Abbot Torres and the complex canonical status of New Norcia

Maria Teresa Avalos
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Abbot Torres and the complex canonical status of New Norcia

Maria Teresa Avalos

University of Notre Dame Australia
ABBOT TORRES AND THE COMPLEX CANONICAL

STATUS OF NEW NORCIA

1902-1914

Maria Teresa Avalos

This Thesis is presented as partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts, Honours in History

College of Law
The University of Notre Dame
December 1999
Declaration

This Thesis is my own work and no part of it has been submitted for a degree at this, or any other University. Due acknowledgment is made to the work of others used in this thesis.

Marií Teresa Áválos
ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the complex issues of abbatial authority and the canonical status of an abbey in Western Australia. The abbey was founded in 1846 in the Victoria Plains of Western Australia by two Spanish Benedictines, Dom Rosendo Salvado and Dom Joseph Serra, and they called it New Norcia. In September 1900 Bishop Salvado incorporated the New Norcia Monastery into the Spanish Province of the Cassinese Congregation of the Primitive Observance. Bishop Salvado died that very year, but before his death he secured New Norcia's next Abbot, Dom Fulgentius Torres. Torres' period as abbot of New Norcia started in 1902 and came to a sudden end when he died in 1914. In this short period Abbot Torres embarked on an ambitious building programme and by the time of his death he appeared to have been a highly successful abbot. However, in 1906 Torres had attempted to resign. This Thesis explores hitherto unexamined documents which shed light on the reasons for his resignation attempt. It is this dissertation's position that it was the problems caused by the complex canonical status of New Norcia, undefined abbatial authority and conflicts with Provincial Superiors that influenced Abbot Torres's decision to resign in 1906 and later in 1908.
Abbot Fulgentius Torres
Second Abbot of New Norcia
Founder of Drysdale River Mission
Source: The Diary of Bishop Torres
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Acknowledgments

Mrs Wendy Pearce- Archivist of Benedictine Archives of New Norcia

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Mrs Alison Thompson - translator

Mr Joshua

The Avalos Family- My parents Rene and Maria Teresa, My brothers, sister and nephews

Abbreviations

SCPF: Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, also known as Propaganda Fide

CCPO: Cassinese Congregation of the Primitive Observance (Benedictine parent house)

SPCCPO: Spanish Province of the Cassinese Congregation of the Primitive Observance.

BCNN: Benedictine Community of New Norcia
Definitions

Abbot General of the CCPO: this congregation consists of several monasteries in which the same regular observance is followed. These follow the same observance to promote the general interest of the order. The role of the abbot general is to take precedence of all other abbots, he is empowered to pronounce on all matters of discipline, to settle disputes arising between monasteries, to hold canonical visitation, to exercise general supervision for the regular observance of monastic discipline. He resides in Rome he has the ultimate say in all matters regarding the extraordinary government of the monasteries incorporated in his congregation.

Abbot Visitor: this office developed gradually over the centuries out of the system of visitation introduced to make sure that all local ordinaries were governing their respective dioceses in accordance with the law and doctrine of the Catholic Church. The Benedictine Congregation adopted this practice and adapted it to suit its monastic needs. The Abbot General of the Order appointed an Abbot Visitor to visit and supervise the government of the monasteries within his congregation and the provinces within it as well. The Spanish Visiting Abbot might be a regular abbot himself who was chosen or the abbot general of the Spanish Province.

General Chapters: In the Benedictine Order, each congregation has its own separate chapter, which is composed usually of the abbot and an elected delegate from each monastery with the president of the congregation at their head. The general chapter usually deals with the elections of superiors and officials. It settles matters of business and discipline, it hears appeals from its subjects and can draw up or sanction changes to the constitution of the order. It represents the highest authority in the congregation.

Provincial Chapter: Gathering of superiors and officials of a province of the Benedictine Congregation. The matters treated are concerning the province, its monasteries and its officials. Sometimes, agreements reached in these provincial chapters may not need approval of general chapters, but they generally need to be submitted for approval. A Provincial officer acts under the superior of a religious order, he exercises general supervision over all local superiors in the province. The province is generally identified geographically and it may consist of one or more countries. The provincial is elected for a period of 3 to 6 years, he has authority to appoint confessors, call provincial chapters, preside over its deliberations and he takes care that the orders of the General Chapters and the Superior General are properly carried out. His province duty is to make regular visitations of the abbeys in his province in the name of the general and report on the religious and administrative state of the abbeys.
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NEW NORCIA- A Chronology

1844 Dom J. B. Serra and Dom R. Salvado exiled from their monastery of St. Martin at Compostela by the 1835 religious persecution. They went to Rome to the Propaganda Fide Congregation and expressed their desire to dedicate themselves to missionary life.

1845 Fr John Brady consecrated First Bishop of Perth on May 18th in Rome. Now a Bishop he set out to seek missionaries to sail with him to Western Australia. Propaganda assigned Dom Serra and Bishop Salvado to follow Bishop Brady.


1847 A Monastery is built, a stone structure approximately 14 feet high. Dedicated to the Most Holy Trinity and called New Norcia in memory of the birthplace of St. Benedict in Italy.

1849 Dom R. Salvado consecrated Bishop.

1859 1st of April New Norcia was declared a Benedictine Monastery and Bishop Salvado was named its Apostolic Administrator.

1867 28th January, Bishop Salvado appointed Abbot for life and the New Norcia Abbey was raised to rank of Abbey Nullius Diocese with a territory of 16 square miles.

1899 Abbot Salvado goes to Europe with the intention of bringing his foundation into line with Canonical requirements by having New Norcia united to the Subiaco Congregation (The Cassinese Congregation of the Primitive Observance under the division of the Spanish Province).

1900 Sudden death of his expected successor- The Very Rev. Fr. Fulgentius Dominguez on April 14 moved him to act immediately to secure his successor.

1900 Bishop Salvado died on the 29th of December.

Abbot Fulgentius Torres

1861 Born on June 24th at Ibiza, Balearic Islands, Spain.
1880 Enters the Episcopal Seminary of Vich, Barcelona.
1885 He takes the Benedictine Habit on June 8th, receives religious name of Fulgentius. Meets Salvado in Spain at Montserrat.
1886 He takes simple vows on June 21st.
1887 Ordained priest on June 5th.
1889 13th July takes final vows, remains in Montserrat for six years.
1895 He is sent to open new mission in the Philippines.
1897 He is called back to Montserrat.
1898 He is appointed Rector of the Montserrat Church in Naples.
1900 He meets with Bishop Rosendo Salvado, who asks him to become his successor at New Norcia, Western Australia.
1902 He is elected Abbot on the 2nd of October. Goes to Rome to receive Abbatial Blessing.

Activities of Bishop Torres at New Norcia:

1901-3 Frontage and third storey added to the north wing of the monastery.
1903 Balconies, verandahs and staircases remodelled; erection of central portion of the monastery; reading room, workshops. All buildings roofed with iron.
1904-6 Building of St. Gertrude’s ladies college, which officially opened in 1908.
1905 Third Plenary Council in Sydney under presidency of Cardinal Moran entreated Abbot Torres to undertake the foundation of mission for the aboriginal peoples in North Western Australia.
1906 Torres’s Journey of exploration of North West coast of Western Australia.
1907-8 Erection of new campanile façade to the church, new altars for the church and a new chapel for the monastery.
1908 He founded the Drysdale Mission in the far north of Western Australia.
1909 St. Joseph’s Orphanage for aboriginal girls.
1910 Drysdale Mission was canonically approved by the Apostolic See on the 4th of May.
1911-3 Erection of St. Idaephonsus’ College for boys.
1913 St. Mary’s new Orphanage for aboriginal boys, and the whole of the monastery library was remodelled.
1914 Bishop Torres died on the 5th of October.
INTRODUCTION

New Norcia, 132 kilometres north of Perth, is unique in Australia; it is a town wholly owned by monks. Benedictine monks established a monastery here in 1846 and the town is now one of the most valuable elements of the National Estate.

(David Hutchinson)

New Norcia’s history expands over a period of 133 years, seven abbots have governed the monastery and this Benedictine Foundation has had to adapt to circumstances of time and place to ensure its existence and development. Generally, the average person associates New Norcia with its Spanish founder, Bishop Rosendo Salvador and his monks; with the evangelization of aboriginal people, successful farming settlement and beautiful architecture. All these are true and they have become part of the romanticised narrative of New Norcia’s history. However, there is so much of New Norcia’s history after Abbot Salvador that has not been researched and examined thoroughly. There are fundamental issues that need to be studied and that can provide a fuller and more thematic approach to the history of the Benedictine Community of New Norcia.

This thesis will examine and discuss the difficulties and limitations that Dom Fulgentius Torres encountered by assuming the office of Abbot Nullius of the Benedictine Community of New Norcia in Western Australia. These difficulties and limitations included the problems caused by distance and unreliable communication. However, the most serious source of problems for the BCNN had its origin in the complex canonical status of the Abbey of New Norcia. The Abbot’s authority was limited by a network of superiors and organizations to which he had to give account of New Norcia’s progress and rely on to solve its problems. It is the aim of this thesis to discuss these issues and assess their importance in relation to the development of a Benedictine monastic and missionary community in a foreign country. This thesis is one more example of the characteristic conflicts of authority and interests that have been the subject of contemporary religious historical studies.

1 Note that from this point the Benedictine Community of New Norcia will be referred to as BCNN or New Norcia.
Abbot Torres arrived in April of 1901 and stayed in New Norcia until his sudden death in October 1914. The story of how Torres became New Norcia’s abbot is remarkable; Bishop Salvado was in Rome at the end of 1900 when he fell sick. He realised that he had to define who his successor should be and, given that Dom Fulgentius Dominguez died back home in New Norcia, he decided that there could be no one better than Dom Fulgentius Torres. Abbot Torres inherited the monastic and missionary New Norcia and its complex status. This created problems which, according to Abbot Torres’ and his community’s opinion, could have been prevented from reaching an importunate dimension; and which Torres had then to solve in order to guarantee his community’s future. He took this matter to heart to such an extent that, after five years of governing the community, he felt unable to cope with the problems and he expressed his desire to resign his office.

His failed attempt to resign from his duties of abbot needs to be discussed. It is obvious that the conflicts resulting from his and his community’s unnecessary dependency on the authority of Provincial Superiors, particularly that of the Abbot Visitor of the Spanish Province, pressured him to seek a way out of such distressing position. It is interesting to see how notwithstanding these problems, he was achieving considerable success in giving New Norcia a new direction; he was earning the respect and esteem of those around him and he was working on the consolidation of the work of his predecessor.

