte people consulted during this thesis have been confronted by personal tragedy. In some cases members of NMCC have experienced their children predeceasing them or seeing them caught up in anti-social behaviour. Margaret Heffernan speaks candidly of the heartache she experiences in dealing with the alcohol abuse and violence that have overtaken their children:

One of my biggest worries for my kids is their struggle with grog. Right now my three sons are all in and out of prison. When they are sober they are good men, kind and strong … But once they start drinking they change … They threaten and hurt people, especially those close to them … My three daughters also had the same struggle with the grog … They have all been in relationships with men who hurt them and sometimes they too get wild with the grog and hurt other people. Some of [my grandchildren] have been taken into care by child protection.1083

The conclusion of Gathering Sticks can only be described as tragic, yet Margaret emerges with a convinced eschatological Hope. She concludes: “We need to keep working together strongly, and we need to hold our little ones with love.” 1084 Here are the bonds of anpernirrentye/kinship and the strength of arntarntareme/holding, caring nurturing, nourishing, working in unison. Altyerre has prevailed and made itself richer.

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1083 Heffernan, Gathering Sticks, 271.
1084 Heffernan, Gathering Sticks, 277.
The reader will recall the verse the verse of the Our Father translated by Therese Ryder, *Ngkarte alhwarrpe anwerneke awelhaye*, which was translated here as “God accompany us in our sadness”. The NMCC Arrernte have absorbed *Ngkarte*-Jesus, the Cosmic Christ, into their religious consciousness, *Altyerre*, feeling *Ngkarte*’s presence in their sorrow, an accompaniment that is the very essence of both Christianity and *Altyerre*. Persons such as Therese Ryder, M.K. Turner, Margaret Heffernan, Kathleen *Kemarre* Wallace, and so many more, carry themselves in a prophetic manner. *Altyerre*-Catholicism in the way it is lived is a gift to the Catholic Church and to the world. As the *Ngkarte Mikwekenhe Catholic Community* discover more of the latent power that lies inexorably flowing in the deep subterranean depths of the *land/apmere*, as they draw upon the spirit/*utnenge* of the *aknganentyel/creation*, they fashion for themselves a resistance movement that, relying on its inherent richness, will never fail them. And in a manner beyond even the best of Charity known to Christians – despite Invasion, dispossession, marginalisation, impoverishment, incarceration, and the sad dismissal of their gifts by White Australia – they continue to offer this richness to anyone and everyone who walks up to their open front door. All can be One in the Cosmic Christ!
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