

Noel Loos

# White Christ Black Cross

The emergence of a black church



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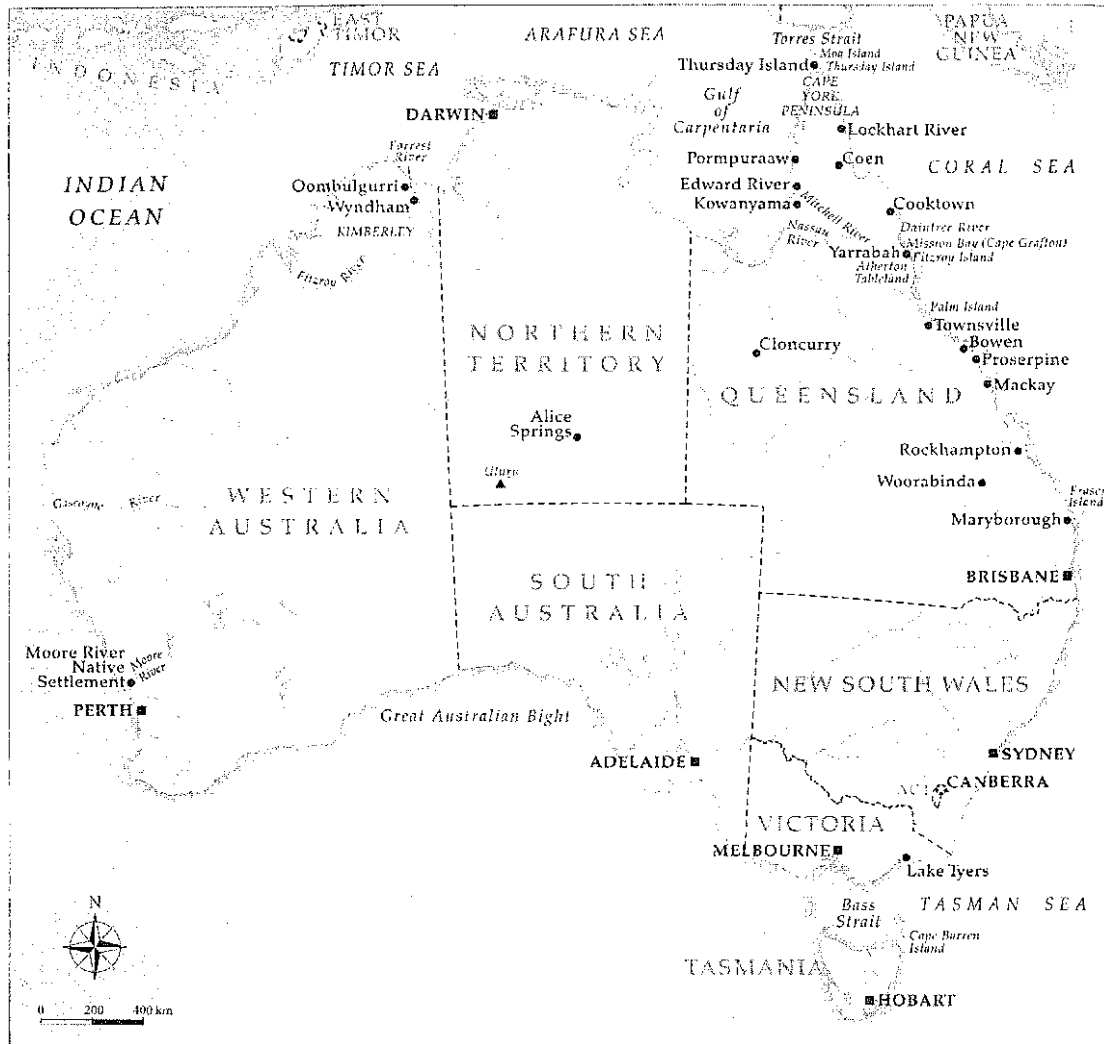
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of deceased persons, and culturally  
sensitive material. AIATSIS apologises for  
any distress this may cause.

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## Abbreviations

ABM	Australian Board of Missions. Now Anglican Board of Missions – Australia
AIATSIS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
AIM	Aboriginal Inland Mission
APNR	Association for the Protection of Native Races
CC	<i>Cooktown Courier</i>
CMS	Church Missionary Society
DAIA	Department of Aboriginal and Islander Advancement
FCAATSI	Federal Council for the Advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders
MM	<i>Mackay Mercury</i>
NAAC	National Aboriginal Anglican Council
NATSIAC	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Anglican Council
PDT	<i>Port Denison Times</i>
Pol. Com.	Commissioner of Police
QPP	Queensland Parliamentary Papers
QSA	Queensland State Archives
UAM	United Aborigines Mission
V & P	Votes and Proceedings of the Queensland Legislative Assembly



*Sites of cultural interaction*

## A Story in Three Parts

This is a story in three parts that are progressively separate, together and apart.

There are the Aboriginal clans who suddenly found a group of white men and women occupying their land, informing them that there was only one belief system, Christianity, which replaced their old religion, their old languages, their old customs and values, and their old way of living.

There were the missionaries searching for their own significance in an alien culture they were determined to shape in a way they could accept.

Then there were the people who sat in the pews in the churches, and their priests and bishops who formed committees, subcommittees and a board of directors in cities sanitised from the reality of the lives of Aboriginal people and the reality of the missions. Here missionaries and the clans they controlled were bound together and yet apart, a small minority of blacks and whites living in separate strata in Christian compounds created to show the glory of the God revealed in Hebrew history and English practice.

The missionaries were fringe dwellers of the Aboriginal culture they chose to live among, and fringe dwellers of their own faith and culture which found it easy not to see the Lazarus in need in the land they occupied from which they derived all that was comfortable and sustaining in their own lives.

I have tried to hear the voices of these three groups of people and to let them speak for themselves. Questions keep recurring. What did the city-based Christians, through their mission agencies and their committees, expect the missionaries to achieve? What did they ultimately think would be the destiny of the Aboriginal people whose lives they were shaping with the support of the local legislatures and the nominal approval of the white Christian majority? From the hindsight of today, how have Aboriginal

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people responded to the faith brought to them in possibly the worst way imaginable?

I have tried to communicate what has been happening in the 150 years since the dominant Christian denomination in the Australian colonies, the Anglicans, formally committed themselves as a church to convert the Aboriginal people to what they said was the saving grace essential to the salvation of Aboriginal people and what they sometimes confessed was their only justification for their occupation of Aboriginal land.

Inescapably, this is my understanding of this complex history. It is a story, then, told in four voices.