Chapter one will concentrate firstly on tracing the development of Benedictine Monasticism until its present Congregational System of Government. This discussion will be placed in the context of St Benedict’s Rule; specifically its statements regarding the role of the abbot, the government of monasteries and the system of Visitation. Secondly, the chapter will discuss New Norcia’s relationship with the Cassinese Congregation and later the Cassinese Congregation of the Primitive Observance, the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith and its ecclesiastical status within the Australian and Western Australian Church Hierarchy. Thirdly, a look at New Norcia’s foundation and development under its founder, Dom

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2 Dom Fulgentius Dominguez had been in New Norcia for quite sometime. Abbot Salvado considered him the best person to take his place; Salvado instructed him in the government of New Norcia and had many times left him in charge of the mission. He was Prior of New Norcia but died soon after Salvado left New Norcia for Rome in 1899.

3 Note the abbreviated form of the Congregation’s name: CCPO.

4 Note Abbreviated form of the institution: SCPF or also referred to as Propaganda or Propaganda Fide.
Rosendo Salvado, will prove most pertinent here for an understanding of the subsequent development of New Norcia under Abbot Torres.

Chapter Two will be dedicated to an analysis of the primary sources that reveal the impracticality of the arrangements established to secure the canonical union of New Norcia with the Spanish Province of the Cassinesse Congregation of the Primitive Observance. Chapter three will discuss Abbot Torres’ resignation and its relation to the problematic status of New Norcia. This chapter will attempt to demonstrate the extent to which the intricate canonical status of the monastery placed a severe strain on Torres’ office and how this created conflicts between him and superiors of the Spanish Province. Chapter four will discuss the outcome of Abbot Torres’ struggle to resolve these problems.

Most of the secondary historical works that have dealt with the history and continual significance of New Norcia have centred around the salient figure of Dom Rosendo Salvado and his period as abbot from 1846-1900. More recent works such as *A Town Like No Other* edited by David Hutchison; *Kalumburu: The Benedictine Mission and the Aborigines 1908-1975* by Dom Eugene Perez and other publications by the Benedictine Community of New Norcia have attempted to cover the period of Bishop Torres, but do so quite briefly and their importance is discussed separately below.


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5 Note Abbreviated forms: SPCCPO or Spanish Province.
1908 to 1939 and Jennifer Ward, *A History of the Drysdale River Mission*. These are characterised by a narrative approach of the subject matter and by the lack of usage of written primary sources. However, the authors did use Oral information as a primary source. They all dedicated a chapter to a narrative of Abbot Torres’ involvement in the exploration and foundation of the Drysdale River Mission.

However, no comprehensive historical research has been conducted to produce a proper history of New Norcia under Bishop Torres. So far, no one has produced such history by going to the written primary sources available at the Benedictine Archives of New Norcia. Except for Father James Flood’s book *Tribute of an Irish Secular Priest*, a contemporary of Torres and whose book attempted to include the contribution of Abbot Torres in a history of New Norcia. A significant attempt was made by Dom Eugene Perez, who was the translator of the *Diary of Bishop Torres*, the author of the books mentioned above and he also wrote *Twentieth Century New Norcia 1900-1960*, a piece not intended for publication. It is probably the best account of Abbot Torres’ influence and contribution to the development of New Norcia and the only work in which the problems caused by the canonical status of New Norcia are briefly mentioned. Besides Dom Perez, other monks of New Norcia wrote about the important contribution of Abbot Torres to the progress of their community. For example, Dom Eladio Rios and Fr Roberto Bas.

The Benedictine Archives for this particular period include most of Abbot Torres’ correspondence in Catalan, Spanish, Italian, English and official Church documents written in Latin. Documents of a more personal type like diary entries and others like business documents have helped put together a picture of the activities and enterprises of the community. The Monastery’s Chronicle is useful in giving a sense

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7. Eladio Rios, *Historical Account of St Ilephonsus’ College in the Mission- Monastery of New Norcia in Australia*, New Norcia, 1959. Abbot Torres was the designer of the plans for the school and the founder; the account concentrates on his direct involvement in the building process and his love for the school.
8. Roberto Bas, Prior of New Norcia in Abbot Torres’s time, he wrote an article for the *Ecos Magazine* published by the Benedictine Foundation in Manila, Philippines. No other details of publication or year of writing are provided. His article was a description of the works of art of New Norcia, the works of Father Lesmes. Father Bas emphasises the direct involvement and interest of Abbot Torres in this aspect.
9. Benedictine Archives, New Norcia, WA. Abbot Torres held correspondence with influential Benedictines from Spain- Abbot Jose Deas of the Monastery of Montserrat, with Abbot General of the CCCPO, Italy Mauro Serafini and D. Antonio Ma Marcet and influential clergymen from within Australia.
of the community’s way of life and is a valuable source for verification of information obtained from other major sources.\textsuperscript{10}

The documents that have given life to this thesis, and the ones that reveal the Abbot’s urgent preoccupation with the canonical status of the BCNN, are his Official Report to the SCPF of 1910;\textsuperscript{11} eleven letters to Abbot Jose Deas of the Monastery of Montserrat; one letter in Italian by Mauro Serafini, the Abbot General of the CCPO; one letter and an official document regarding his resignation by Abbot Antonio Marcet of the SPCCPO, and the English Translation of the Diary of Bishop Torres.

The Report to SCPF was written by Abbot Torres in 1910 and presented to Propaganda the same year. He wrote the report in Latin and in it he discussed the most urgent issues concerning the New Norcia Community; the problematic canonical status of the abbey and the limitations this placed upon the abbot. The letters to Abbot Jose Deas, although some were written prior to the presentation of the report to SCPF, are illustrative of the problems discussed in it. The letter by Abbot General Mauro Serafini and the documents by Abbot Antonio Maria Marcet are the only existing evidence of his proposed resignation. Unfortunately, there is no copy available in the Benedictine Archives of the letter or official document by Abbot Torres in which he presented his resignation. Finally, the English translation of The Diary of Bishop Torres, in particular the entries for 1910 (Business in Rome), are of great value because they reveal the outcome of his battle to resolve the problems caused by the nominal union of the abbey to the SCCPO.

It is the goal of this thesis to discuss thoroughly the fundamental elements of this intricate aspect of the history of New Norcia. All in order to understand their magnitude and their impact on the ability of Abbot Fulgentius Torres to govern the Benedictine Community of New Norcia for twelve years.

\textsuperscript{10} Chronicle or brief Diary of the most notable events that have taken place in the Benedictine Mission of New Norcia from 1901 to 1914. Several brothers contributed to the writing and keeping of the Chronicle; Torres was the chronicler for a few months in 1910.

\textsuperscript{11} The original was written in Latin, it was translated into English by Mrs. Alison Thompson in 1999. The presentation of a report of this nature was a practice carried out for centuries. Diocesan bishops and ordinaries had to send a report to Rome every five years on the state of the church in their respective circumscriptions.
Chapter One: The Benedictine Foundation of the Australian Catholic Church

Before embarking on a narrative of the foundation of the Catholic Church in Australia, and especially Western Australia, it will prove useful to understand St Benedict’s monasticism, its development through the centuries and its subsequent involvement in the formation of the Australian Catholic Church.

The love of God and a life dedicated to Him is the main principle of monasticism; the one that makes the experience of it a truly spiritual experience. However, the notions of solitude, contemplation and fidelity needed for a life dedicated to God were not the conception of a single man,\(^\text{12}\) rather they were the principles of a contemplative life that developed over a long period of time starting with the desert monks or hermits of the East.

St Benedict was amongst the first to introduce a unified structure, stability and a solid direction to monastic life. This is reflected in his Rule, which contains not only the teachings found in the Holy Scriptures but also the teachings of monastic fathers of the East and the West as well as other religious and philosophical teachings.\(^\text{13}\)

The Rule of St Benedict surpassed earlier attempts to set down a system for monastic life because it was actually a true rule of life. It was, and still is, an ordered and practical code of laws regulating the working of the monastery.\(^\text{14}\) It provided simple and concise legislative measures. It has been described as 'a monument of legislative art', ‘remarkable alike for its completeness, its simplicity, and its adaptability’.\(^\text{15}\) This last sentence brings to light two of the most remarkable features of the text. Namely its completeness and its simplicity; its deals with the important aspects of governing a monastery. It introduces theological truths in a simple and easy manner. Its adaptability has allowed it to be the single most important rule for monastic life and the foundation of many other religious Orders. The use of it in monastic houses spread outside of Monte Cassino and into the neighbouring European Countries. In later centuries, the missionary Benedictines transplanted the creed of their order to other continents, for example Africa, Asia, America and Australia.

\(^\text{13}\) Ibid., pp. 28-29.
Comprehensive accounts of the development and importance of Benedictine Monasticism have been supplied by many scholars. A noteworthy work is that of Dom Cuthbert Butler's *Benedictine Monachism*. Most pertinent here is his analysis of the duties of the abbot. Dom Butler outlines the several roles and duties of the abbot; first he is Christ's vicegerent in the monastery, he should be obeyed and loved as if he were Christ himself. Secondly, the abbot is the monks' spiritual father and guide; thus they should develop a loving relationship like that of offspring and parent. Thirdly, the abbot ought to be a good shepherd of God's flock, being a shepherd implies the duties of guidance and care for his monks. Next, the abbot should be like a wise physician in the manner he disciplines and deals with faults within his community of monks. He ought to be a master in both senses of the word; connoting the role of ruler and teacher. He is the supreme authority in the monastery, he should be obeyed, respected and he should establish discipline and teach his disciples the virtues of Christian life. Lastly, the abbot ought to be a wise, prudent and just administrator of God's community of monks.16

Thus according to St. Benedict, the ideal qualities of an abbot should be wisdom, knowledge of divine law, chastity, sobriety, mercy, moderation, prudence, consideration, humility and serenity. The government of the monastery is his major concern, everything depends on his will and judgement; he possesses unrestricted powers in the internal affairs of the monastery.17

St Benedict allowed external ecclesiastical authorities to assist in the running of a monastery. He encouraged the Episcopal visitation of a monastery; the visit of the local bishop represented the only means to supervise and ensure that the abbot and his monks adhered to a proper monastic life. Gradually, this bishop's visit became a regular feature of monastic life and later monasteries were subjected to a double system of visitation- the original bishop's visitation and the visit of a Benedictine appointed by the Holy See. This was a provision introduced by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. The formation of a Congregational System of Benedictine Government, whose main concern was to ensure the uniform level of observance of monastic life according to the Rule, established that either the president of the congregation, or visitors delegated by the General Chapter were the ordinary visitors.

