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Abbot Torres and the complex canonical status of New Norcia

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Chapter Four: Torres goes to Rome

Abbot Torres presented his *Ad Limina* report to the SCPF himself. In 1910, he travelled to Rome and stayed there for six months to settle the problems caused by the union of New Norcia into the SPCCPO and other problems connected with the status of the Drysdale River Mission. The outcome of his trip was significant because he became consecrated Bishop Titular of New Norcia and Apostolic Administrator of the Drysdale River Mission. His criticisms of the nature of the canonical incorporation of New Norcia into the Spanish Province of the Benedictine Congregation did achieve some changes. He proposed that New Norcia become separated from the Spanish Province and revert to be a monastery within the CCPO, under the government of the Italian Province. Abbot Torres was extremely critical of the way the Spanish Province handled the monastic affairs of the BCNN; perhaps he felt that all these problems would end if New Norcia reverted to being a monastery within the Italian province. This would ensure the efficacy of the system and the protection of New Norcia's interests. The necessary outcome of this arrangement would prevent the interference from other superiors and there would be no question about his authority as Abbot of a foreign monastery.

As soon as he arrived in Rome, he visited Monsignor Veccia, the Secretary of Propaganda, and they became engaged in a discussion of the issue of Visitation to the Monastery of New Norcia by the Abbot Visitor. The Secretary made clear Propaganda's position in regards to the matter and informed Abbot Torres that it was agreed that the Abbot Visitor's jurisdiction could only concern the monastic community and not matters related to the Abbey Nullius. He also informed him that the annual fee payable by New Norcia to the abbot visitor for his visitation was no longer required as it was no small burden to the New Norcia Community. The Secretary also established that such expense should be the responsibility of the Cassinese Congregation.¹³¹

Abbot Torres was strongly opposed to the interference of the abbot Visitor in the affairs of the diocese and said:

I informed the Prior and Vicar General, in case the Visitation was made during my absence, that should the Visitor try to get involved and give decrees on any point

¹³¹ Torres, *The Diary of Bishop Torres*, p.- 208, 214.

pertaining to the Diocese, to warn him that it was my intention to protest against those decisions and if that was not sufficient to make a public protest.¹³²

Torres recorded the Secretary's reaction to the above:

The Secretary told me that I was right in thinking that no one should get involved in the affairs of the Abbey Nullius. I need not worry about the Visitation as he had changed his mind about having it carried out. I added that I had no objections to Visitations as long as they limited them to the affairs of the Community.¹³³

His Report also received consideration from the CCPO, the Abbot General discussed the matter with Abbot Torres and expressed his concern and preoccupation. The Abbot General told Torres that 'he would like to raise the question for serious consideration by the next General Chapter'.¹³⁴ It was the Abbot General's view that

...dependence on the General is most practical, but separation of the Province offers great inconveniences, for example during trips to Europe, representation of the Community in the election of deputies for the General Chapter and in the case of Consultors and so on. For all these reasons he believes that union with the Province, even if nominal, may be convenient though not necessary. He agrees that with permission from the Holy See, a visitation need only be carried out every 8 years, that is, once during the tenure of the Abbot General.¹³⁵

They concluded that it was 'judged prudent not to present any petition, more especially because it would go to the Congregation of Religious, and naturally the Cardinal Prefect would resent the separation from the Spanish Province'.¹³⁶ His Report to Propaganda Fide achieved some changes; New Norcia was not obligated to pay the Abbot Visitor the annual fee of 500 lire. The Abbot Visitor's scope of interference was limited; no one but Abbot Torres had the right to deal with matters pertaining to his Diocese. Torres' range of pastoral and missionary care was extended by his ascension to the office of Bishop of New Norcia and Administrator of the Drsydale Mission.

The extent to which this outcome satisfied Abbot Torres will never be known. After 1910, the matter was closed and never discussed in his correspondence or in his personal diary. It is possible that his ascension to Bishop of New Norcia and Apostolic Administrator of the Drsydale River Mission granted him more independence and the ability to act in extraordinary matters without constant and

¹³² Ibid., p. 208.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 238.

¹³⁵ Ibid., pp. 238-9.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 239.

unnecessary consultation with the Abbot Visitor. Indeed, Provincial and General Superiors must have realised that as an Abbot in a foreign destination, Bishop Torres required more freedom to act in matters of his Diocese and Monastic house.