NOTICE OF ORDINARY MEETING

The next meeting will be held in the Museum Education Building, North Terrace, Adelaide
at
8.00 p.m. on MONDAY, 24 JULY, 1972

AGENDA

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of 26 June, 1972 Meeting
3. Tabling of Papers and Journals
4. Announcement of New Members
5. Mr. Albert J. Whitelaw, B.A., B.Sc., Dip. Ed., Dip. T. (Sec.), M.A.C.E., Assist. Supt. of Primary Education and Liaison Officer, Aboriginal Education will give an address entitled:—

"THE TEACHER AND HIS PROBLEMS IN LOCATING RESEARCH AND TRANSLATING IT INTO PRACTICAL TERMS"

6. Date of next meeting:— Monday, 28th August, 1972.

R.D.J. Weathersbee
Honorary Secretary,
C/- South Australian Museum,
North Terrace,
ADELAIDE. S.A. 5000.
The following is a precis of the address given to the Society on the 28th April, 1972 by Dr. J.M.R. Young, Ph.D., Senior Lecturer in History, University of Adelaide:

"THE RELIGIOUS RESPONSE TO COLONIALISM IN NEW GUINEA"

One way of comparing New Guinea society as it was until recent times, with our own is to describe our society as 'open' and theirs as 'closed'. By 'open', I mean a society in which human relationships and social organisation are regarded as conventional and therefore subject to alteration by human activity, while a 'closed' society is one in which personal and social relationships are seen as part of the natural order, subject, like the seasons, plants and animals, to the laws of nature and therefore only changeable through supernatural power. In this sense - New Guinea societies were more 'closed' than most - even though it would be inaccurate to describe ours as entirely 'open' - most societies contain both 'closed' and 'open' characteristics.

Colonial policy in New Guinea was a combination of 'development' - of European enterprise and 'protection' of the natives which involved an element of contradiction because pacification was followed by considerable disruption in order to provide labour for the process of development.

But while travel and wider experiences made the peoples of New Guinea conscious of the vast economic gap between them and their European masters it did nothing to alter their view of the world or to doubt the need to obtain supernatural support in order to rectify what they saw as a disruption of the natural order. The missionary monopoly of primary education did little except change the emphasis of religious activity from control of the present:- which seemed hopeless - to control of the future, which might be possible.

Cargo cults therefore emerged and spread as a religious response to an oppressive situation from the 1890's onwards.

Government reaction: as for example in the case of the 1919 Valaila Madness, was to suppress it - partly at least because the cessation of work in expectation of a rosy millennium in the near future was an obstacle to the policy of 'development'.

But this policy was based on a misunderstanding of the problem - Envy of European wealth was believed to have caused a mass delusion whereas the cult was based on the belief that contact
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(Cont'd.)

with the ancestors and hence control of society had been lost, and that a cleansing ritual must be discovered in order to re-establish contact and regain control.

Japanese were seen as ancestors seeking to re-establish contact in a new guise, as were Americans, Australians and occasional visiting anthropologists.

When cults fail, either through government suppression or because of embezzlement of funds by the cult leader this focuses the blame for failure on the administration or the leader without undermining the system of thought on which the cult is based. Often, if the administration responds by rectifying economic grievances, cult thinking is vindicated.

So in practice, cargo cults serve as a transitory organisation which originates as religion and ends up as politics. They are the first social institutions to be consciously created by man. They reveal the possibility that the social order is conventional and therefore humanly changeable. Therefore, instead of regarding them as primitive obstacles to political progress they should be regarded as an essential and unavoidable step in the direction of what we regard as political normality.