16 Ibid., pp. 184-186.
of monasteries of the congregation. This general chapter was provincial in nature and its regularity allowed provincials of the congregation to oversee the affairs of the monasteries of the province.\textsuperscript{18}

Gradually, this provincial congregational system developed a set of constitutions and guidelines supplementary to the Rule; abbots had to follow these in the same manner they were expected to follow the Rule.\textsuperscript{19} This was indeed a legitimate and workable system; the only disadvantage for abbots was that it limited the scope of their powers. By placing them as superiors amongst several higher superiors, their importance became mitigated; those above them came to represent the real and supreme authority. In St Benedict’s idea of rightful administration of a monastery, the interference of higher superiors in the internal affairs of the community led to many difficulties; mainly because the relationship between abbot and his monks was broken.\textsuperscript{20} The extent to which this system developed will be discussed below.

The introduction of delegates to visit monasteries of the province signified that these were given the powers to judge the spiritual and temporal state of the monastery. In order to achieve this, the appointed visitor had to examine the religious life, observance and discipline of the community. Thus, he was given unlimited access to studies, administration, finances and state of property. He had the power to interview monks individually; the latter had to inform him of any area that may need correction, reformation and improvement. Ultimately, his function was to see that the law of God, the ecclesiastical laws, the Rule and all supplementary regulations and constitutions of the congregation were observed faithfully. Once his visit concluded, he could make enactments to address any particular area that he considered needy of improvement and reformation.\textsuperscript{21}

The supremacy of the abbot’s office became further restricted by the abolishment of its perpetuity in an attempt to quash the dominant and corruptive practice of commendatory\textsuperscript{22} abbots, especially in Italy. This Congregational system

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., pp. 218-222.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., pp. 218-222.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., pp. 222-224.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., pp. 220-221.
\textsuperscript{22} Commendatory Abbots were appointed as temporary trustees of monasteries. Their duties were to administer the estates of an abbey during a vacancy; in most cases they managed to retain the office for life and claimed a portion of the revenues for their maintenance. This led to serious abuses because in many cases they had no vocation, no previous experience and they had not earned the right to be
established a norm in which every office of importance held in a monastery was to last for a year only.  

Two centuries went by before an attempt was made to bring together monasteries under the central and supreme authority of a single abbot. The first man to attempt this without much success was St Benedict of Aniane in 817; his vision was to include all monasteries scattered through the Carolingian empire. In the tenth century in England something similar took place, but there was no real creation of a scheme of centralised government. These attempts were followed by the more successful ones made by the Cluniac and Cistercian systems; although each differed in relevant areas, they were both hierarchical and centralised monastic systems.

In the thirteenth century, a large scale movement took place to modify monastic observance in Germany and England. In general terms, the systems developed by the religious houses in each country only intended to create a system to ensure that all monasteries observed the principles of the Rule, practised uniformity of life and cooperation between all monasteries.

The most important phase of this congregational movement in monastic life was its expression in the abbey of Justina of Padua in the year 1421. Several monastic houses joined to establish a congregation; they did this by meeting in a yearly general chapter composed of the superiors or delegates of each community. These elected a committee of eight or nine delegates; the committee then appointed the president, the visitors, the abbot for each monastery together with its officials. All were to hold office for a year only and they were to be mere deputies whose actions were largely dependent on the authority of the general superior. Lastly, monks did not belong to a single house, but to the congregation.

This congregation later embraced most of the Benedictine houses in Italy and changed its name to the Cassinese Congregation. This system of monastic national government inspired monastic houses in France and Spain, where different national conditions and the desire to adhere faithfully to St Benedict’s ideal monastic


23 Ibid., pp. 243-244.
24 Ibid., p. 236.
25 Ibid., p. 237.
26 Ibid., pp. 238-239.
27 Ibid., pp. 239-243.
28 Ibid., pp. 243-247.
organization set their systems apart from the Italian system. In Spain, monks made their profession to a house; to the monastic family of that particular house. The abbots, although elected for a short time, were really the rulers of the house and the matters of the monastery remained truly independent of the congregation’s control.29

In 1872, there was a division within the congregation and part of it formed what is now known as the Cassinese Congregation of the Primitive Observance. This was a fully organised order with a centralised government and, as its name denotes, it was an order whose main aim was to return to the keeping of the letter of the Rule. It became known as the Subiaco Congregation and it was divided in Provinces that spread over several countries in Europe: the Italian, French, Belgian, English and Spanish provinces. These managed to spread throughout the world; the Spanish province for example, founded monasteries in Australia and the Philippine Islands. The Belgian Province established monasteries in Holland and the Rhineland, the French in England, USA, Argentina and the Holy Land.

The Spanish Province comprised initially the Monastery of Montserrat; the only monastery left from the Congregation of Valladolid which was destroyed by the revolution of 1831. The Subiaco Congregation was governed by the Abbot General; he was assisted by a consultor from each province and the government of each was carried out by abbot-visitors. All these remained in office for twelve years. The monasteries were governed by an abbot and his term lasted for three years and he was elected in a General Chapter.30 Finally in 1899, Pope Leo XIII managed to introduce the abbatial system; which meant that the abbot was elected by his monks by universal suffrage, half the council was elected by the community, the important affairs of the monastery were submitted to General chapters where they were discussed and decided upon by all. A body of representatives was chosen by the community to be present at the general chapter composed of two from each monastery and the elected delegate and only four co-opted members. The president was not superior of superiors but merely the president, the monks were entirely the subjects of their abbot.31 The hierarchy within the CCPO can be illustrated in the following diagram:

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29 Ibid.
30 Cardinal Domenico Serafini, Historical Sketch of the Subiaco Congregation (Cassinese of the Primitive Observance) 1922. No other publication details available, the translator’s name remains unknown. Copy of translation provided by Benedictine Archives of New Norcia, p. 12.
31 Ibid., p. 246.
Abbot General of CCPO

Abbot Visitor of a Province
(Spanish, English, Belgian or French)

Abbot Ordinary of a monastery within the Province

Monk.

Relevant to the development of this thesis is the missionary and monastic work that the Benedictines carried out in Australia. The Benedictines arrived in Australia when it was still known as New Holland and Van Diemen’s Land; back in the first half of the nineteenth century. Initially, the Vicar-Apostolic of the London District administered affairs of the Catholic Church in the new colony. In 1819 the Mission of the Cape of Good Hope- inclusive of Mauritius, New Holland and the islands in the Pacific Territory- was established with its Bishop’s quarters in Mauritius.

It was not until the appointment of John Bede Polding, a Benedictine from the monastery of Downside, England as the Vicar-Apostolic and Bishop of Hiero-Caesarea (New Holland and Van Diemen’s Land) that solid foundations were established for the development of the Catholic Church in Australia. The subsequent development of the Catholic Church in Australia is a remarkable story; one dominated by conflicts of interest and authority, the roots of these were found in religion, politics and economics. Bishop Bede Polding set his hopes high on the development of a Benedictine Australian Catholic Church. His personal plea to the SCPF in 1840 revealed the direction he wanted to lead and the difficulties that made his pastoral and missionary tasks the more difficult:

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32 From young age he desired to go to Botany Bay, when he was 17 years old he entered the Benedictine Order in 1811 and took his vows the following year. He was a monk at the Monastery of Downside, Somerset in England. He was Novice Master from 1824 to 1834 and Subprior from 1836, O’Donoghue, Frances, The Bishop Of botany Bay: The Life of Jonh Bede Polding, Australia’s First Catholic Archbishop. (Angus & Robertson Publishers; London, Sydney, 1982) pp. 2-4.


In Australia, our Ecclesiastical Establishments are in their infancy—Church Revenues we have none—whilst the necessity of providing a Seminary without delay, presses upon us with greater force from the very circumstances in which we are placed.\textsuperscript{35}

This Seminary had a crucial role to play:

Our Seminary is intended to supply Missionaries to a country immense in extent, wherein are thousands of uninstructed Natives in the lowest state of barbarism; thousands of Catholics without the sacramental means of salvation; numbers of well-intentioned individuals prepared to embrace the truth. In our Archdiocese we have only 25 priests, in an extent of country of 1500 miles in length, and many hundreds in breadth, having throughout a scattered population. Double that number would not suffice.

Your are invited to assist in giving permanent existence to the Church of Australia. This can only be effected by the institution of a Seminary. And it would appear to be in the sweet designs of Providence, that just at the time when the ruins (sad emblem!) of the first Monastery of SS. Peter and Paul of the Holy Order of S Benedict, erected at Canterbury by the Blessed Augustine and the Monks who accompanied him to labour in the conversion of our Pagan Ancestors..... it would appear, I say, that we should endeavour to transplant that same Holy Order, in which We have been nurtured, to the far distant climes of Australia.\textsuperscript{36}

J. Molony in \textit{The Australian Hierarchy and the Holy See, 1840-1880} outlined the factors that made Bishop Polding’s dream, only a dream. Actually, he called this vision a myth and its failure was due to the lack of Benedictines; the English Congregation could not afford to supply the men and obtaining Benedictines priests from other congregations proved ineffective. There was also the secular nature of the clergy, mainly Irish, then present in Australia and the prominence of the English Protestants.\textsuperscript{37} Finally, Molony wrote:

It was already an anachronism even in the mid-nineteenth century to try to build a church on the framework of Benedictine Monasticism. In 1852 Rome flatly refused Polding’s request that the archbishops for the see of Sydney would always be chosen from the Black Monks. It was clear recognition of an historical fact. The great days of Benedictine monasticism would never be repeated even in Australia.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p. 125.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., pp. 126-127.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., p. 178.
One major concern of the Bishop Polding was the growing demand for Catholic priests in the Swan River Colony in Western Australia.\textsuperscript{39} To cater for the spiritual needs of the Catholic settlers in such desolate part of Australia, he requested help and reinforcements. Only then could he afford to dispatch priests to different parts of the country. Western Australia saw the Irish Reverend John Brady, who had arrived in Sydney on 1838, appointed as its Vicar General. He set foot in Fremantle on 8th December 1843.\textsuperscript{40}

