Noel Loos

White Christ
Black Cross

The emergence of a black church
Contents

Abbreviations vii
Map viii
A Story in Three Parts ix

1. The Triumph of the Mynah Bird 1
2. Agents of the Aboriginal Holocaust 17
3. In the Beginning: The Australian Board of Missions, the Anglican Church and the Aborigines 1850–1900 43
4. The Golden Age of Missions 1900–1950 58
5. An Expanding Perspective 1900–1950 73
6. Of Massacres, Missionaries, Myths and History Wars 100
7. The End of An Era 117
8. A Black Church: ‘Let My People Go’ 146
9. A New Beginning: A vision from Yarrabah 163

Appendix: The Forrest River Massacre 177
Notes 181
Index 204
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   Cooktown Courier
CMS  Church Missionary Society
DAIA Department of Aboriginal and Islander Advancement
FCAATSI Federal Council for the Advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders
MM  Mackay Mercury
NAAC National Aboriginal Anglican Council
NATSIAC National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Anglican Council
PDT  Port Denison Times
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
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
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.