Soon after his arrival, Brady sailed to Rome in order to make a direct request for missionaries and financial assistance.\textsuperscript{41} While there, he was consecrated Bishop of his Diocese and consequently he was introduced to several religious men and women who had previously professed profound interest in missionary work. Amongst these were the two Spaniards who would, within a short period of time, prove to be chief contributors to the growth and consolidation of both missionary and religious work in the state.\textsuperscript{42}

The subsequent development of the Australian Catholic Hierarchy is essential for an understanding of the future role of New Norcia. The Perth diocese included all of Western Australia. It was a “suffragan”\textsuperscript{43} of the Archdiocese of Sydney. The whole of Australia was one ecclesiastical province with one Archbishop in Sydney until Melbourne became an Archdiocese in 1874. Melbourne had four suffragans: Ballarat, Sandhurst, Adelaide and Perth. In 1887, Adelaide became an archbishopric and its suffragans included the dioceses of Perth and Port Augusta. This ecclesiastical arrangement lasted until 1913 when Bishop Clune of Perth became the Archbishop of Perth; the diocese’s suffragan circumscriptions were Geraldton, the Abbey Nullius of New Norcia and the Prefecture Apostolic of the Kimberley.\textsuperscript{44} In 1971, a major part of the territory of the abbey nullius of New Norcia was returned to the Archdiocese of

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., p. 67.
\textsuperscript{41} D. F. Bourke, The History of the Catholic Church in Western Australia (Vanguard Service Print; Perth, 1979) pp. 9-10.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., pp. 10-11.
\textsuperscript{44} This information was taken from section entitled: ‘Ecclesiastical Status of Western Australia in Martin Griver’s Time’ in L. J. Goody, Martin Griver: Second Catholic Bishop of Perth (1814-1886). An Appreciation to Commemorate the Centenary of his Death. (Catholic Archdiocese of Perth: Perth, 1986) p. 44.
Perth, in 1982 the rest of the territory was incorporated into the Archdiocese and the New Norcia was no longer independent of its Diocese.

New Norcia’s special status of Abbey Nullius connoted a privileged position. Abbey is another term used to refer to a monastery. Nullius comes from the Latin and means ‘of no diocese’. Thus, an abbey nullius is an abbey that has territory exempt from the jurisdiction of the local bishop. Its standing is equivalent to that of a diocese. The Abbot Nullius fulfills the responsibilities of a bishop, even if he is not consecrated a bishop by Roman officials. He is a religious prelate assigned to govern his abbey, and also the clergy and laity of a territory that is separate from any diocese.45

The SCPF is another organisation within the Roman Catholic Church which has had a direct function in the development of the Australian Catholic Church. It is the Department of the Roman Curia concerned with the direction and administration of the missionary activity of the Church. A commission of cardinals established by Pope Pius V in 1568 and Gregory XIII in 1573 for the Orient and later expanded to include the evangelization of Protestants in Europe. Pope Clement VIII in 1599 named the commission Propaganda Fide and enlarged the importance of this commission of cardinals. In 1622, Pope Gregory XV created the Congregation of Propaganda Fide by the bull ‘Inscrutabili Divinae’. In the beginning its competence was very broad, it embraced all matters relating to missionary activity, the only limitation for the commission being that particular serious affairs had to be referred to the Pope. In 1908 its powers were modified by Pope Pius X; he restricted its competence in regard to extent of territory, matters of faith, matrimonial cases, the disciplines of the sacred sites and religious missionaries. Pope Paul VI gave it the present name when he reorganized the Roman Curia in 1967. Its responsibilities include the direction and coordination of evangelization of all peoples and missionary cooperation throughout the world. It fosters missionary vocations, cares for the education of catechists and clergy, it supervises the establishment of churches as well as the delineation of territorial boundaries for future dioceses and organizes distribution of subsidies for missionary work.46

Being a Benedictine Missionary and later a Monastic institution meant that New Norcia had a dual role; namely that of observing the principles of monastic life in accordance with the Rule of St. Benedict and fostering its growth. Its missionary role included pastoral care and the evangelization of Aboriginal peoples in Western Australia. This function was supervised and dictated by the constitution of the SCPF. In addition to these roles, its canonical status of Abbey Nullius implied that it was immediately subject to the Holy See; however its canonical union with the SPCCPO in 1900 meant that New Norcia’s abbot had limited powers to exercise his office, for he was immediately subject to the Abbot Visitor of the Spanish Province and to the Abbot General of the CCPO. The above will be discussed in depth in the following chapter.

Had Dom Rosendo Salvado given up his desire to enter the priesthood, when the liberal Government of Spain in 1835 decreed the suppression of all religious orders, and had he not followed his calling by becoming a monk in the Monastery of La Cava, New Norcia would have a different history if any at all. He met his friend Dom Joseph Serra in those turbulent years and together they went to offer their services to the SCPF; together they sailed to their destination, what was then called the Swan River Colony in Western Australia.  

Their arrival in Fremantle and their stay in Perth for a few weeks allowed them to witness the abiding attitudes towards and the treatment of the Aboriginal peoples by authorities and European settlers. The Spaniards’ experience of such injustice increased their anxiety and desire to initiate their labour with the Aboriginal peoples. They thought it best to withdraw from town life and work with the untouched tribes of the uninhabited inland areas of the colony. After many trials and instability they found a suitable place by the Moore River called Maura. They called it New Norcia in memory of the birthplace of St Benedict.

Amongst the difficulties they encountered there were several that could have discouraged them to continue. The difficulties were the lack of considerable material resources to meet their missionary needs; the language barrier between them and the

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47 Birt, p. 469. Salvado and Serra were members of the monastic community of St Martin at St James of Compostela, escaping persecution and following their calling they took refuge in the Italian Cassinese Abbey of La Cava, near Naples.

48 Ibid., pp. 470-471.

49 Birt, p. 478.
aboriginal people they intended to civilize. They had no safe residence or the means
to build adequate housing. They had no means of fast or reliable communication, no
means of transport, Perth was 82 km away and there was no road in between. They
had limited human resources and a limited knowledge of the land and its inhabitants.
Regardless, they continued and their will and perseverance enabled them to overcome
each one of these obstacles to the best of their capabilities.

Salvado’s long term vision has been comprehensively summarised by
McMahon in the following points. Salvado required land in which he could grow the
crops and take care of the livestock needed to supply enough food to feed the
Aboriginal people he wanted to attract for his mission. This he achieved to an extent,
for he acquired the land and saw many successful harvesting years, but the Aboriginal
people were not entirely persuaded to settle in the mission or its surrounding areas. He
envisioned orphanages in which he could inculcate the Christian faith and educate the
young. He hoped to achieve a Christian native farming settlement, New Norcia would
act as the administrative centre by providing support to the Aboriginal farmers. He
wanted to make reliable labourers out of the Aboriginal people, he would pay them
for their work and provide support. Lastly, Salvado wanted to see the growth of the
religious community by establishing a native priesthood, thus enabling Aboriginal
priests to preach and spread the gospel of God to their own people.\textsuperscript{50} It is not
surprising then, to see Father E. J. Stormon describe Salvado’s as ‘first and foremost
the apostle to the aborigines’.

Most historical works on Salvado’s New Norcia have concentrated on a
glorifying study of his life’s work. In a publication by the BCNN in 1936 entitled New
Norcia: Historical Guide to all its Institutions, Salvado’s period (1846-1900) is
referred to as pre-eminently the “missionary stage which corresponds to the
foundation and consolidation of New Norcia as a Mission for the Australian
Aborigines”.\textsuperscript{51} Salvado is described as “the man who was its soul and driving
power”.\textsuperscript{52} The community’s life is described in the following paragraph:

Under the circumstances these intrepid labourers could not for many years bind
themselves down to strict monastic routine. Theirs was rather a patriarchal kind of
life. They followed to the letter the Rule of the holy Patriarch St. Benedict, as

\textsuperscript{50} John T. McMahon. Bishop Salvado: Founder of New Norcia, West Australia. (Patersons Printing
Press LTD; Perth, 1943) pp. 5-7.
\textsuperscript{51} New Norcia: Historical Guide to all Its Institutions. Compiled and Illustrated by Monachus. (The
Benedictine Abbey, New Norcia; Western Australia, 1936) No page numbers.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
embodied in and interpreted by their father and leader, whom they revered and loved. Most of their time was spent in the open air; yet a monastery had to be provided for them.\textsuperscript{53}

New Norcia was an impressive flourishing settlement as early as 1855 and this statement can be illustrated by a report of a magistrate of Toodyay.

Extensive improvements have been carried out in this neighbourhood (or New Norcia), and several substantial buildings erected since my last visit. An excellent mill, likely to be of great service to the district, a barn, stock, yards, perfect fences of immense strength, also a large chapel with a large bell frequently heard at a distance of 15 and 16 miles. The establishment consists of 40 men, blacksmiths, carpenters, ploughmen, etc. The father got about 150 acres under crop. Their ploughs, each worked by two bullocks, are about 150 lbs, and if I may judge from the appearance of the crops, I should say they are most efficient.\textsuperscript{54}

During this period he managed to obtain a post office, housing for the few Aboriginal people living in the mission, he established the two orphanages for Aboriginal children.\textsuperscript{55} His achievements for the improvement and continuation of monastic life included first his success in persuading the Cassinese Congregation of his Order to reserve six places each year in their novitiate at Subiaco for young Benedictines destined for New Norcia. He was instrumental in the passing of the decree in 1867 that enabled New Norcia to become a Prefecture Apostolic and Abbey Nullius independent of Perth. This meant that all future Benedictine establishments in Western Australia were to come under his leadership for he was made Abbot of New Norcia for life. Lastly in 1899 he brought about the Canonical Union of New Norcia with the CCPO under the division of the Spanish Province.\textsuperscript{56}

The history of New Norcia is long and rich and understanding the community’s significance at all levels requires an understanding of its long standing history. It is a religious community that was founded in the nineteenth century in Colonial Western Australia based on the a mode of life that had its origins in Medieval Europe. Without an understanding of the significance of St Benedict and his Rule for monastic life, one could not understand what the founder of New Norcia and his successors set out to do in New Norcia. This chapter has looked at the

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{54} Eugene Perez. \textit{Dom Salvado's New Norcia: An Account of His Mission in Western Australia 1846-1900}. (Published in 1970, no other publication details given) p. 108.

\textsuperscript{55} New Norcia, Monachus.

\textsuperscript{56} Dom Rosendo Salvado. \textit{The Salvado Memoirs}. E. J. Stormon (ed, trans) (University of Western Australia Press; Nedlands, 1977) Introduction pp. XII- XIII.
development of Benedictine Monasticism, the role of the Abbot, the Abbot Visitor and the development of a Congregational system of monastic government. All in an attempt to understand the history of the BCNN in Western Australia and its development. It is expected that an understanding of these aspects will facilitate an understanding of the topic of this thesis.

**Status of New Norcia in 1851 as established by SCPF and the CC**

![Diagram showing the relationship between Holy See, SCPF, Perth Diocese, New Norcia Mission]

**New Norcia in 1859 by decree of CC**

![Diagram showing the relationship between Holy See, SCPF, Perth Diocese, New Norcia Mission, Salvado appointed Apostolic Administrator of New Norcia Mission and declared a Benedictine Monastery]
New Norcia in 1864

Holy See

CC

Abbot Visitor of CC

Perth Diocese

New Norcia
Mission and Monastic House

New Norcia in 1867

Holy See

CC

Abbot Visitor

New Norcia becomes an Abbey Nullius
(a Diocese in its own right, completely independent of Perth Diocese)
Chapter Two: Intricate Canonical Status of New Norcia’s Status and undefined Abbatial Authority

Given the state of things it could be an obvious imprudence from my part to call things for their real name. Not taking into consideration that some people may feel offended, such intention is so foreign from my way of thinking.  

(Abbot Torres to Abbot Jose Deas, 8th October 1909)

Before entering upon a proper discussion of the intricate canonical status of New Norcia, it will be worthwhile to learn something about the man Bishop Salvado hand-picked to be his successor. On 10th April 1901, Dom Fulgentius Torres, accompanied by a party of ten monks and postulants 57 arrived in New Norcia and as soon as possible he set out to commence his labour.

It is almost impossible to say what he was really like by looking at his personal diary; for even in it he concentrated on the business at hand. Few are the instances in which he alluded to his feelings and thoughts. The diary entries reflect their author as a man deeply focused and concerned with the events at hand and the importance they may have for the monastic Community and their missionary goals. The Diary of Bishop Torres is almost entirely dedicated to his voyages of exploration of the north coast of Western Australia.

His correspondence reveals his honest and simple attributes. These attributes can perhaps be corroborated by an article dedicated to Bishop Torres after his death in 1915 in the Revista Montserratina. The article makes manifest the lasting impression he made on his superiors in Europe. They knew him right from the beginning of his religious life and a look at what they had to say may reveal something about his personality:

It is only fair that we render a last tribute in these pages of the Revista Montserratina to one who may have left so many alive and beautiful memories in all who knew him, much more amongst us due to the number of years that he lived here and for the offices entrusted upon him. 58

57 They were Dom Gerardo Castanares, Dom Fausto Curiel, Dom Emiliano Planas and Dom Inigo Alcalde; the deacons Dom Hermenegildo Casas and brother Mauro Bonet from the Monastery of Montserrat and the postulants Alberto Porres, Luis Arrufat, Manuel Ferror and Valentín Saez.  
58 "The Illustrious and Reverend Father Dom Fulgentius Torres y Mayans, O. S. B. Ordinary Abbot of the Monastery of Sacred Trinity of New Norcia (Western Australia) and Bishop Titular of Dorylaeum, Administrator Apostolic of the Kimberley Vicariate", Revista Montserratina. Number 97, January
His kindness and good character earned him everyone’s esteem, to this also contributed even more his spirit of charity and his readiness to help beyond measure which sealed all his acts.\textsuperscript{59}

There is not much that can be said that has not been said before about Torres’ early life in Europe. He was baptised Antonio Torres Mayans, his parents were Juan Torres y Torres and Manuela Mayans y Torres de Formentera. He was born on 24th June 1861 in Balearcs on the Spanish Island of Ibiza, Spain.\textsuperscript{60} He made manifest his desire to become a priest from a young age. Apparently, his parents wanted to dissuade him from becoming a priest and encouraged him to concentrate on his studies. This he did with great success, for he was studious and disciplined. He was sixteen years old when he moved to Barcelona, to go to the University there to follow up studies in Pharmacy. He completed his three years Bachelor of Science degree in 1880, nonetheless he decided to enter the Seminary of Vich; there he initiated his religious studies whilst teaching in the missionary college of Montserrat.\textsuperscript{61}

In 1885, Torres felt certain of his calling and decided to go to the Monastery of Montserrat to ask for the Habit of St Benedict. After a period of trial, he was accepted and under the guidance of the recently elected Abbot Jose Deas he took St Benedict’s Habit. After one year of novitiate, he pronounced his simple vows, in 1887 he was ordained priest and in 1889 he made his solemn vows. He put to good use all his pharmaceutical knowledge; first by helping the monastery’s doctor install an efficient dispensary. He was also the assistant choir master of the boy choir. He was apparently an excellent teacher of mathematics, physical science and natural history. He was in the group of monks chosen to set up a foundation in the Philippines in 1895, after sometime he was appointed Superior of the Mindanao mission and Parish priest of Gigaquit. The political instability of the Philippines at the time forced the missionaries to return home to safety. In 1898, he was chosen to assist the Prior Justo Saez of the Monserrat Church in Naples, who died after a few months leaving Torres in charge of the office.\textsuperscript{62}

\textsuperscript{1915. p. 12. The article is anonymous and at the end of it is written ‘to be continue’, unfortunately no further copies of this journal were accessible.}
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., pp.12-13.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., p.12.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., pp. 12-13.
It was in Naples in January of 1900 that Salvado first met Torres and he had the opportunity to admire Torres’ dedication and genius. Salvado thought highly of Torres and treasured their shortlived friendship and he asked Spanish Provincialists to allow him to go with him to his Australian Mission. Moreover, when Salvado learnt that his chosen successor as abbot of New Norcia, Dom Fulgentius Dominguez had died in April of the same year, he decided to ask Torres to take his place. This took place on 14th December 1900; Torres agreed to this, but had to wait for the decree of the SCPF to appoint him Apostolic Administrator of the Abbey Nullius of New Norcia and subsequently Torres had to undergo a proper abbatial election in New Norcia.64

Salvado’s last visit to Rome is indeed significant because in it he finalised a matter that had remained undefined for too long. Father Eugene Perez wrote that:

In the Archives of Propaganda, the Decree of 1864, by which New Norcia, without his knowledge, had been united to the incipient Subiaco Congregation, 60 km east of Rome, was still dormant. It had been suspended on his arrival in Rome on that occasion but now, at his request, was brought out and presented for approval. He wrote, “I propose, that it be put into execution, but with the modifications I myself have introduced”. All his amendments were accepted, and his monastery in Australia became part of the Congregation of Subiaco and united to the Spanish Province of that Congregation.65

**New Norcia in 1900 by Decree of CCPO and with approval of SCPF**

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63 Salvado wrote of Torres in a diary entry: “I saw in Naples the place where he is building the new church and house, which could not be better nor more central. As far as I could judge from the plans I saw, the buildings should be good. I understand that everything will be finished shortly, thanks to the activity and zeal of Fr Torres. May God keep him strong and healthy for many years”. Cited in the introduction to *The Diary of Bishop Torres* by Dom Eugene Perez, p. 16

64 Ibid., p. 17.

65 Ibid.
This was a great achievement for Bishop Salvado and a great step towards securing the legal canonical standing of his monastery within the SPCCPO and of ensuring that after his death New Norcia would not fall under the control of secular clergy. However, this union really served to place the New Norcia Monastery in a disadvantageous position. When Torres became Abbot of New Norcia, he inherited the responsibility of consolidating the monastic and missionary work of his predecessor. However, he also inherited the responsibility of adhering to the amendments established by the union. The consequences of this union were discussed by Abbot Torres in his ad limina report to the SCPF of 1910.

This document is not only illustrative of the particular situation of New Norcia and its abbot, but also representative of the similar circumstances that applied to other religious congregations in Australia or foreign missions. It exemplifies the nature of the conflicts of authority in foreign missions. It provides a clear and well-structured discussion of the unresolved and consequently problematic canonical status of the New Norcia Community.

The only copy of the report in the archives is in Latin; according to Mrs Alison Thompson, the translator, there are several mistakes in the Latin grammar that add some confusion as to what the document was meant to say. Although repetitive, the document is set out in a comprehensive and concise manner. His approach can best be described as highly pragmatic; he showed his ability to treat the issues with reference to their practical reality and, even when complicated in their nature, he treats them with great clarity. His discussion in the report is divided in four sections. Each section presents a new argument and, as he progresses, one can clearly see each argument’s relation and significance to the centrality of the discussion.

In the first part he presented the objective of the report accompanied by a discussion of the problems that the union of New Norcia to the SPCCPO created for New Norcia. The second part is a discussion of the Provincial duties of the superior of monasteries; duties and functions that Abbot Torres considered could not be demanded from Abbots who found themselves in extraordinary circumstances. It looks at the destructive interference of Superiors of the Congregation in matters of foreign monasteries to which they were entirely foreign and the particular problems caused by Holy Visitation. The third part is a continuation of the problems caused by the impracticality of the Holy Visitation and the sacrifices it imposed on the BCNN.
In the final part, he presents several measures that he and the New Norcia Community deemed more adequate for the inclusion of New Norcia into the CCPO.

It was Abbot Torres’ view that New Norcia’s ecclesiastical problems began with the union of the abbey into the SPCCPO, which took place in September 1900. This report represented his official attempt to have Propaganda Fide intervene and seek to ameliorate a condition that had been the source of problems for the Abbot of New Norcia and his Community.66

He argued that this state of New Norcia’s subjugation to the Spanish Province was largely influenced by previous conditions established by the mutual agreement of Bishop Salvado and the Prefect of Propaganda Fide in 1864. New Norcia and its abbot became subject, not only to the laws of the CC but to the Abbot General of the Congregation and to the jurisdiction of the Abbot Visitor of the Congregation.67 For further assistance in ecclesiastical matters, New Norcia’s abbot could approach the SCPF.68

From the Report it can be sensed that, in theory, adhering to these arrangements and obeying the laws established for the benefit of a provincial monastery did not represent a problem for Abbot Torres. The problem lay in the fact that they could not apply to New Norcia, in the same manner as they did for monasteries of the Province located within it, due to New Norcia’s unique status and to the fact that these measures were never truly executed. Abbot Torres was aware of this; for he knew from experience that these arrangements availed to nothing. It was a convenient system in theory, but in practice achieved very little.

This ecclesiastical incorporation brought more problems than solutions.69 First of all, New Norcia’s abbot was subordinate to all Provincial and General Superiors; this not only meant that he received orders from these men individually and directly, but also he relied on their assistance to solve the problems of his monastic house. Before leaving Australia for Rome at the end of 1909, he wrote to Abbot Deas and what he had to say about New Norcia’s reliance on the Abbot Visitor is most illustrative of the problems the system created for New Norcia:

I must inform your Paternity that at the end of this year I will leave for Rome where I have some matters of importance to deal with the Sacred Congregation of

67 Ibid., p. 1, No. 1.
68 Ibid., pp. 1-2, No. 1 (ii)
69 Ibid., p.2, No. 2.
Propaganda. Given that I am convinced of the little usefulness that offer the Provincial Chapters and on the other hand considering the 15 years the Visitor has performed his role, he has shown me the little one can expect from such office, even though a person of known virtue and energy is in charge of it. It will be easy to propose to the Holy See a relative argument regarding this matter; given the distance in which we are from the Abbot Visitor and given the slowness with which some matters are dealt, many times this results in prejudice against the interests of this house. 70

Apart from his inevitable dependence on Provincial Superiors and General Superiors, 71 the Abbot of New Norcia was a professed missionary; his duties were dictated by the Constitution of Propaganda Fide. He was a superior amongst several other higher superiors and two Congregations whose authority restricted his own power as abbot. In which case he was placed in a complex position; he had to withstand the problems caused by distance and the conflicts of authority that originated in Spain and Italy respectively. Consequently, these interfered in the government of his monastic house. 72

Ultimately, he identified that the most incoherent arrangement was that which legalised the community’s dependence on the authority of the Spanish Abbot Visitor, when distance was the ultimate obstacle and prime cause of the system’s unreliability. A further complication to the matter was the fact that the abbot of New Norcia, as a missionary, had to refer all his missionary activity to Propaganda, he was the administrator of all of New Norcia’s possessions on behalf of the Congregation. New Norcia’s dual role separated it from the rest of the Provincial monasteries. Consequently, the dependence on the Abbot Visitor in the same way as other monasteries of the Province could not, he argued, in any way apply to New Norcia. Its conditions were unique compared to those of the usual Provincial monasteries found in Spain. 73

70 Archive No. 01720, Letter No. 9, dated 8th October 1909, pp. 5-6.
71 In the document Abbot Torres makes constant reference to ‘The Very Reverend Fathers or Officials’, it is assumed that they discussed the matters in their General Chapters. To avoid confusion in this thesis these superiors will be referred to as either Provincial Superiors or General Superiors. Provincial Superiors refers specifically to Spanish Provincial Officials; General Superiors refers to those meeting in a General chapter in Rome (they may include Provincial Superiors).
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid., p. 2, No. 2. He wrote: But another reason can be demonstrated for the impossibility of that condition being fulfilled which is that a distance of 8 thousand miles separates our Abbey from the Very Reverend Abbot Visitor; since this serious condition occurs in no other professed Provincial Monastery, it is truly absurd to want our Abbey to depend on the Reverend Abbot Visitor in the same way as other Monasteries which have their roots in Spanish territory itself.
This problem only continued to aggravate due to the manner in which the General Superiors and Spanish Provincials treated it. They knew the seriousness of the matter, and yet, according to Torres, they treated it lightly, and no real solutions were ever introduced to ameliorate the situation.\(^74\) This, he found, was even more alarming when it was taken into consideration that this situation originated in Salvador’s time and, as Abbot Torres expressed it, he was quite uncertain that it could be solved now. His criticism of the system focused on the unreliability on Provincial Officials and on their failure to address the issues related to it with the seriousness they deserved. He claimed that they took advantage of its subjugation and that their attempts to solve anything were always ineffective. An example of how some provincials took advantage of the distance factor is revealed by a problem he had with the Prior of the Monastery and College of El Miracle, in Barcelona:

The reasons, or better yet, the main cause by which the Prior of Miracle decided to get rid of the postulate, is no other than he was not able to squeeze out to his liking the money of this mission, even though for the six incomplete years that the postulate lasted it has cost this mission the excessive amount of 53000 pesetas in even numbers.\(^75\)

The Provincials’ involvement and continued authority over the BCNN was ineffective and pointless because New Norcia had little to do with matters of the Province and as such it only served to cause more delays.\(^76\)

He acknowledged that Superiors at all levels within the congregation were trying to find a solution, he said in the report: ‘latterly they did try in the end to remove some bad provisions and rule. Nevertheless, those arrangements effectively died.’\(^77\) Finding a solution to the problems remained a dilemma because they failed to approach such problems in a concerted manner. He argued that ‘clearly all the Fathers of the Provincial Capital knew that; the Reverend Fathers of our Congregation gathered in the General Capital knew that; and finally the Very Reverend Abbot General with his own advisers knew just as did the Spanish Abbot Visitor. And seeing that everyone had a very good idea of the trouble, all within the limits of their own authority were busy trying to apply remedies. But following always a purposeful end? As far as our Abbot was concerned, I shall speak openly: not at all.’\(^78\)

\(^72\) Ibid., p. 3, No. 3.
\(^75\) Ibid., pp. 34, No. 4-6.
\(^77\) Ibid., p. 3, No. 4.
\(^78\) Ibid., p. 6, No. 7.
For example, when Spanish Provincials proposed that a Superior of a foreign monastic house be given extraordinary powers of authority like those of the Abbot Visitor, the Abbot Visitor rejected it. However, the Abbot General did not disregard it entirely and gave his consent to allow the Spanish Abbot Visitor to delegate his authority to abbots in foreign missions. This measure never became effective because the Abbot Visitor never approved of it.79

Following this substantial discussion of the conflicts of authority within the congregation, Abbot Torres moved over to a discussion of the impact of this on his office. His reflection upon the importance of his office reflects his beliefs and virtues:

The good order and progress of the Religious Family, just as with any other community, does not depend so much on having obtained power to settle extraordinary business quickly, as following from right order and ease in settling every day things.80

He felt he was given no real authority to settle the more frequent ordinary matters, this restriction only served to make small problems big. Up to the time of the writing of the report, Torres pointed out that very rarely did consultation with the Abbot Visitor take place and that even when it did nothing was improved. New Norcia had not yet had a Holy Visitation.81 The Abbot Visitor was really unable to do much for the BCNN because he was obviously foreign and ignorant of the matters that concerned the abbey and because of the distance factor he was unable to visit the abbey and judge for himself the matters that needed improvement.82 An example of this is found in the handling of the problem concerning ‘the incompatibility in which Father Altimira83 would find himself in attending to the office of administrator and the duties of Prefect of the Juniorates’.84 This was a problem exposed to the Abbot Visitor on

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79 Ibid., pp. 4-5, No. 6.
80 Ibid., p. 6, No. 8.
81 Ibid., pp. 6-7, No. 9.
82 Ibid., pp. 7-8, No. 11.
83 Abbot Torres had to reorganize the administration of New Norcia when the Drysdale Mission was founded. Father Altimira was the manager or administrator of New Norcia and because Abbot Torres was short of staff he asked the Abbot Visitor to send another Benedictine to help him run affairs of the mission and the monastery. This was delayed for many years and Torres found himself having to appoint Father Altimira the Leader of Priests or Prefect of the Juniorates, by order of the Abbot Visitor (as well as being the administrator of New Norcia) His role would be to prepare those postulants within New Norcia to become novices. In 1910 Father Altimira replaced Father Planas as superior of the Drysdale River Mission.
84 Letter No. 5, pp. 2-3. Juniorates are postulants undergoing the proper religious preparation to become novices within a monastic house or religious order. In New Norcia’s case, they would have been monks from within the same house who were being prepared by a Priest appointed by the abbot visitor.
1907, months went by and they still received no resolution from the Abbot Visitor. When finally some news was received from the Visitor, it was only to inform the New Norcia community that some of the letters explaining this matter to him had been lost. This meant that after a year of correspondence the matter was still at the same stage. No progress had been made whatsoever, due to the manner in which the Abbot Visitor handled the matter and to the unreliable nature of correspondence. The final point Torres made in this section is illustrative of all he said previously. It involves the dependence on the authority of the Abbot Visitor, the unnecessary delays caused by distance, slowness and the inconsistent manner in which the Provincial Superiors handled the matter:

...something happened very recently, to necessitate approaching the Reverend Abbot Visitor with regard to some affairs involving the Community, which granted were not urgent, nevertheless were of great significance; for they were concerned with the recent election to the office of Leader of the Priests, for which was also required previous acceptance of a declaration from the person then voluntarily exercising the duty of Abbot Visitor, all of which had been connected with the necessity of choosing Monks for New Norcia,... and nevertheless it was necessary to wait for eight months and more, and we merited to receive no answer other than that received after another ten letters making mention of that matter,...

The Abbot Visitor’s response was, in Torres’ words, that:

...he had not answered before, for the reason that he had delegated to us the powers of acting in necessary and urgent cases. To which worthy person it could be objected: if the Abbot of New Norcia is held to solve by himself the ordinary affairs of the Community in which the agreement of the Abbot Visitor is required, too much slowness in attending to these affairs renders them urgent [..] Finally what good can be hoped for, if our Abbot is prevented from fulfilling his duty by so often having to run back to the professed authority?

Abbot Torres opened the second part of the document with a repetition of the statement that

[The Fathers of Our Congregation knew the troubles of our monastery were not unimportant, coming from its dependence on the rule of the Abbot Visitor; and although they mediated in some matters that had to be extirpated, they succeeded very little in carrying out their proposals, to the extent that the troubles persist today just as before.]
The laws concerning the Provincial duties of an Abbot Ordinary of a foreign monastery were not modified to accommodate for New Norcia’s special circumstances. The Benedictine Constitution established that the Abbot Visitor should make a visit every year, or at least every second year. Torres’ argument was that, even if this clause should apply to all monasteries of the Province, it did not apply in New Norcia’s specific case. He argued that “the abbot of New Norcia [was] not a part of the Provincial Chapter, and his community [did] not send any of his monks there”.  

He claimed that it was inconvenient and harmful for the New Norcia community. It was also unnecessary because in the Provincial Chapter only the interests of the Provincial Monasteries would prevail and the interests of New Norcia, due to their independence, could be ignored. New Norcia could not be part of the SPCCPO in the same way as the rest of the monasteries situated within it. To target these issues, Benedictine Officials made two concessions. Firstly, the Superior of a foreign Monastery did not personally have to be present at the Provincial Chapter and he was allowed to appoint a deputy. The second concession was that monasteries outside the province, belonging to the province, were allowed to choose a monk as deputy to the Provincial Chapter, as long as two of the voters from outside elect him.

Thus the abbot was freed from the burden of being present at the Provincial Chapters and freed from the obligation of choosing a monk as deputy from his own Province. These provisions were unreliable because it was doubtful that these deputies could mediate fairly. The fundamental reason for this was that a deputy under such circumstances was foreign to the community he represented; the interests of the New Norcia community could not be thoroughly communicated through someone who was not equipped to know the entirety of the problems. This system of dispensation had already created several serious problems, most of which he enumerated in the report. These were that Provincial Officials were in most cases unable to do anything to help solve the problems; exposing problems to them led to nothing being done. Thus, the foreign Communities were disadvantaged and sometimes censure took place. The deputy could not possibly persuade the superiors the Provincial Chapters of the seriousness of the problems he was presenting because he himself was totally unaware.

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88 Ibid., p. 8, No. 12.
89 Ibid., p. 9, No. 12
90 Ibid., p. 9, No.13.
of their dimension in Australia. The Provincial and General Superiors when presented with particular cases, could not make any sound judgements because they had no evidence or the opportunity to learn the truth of the matter. This gave room for inaccurate interpretations and false accusations. This in turn had the potential to damage the honour and good name of innocent people.\textsuperscript{93} For example, the problem with the Prior of the Abbey of Miracle illustrates this point quite well. How were the Provincial Superiors to believe one or both sides of the conflict when one side of the problem could only be verified in New Norcia in Western Australia. Abbot Torres wrote to Abbot Deas:

in reference to the problem with Miracle, I will try to inform you about it in a few words; even though when you receive these lines you will be already informed, it is possible that that information is not exact.\textsuperscript{94}

The prevention measures that you mention I know nothing of; they must have been intended to have the damaging effect of losing those vocations to harm this mission. If that was the intention; God will not take it into account.\textsuperscript{95}

Notwithstanding these, Abbot Torres had to do with what was available to him and conform to this system of dispensation. In a letter to Abbot Deas he informs him of his choice of representative:

today I write to you to let you know that I received a letter from the Abbot Visitor in which he announced that the Provincial Chapter will be held in September or October in your Monastery, and that it followed that I should with all promptness possible elect the delegates representing my community and myself.\textsuperscript{96}

Abbot Torres then proceeded to make his final exposition of the problems in the third section. He acknowledged ‘another fountain’ from which no ‘beneficial drink was forthcoming for the Abbot of New Norcia’.\textsuperscript{97} He wrote:

The Reverend Fathers of Our Congregation knew that the troubles of our monastery happened because of their dependence on the Reverend Spanish Abbot Visitor in the order relating to Holy Visitations, and although in the most recent orders they were able to do good, they were by no means able to carry through their own plan.\textsuperscript{98}

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., p 10, No. 14.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., pp. 10-11, No. 14
\textsuperscript{94} Archive No. 01720, Letter No. 9, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., p. 4.
\textsuperscript{96} Letter, No. 8, dated 29th June 1909, pp. 1-3.
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., p. 11, Beginning of Section III.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., pp. 11-12,
He supported his discussion by referring to the particular clauses of the Benedictine Constitution that defined the frequency and importance of the holy Visitation. From it he acknowledges the dependence of New Norcia on the Spanish Abbot Visitor for Holy Visits in the same manner as other Provincial Monasteries and the necessity of having a companion to make the official visit with him. He concludes it to be an inconvenient journey and an unfair financial burden on the New Norcia Community.\textsuperscript{99}

To target this problem the Superiors created this decree:

In the overseas monasteries there should be a Holy Visitation only about every four years. If however it does not happen, even without a companion it could be undertaken, that is, for reference.\textsuperscript{100}

In such cases the decrees that the Spanish Abbot Visitor may have introduced were not effective until the Abbot General confirmed them. This decree achieved nothing because it never took effect. The dilemma however lasted for much longer because the financial burden still remained even when the Abbot Visitor did not accomplish his duties on behalf of New Norcia.\textsuperscript{101} Torres openly stated that “from the beginning of our union there has in fact been no Holy Visitation”.\textsuperscript{102}

Before his closing paragraph, he made two further points. First, that it was impossible to see this system of Holy Visitation ever working effectively; especially in those cases in which the Abbot Visitor concentrated solely on a study of the revenues and expenses of the Abbey. According to the Constitution of the CCPO the Abbot Visitor should be thorough in his examination of the administrative aspect of the Abbey.\textsuperscript{103} The second point, he thought needed consideration, was that which became a necessary condition due to the arrangements established by the SCPF. Namely, the limitations of powers of the Visitor; his scope of power was limited to an inquiry of the observance of the Rules of Monastic Life. Abbot Torres then questioned the necessity of having a visitation when the Rules of Monastic Life were being faithfully observed and when such Visit only placed more sacrifices upon the said Community.\textsuperscript{104}

It is worthwhile to include here Abbot Torres’ closing paragraph:

\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., p. 12, No. 15.
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., No. 16.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., pp. 12-13.
\textsuperscript{102-103} Ibid., p. 13, No. 17.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., p. 13, No. 18.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., p. 14.
Therefore note well that the amalgamation and incorporation of the Abbey of New Norcia with the Spanish Province of the Cassinese Congregation of the Primitive Observance was set up in that way by the Very Reverend Fathers D. Rudisendo Salvado and D. Domenico Serafini, but never in fact existed with them; for they were unable to exist in practice or action; that was prevented through permanent causes and intrinsic things relating to the condition and position of the Abbey; and also hasty considerations over which the supreme authority of the Congregation was powerless, although they tried with every effort, to make that union more effective, and avoid the troubles and prejudices that arose thence for the Abbey on account of the necessities of dependence relating to the order, whether relating to the Reverend Abbot Visitor, or the Provincial Capital, or finally to a holy Visitation.\textsuperscript{105}

The very last section of the report was dedicated to the presentation of six proposals, or better yet six new foundations for a stable union to be possible and by which all troubles and inconveniences could be removed.\textsuperscript{106} The new conditions he laid out, if approved, meant that the Abbot and future Abbots of New Norcia would be subject to the jurisdiction of the Abbot General and the Council of the Diet of the CCPO and not to the Spanish Division of the same Congregation. The role of the Abbot Visitor remained the same,\textsuperscript{107} however in the administration and running of matters of the monastery, no one whatsoever could interfere.\textsuperscript{108} The Abbot and the Community of the Abbey of New Norcia were to constitute a religious family of true name; as such they had to obey the Rules of the CCPO. The Abbot had to rule the Abbey according to the Holy Benedictine Rule and all other supplementary Constitutions and Declarations.\textsuperscript{109} Regarding visitations to the Abbot General pertaining to ordinary and extraordinary matters, the Abbot of New Norcia could deal with such matters by letters of investigation or by delegation. In Extraordinary matters he would have to travel to Rome to settle the matter. To ensure the stability and order of the Community the monks of New Norcia could not be transferred without the approval of their Abbot. If a transfer was approved but not demanded by the Abbot of New Norcia, the New Norcia Community was not liable to pay for the expenses of the transfer. Furthermore, New Norcia was not obligated to pay the costs of an ordinary

\textsuperscript{105} ibid., p. 14.
\textsuperscript{106} ibid., p. 15.
\textsuperscript{107} ibid., p. 15, No. I.
\textsuperscript{108} ibid., p. 16, No. V.
\textsuperscript{109} ibid., p.15, No. II & III.
visitation, expenses were only to be covered by New Norcia in case of an extraordinary Visit.\textsuperscript{110}

Abbot Torres’ proposal given the nature of the problems created by Union of BCNN to the SPCCPO

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
    \node (holy) at (0,0) {Holy See};
    \node (cpco) at (-3,-2) {CCPO};
    \node (scp) at (3,-2) {SCPF};
    \node (nullius) at (0,-4) {Abbe\textit{y Nullius of New Norcia}};
    \draw (holy) -- (cpco);
    \draw (holy) -- (scp);
    \draw (cpco) -- (nullius);
    \draw (scp) -- (nullius);
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{110} ibid., p. 16, No. VI.
Chapter Three: An Unsuccessful Resignation

In all, my satisfaction will be great the day I can see myself free from this obligation, because if the moral responsibility is big, the material one is not insignificant. Several millions constitute the value of this mission.- May the lord grant me success to continue with the work of the unforgettable Bishop Salvado.\textsuperscript{111}

(Abbot Fulgentius Torres, 1908)

That Abbot Fulgentius Torres was inclined to resign after five years of government of the BCNN can be partly justified by the many difficulties he encountered. On one side, there were the problems caused by the nominal union of New Norcia with the SPCCPO; a dependence that he and his community deemed problematic for the progress of the monastic life in New Norcia. Distance and conflicts with Spanish provincials were the major factors that made this union ineffective. He was the Abbot of New Norcia; a superior who, in theory, was on equal footing with the rest of the Provincial Superiors, but who in reality had no equal say on Provincial matters. On the other hand, back home in New Norcia he was the Abbot Nullius; he was responsible for the spiritual care and guidance of his community of monks, Aboriginal people and European settlers. It is the objective of this chapter to discuss the reasons for his attempted resignation and the reaction of Benedictine Officials to these. These will be discussed in relation and opposition to the relative success he was achieving simultaneously in securing the spiritual and physical growth of his diocese.

For the thirteen years that Torres governed New Norcia, the community saw many changes and new responsibilities were added. The most obvious and lasting of Torres’ contributions to the growth and continuation of the community is embodied in the architectural monuments still extant in the town of New Norcia. The buildings of New Norcia stand erect as monuments of a period and of Torres’ and his community’s contribution to the social, religious and educational significance of the town.\textsuperscript{112} The schools for white children, namely St Gertrude’s and St Ildephonsus’ colleges, opened in 1908 and 1913 respectively, became associated with prestigious and excellent education. St Joseph’s and St Mary’s orphanages dedicated to the education and upbringing of Aboriginal children represented one of the many ways in which the BCNN continued to carry out its original task of missionary work. New Norcia continued to be a center of missionary work and monasticism. Torres managed to

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., pp.7-8.
change the community from within itself; he modified certain aspects of it and restructured areas of its administration. He was deeply aware that this was necessary because the best instrument to achieve spiritual and material stability for his community depended on a virtuous and genuine group of monks. He is also most notable for his direct involvement in the exploration and surveying of territory in the north west of Western Australia in 1906; a venture that culminated in the foundation of a mission for Aboriginal people in 1908.

Taking the above into consideration, it is hard to see a man like Abbot Torres attempting to resign the position that he so willingly accepted in 1901 and that had earned him respect and admiration from his peers. However, there is an obvious relation between the problems that originated from the complex canonical union of New Norcia and Torres’ desire to resign. As discussed previously, these problems placed a great deal of restraint in the way Abbot Torres was able to govern his monastic household. Initially, his resignation was handled by Mauro Serafini, Abbot General of the CCPO. It seems that it was upon Abbot Torres’ persistence, that the matter was then discussed in the Spanish Provincial Chapter held in 1908; there all Provincial Superiors examined Torres’ motives for a resignation and agreed that it was highly inconvenient and impossible to allow him to resign.

It has only been possible to learn the motives of Abbot Torres’ desire to resign through the letter from the Abbot General, Mauro Serafini, to Abbot Torres. Serafini started the letter by saying:

I communicated to Monsignore Archbishop the matter that you write to me about in your last letter and now I let you know briefly his and my observations regarding the proposed resignation.

The Abbot General identified the special status of New Norcia and the terms under which Torres was entrusted with its government:

\[\text{Refer to chronology}\]
\[\text{Far off activities were greatly reduced, and a number of Priests was secured gradually to take over the office of the Choir from the aged Brothers, who up till then in their fervour had kept up the daily recitation of the Liturgical Prayer. New norcia: Historical Guide to all its institutions. The Local Decrees to the Benedictine Community of New Norcia, Archive No. 01719 from 1901-1908, Abbot Torres introduced several minor, but significant changes to routine of prayer, festive days, meals, work and added restrictions regarding the liberty to talk to those outside the monastery.}\]
\[\text{Archive No. 01673, Abbot General Mauro Serafini, Rome 22rd October 1906, in Italian.}\]
\[\text{Ibid., Abbot General Antonio Ma. Marcut of the Spanish Province of the CCPO, Subiaco (Rome) Sta Scolastica 12th and 13th of November of 1908.}\]
\[\text{Abbot Mauro Serafini, p. 1}\]
It is a regular abbey, a prelature Nullius, a mission; it was entrusted to you for only five years or so, in the prime of youth. The deceased Bishop Salvado placed his trust upon you...\textsuperscript{117}

Further he informed Abbot Torres that in order for his resignation to be granted, his motives should be necessary and persuasive. The two main reasons behind his resignation were his health and the state of antagonism between Torres and the superiors of the Spanish Province. The Abbot General’s response to these motives was that they were not persuasive or serious enough to make his resignation valid.\textsuperscript{118} He offered some alternatives for Torres in case his health deteriorated; he also attempted to make him realise that a life of hardship:

‘is an inherent aspect of the life of sacrifice that you willingly embraced, and it would be childish to believe that your lordship is now afraid of giving it up for God and for your neighbour the life to which you consecrated yourself, when you gave yourself to the missionary life’.\textsuperscript{119}

Thus, this health reason does not seem to me to justify your demand- by the rest I do not intend to say that you should end your life so fast for the position, neither your superiors nor the Holy See will deny you the opportunity to take some repose- this is the response that is usually given to similar demand.\textsuperscript{120}

Regarding the difficulties he had with the Superiors of the Spanish Province, Abbot Serafini judged this motive to be even less persuasive. He made it clear that Abbot Torres had no motive to complain about the way in which his demands were met in the Provincial Chapter because they were doing whatever they could. Moreover, Serafini affirmed that there were no obstacles that could prevent him from carrying out his work in New Norcia.\textsuperscript{121} The Abbot General was dismissive of Abbot Torres’ proposed resignation. However, he was still sympathetic and understanding, for he encouraged Torres to continue by saying that ‘in difficulty one needs to show virtue and the strength of the soul’.\textsuperscript{122} Further, he suggested that it would be better to discuss the matter in person in 1908, when the Spanish Provincial Chapter was due to take place.\textsuperscript{123} Serafini warned him of how proceeding with a petition of this nature could affect his reputation and that of the congregation. It was not only an untimely demand,

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., p.2.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., pp. 2-3.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., p. 3.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., pp.3-4.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., p. 4.
but one that had to obtain the vote of the Spanish Provincials so that it could then be submitted to the Holy See.\textsuperscript{124} Finally, the Abbot General had this to say:

As a matter of fact, I reassure you that in Rome and particularly the Pope is very much against resignations of no evident utility. So that you would probably find the risk of getting a negative answer, and instead your reputation of commitment to a life of sacrifice will be damaged.\textsuperscript{125}

In 1908 he met the same reply from the Superiors gathered at the Provincial Chapter of the Congregation held in the Monastery of St. Scolastica in Subiaco. The Abbot General of the Spanish Province, Abbot Antonio Marcet, wrote to Torres and informed him that ‘the matter was studied with true interest and without doubt everyone wished to be able to please you, but they also realised, and it was a unanimous decision, that it was not only inconvenient but also impossible at least for now’.\textsuperscript{126} They realised that in order for it to be finalised it had to be submitted to the Holy See, but it could not be submitted to the Pope because it was not persuasive enough to be considered valid. They recalled other cases in which the circumstances were far more serious and the Holy See denied the resignation. They took into consideration the effect the resignation would have on the enterprises then recently undertaken by Torres, namely the Drysdale River Mission, and they felt that it would create a bad impression in Australia.\textsuperscript{127}

Just like the Abbot General in 1906, the Provincial Superiors showed the same sympathetic approach to the issue of his health. They agreed that he could go to Europe and take a long break from the affairs of the monastery to recuperate and regain his strengths in case it became necessary.\textsuperscript{128} Abbot Marcet, as the spokesman of the Provincial Chapter, reassured him that he had their support, help and best of wishes in any matter.

There is now no way of knowing with certainty how bad Abbot Torres’ health was or of knowing how it deteriorated with the passing of his time in New Norcia. In a letter to Abbot Deas of December 1907, he informs him of the many tasks and happenings in New Norcia and towards the end of the letter he added that ‘thanks to God I find myself in sufficient health to attend the places where the obligations of the

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., p. 5.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., pp. 5-6.
\textsuperscript{126} Abbot Antonio Marcet, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., p. 4.
Nullius call me'. However, there is another minor indication of how often he got sick in the article written by Dom Roberto Bas in 1915 after Abbot Torres’ death. Dom Bas wrote that ‘on the 26th of September, after leaving the refectory at night, he [Abbot Torres] felt sick and he suffered from serious pains and terrible vomiting until the next morning. And because he had found himself in similar situations before, he did not pay much attention to it, and he thought that it would go away by taking some home remedies’.

It is almost impossible to know now the extent to which his health interfered with his work and the extent to which, in Torres’ mind, it was a valid motive for a resignation. However, from his achievements and success in administering the BCNN, it can be argued that he put his health to one side and he set his energy and ambitions in making it a great centre of missionary, educational and religious life. His scope of success extended well beyond New Norcia and into neighbouring towns and into the North West. Either way one may look at his motives for a resignation, it is obvious that he was a good abbot and apostolic administrator, for in his government he targeted those areas that needed improvement (monastic practice, pastoral and missionary care in the diocese). In the area of education alone, he deserves great recognition.

130 Revista Montserratin, p. 41.
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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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’.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{135}

They concluded that it was ‘judged prudent not to present any petition, more especially because it would got to the Congregation of Religious, and naturally the Cardinal Prefect would resent the separation from the Spanish Province’.\textsuperscript{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 Dsrydale 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 Dsrydale River Mission granted him more independence and the ability to act in extraordinary matters without constant and

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., p. 208.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., p. 238.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., pp. 238-9.
\textsuperscript{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.
CONCLUSION

When Dom Fulgentius Torres willingly undertook the responsibility of becoming the Apostolic Administrator of the Abbey Nullius of New Norcia he, like Bishop Salvado, must have felt that once and for all the canonical status of the Benedictine Community of New Norcia was resolved and legalised. This union would ensure the future of the community and it would prevent it from ever becoming under the control of secular powers. However, this was not so and, in his fifth year of government, Abbot Torres found himself in a distressing and conflictive position. Problems with Provincial Superiors and the unreliable nature of the system that placed New Norcia and Torres under the jurisdiction of the Abbot Visitor of the Spanish Province started to become more difficult to solve.

As a consequence he felt discouraged and decided to resign; his resignation was rejected primarily because, it was held that his motives were not persuasive and valid. Despite the fact that his resignation was rejected, his attempt is significant because it is the first indication of magnitude of the problems he had to face and for which he had to rely on the jurisdiction of the Abbot Visitor. The second and most obvious indication of the magnitude of the problems created by the union with the SPCCPO is explained by Abbot Torres himself in his Ad Limina Report of 1910 to the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. It has been the prime objective of this thesis to discuss and examine these issues and their interrelatedness.

The views and argument expressed in the Report to Propaganda have been corroborated by several of Torres’ letters to his friend Abbot Jose Deas of the Monastery of Montserrat and by his diary entries of the year 1910. Abbot Torres’ prime concern was the fact that obviously the union could not be effective because New Norcia was unique; it was a mission and Abbey Nullius in Western Australia. As such it could not be part of the Spanish Province in the same way as other regular monasteries located within the Province. A great distance separated the Province from New Norcia, reliance on correspondence to solve ordinary matters that required approval of the Abbot Visitor proved highly ineffective and costly. Finally, the interests of New Norcia were so different to those of the Province. To solve these problems he considered it necessary to separate the Monastery of New Norcia from the Spanish Province and that it was crucial to bring back BCNN into the CCPO.
His struggle achieved very little, the arrangement remained the same for it was the advice and view of the Abbot General of the CCPO that union with the Spanish Province was convenient, even if not necessary. SCPF intervened by restricting the interference of the Abbot Visitor in administrative matters of the New Norcia community and by relieving New Norcia from paying the annual charge or financial burden to cover for the cost of Visitation. Indeed New Norcia remained under the jurisdiction of the SPCCPO until as late as 1952.

The *Ad Limina* Report of Torres provides a valuable insight not only into Torres’ own experiences in Western Australia, but also into the complex nature of establishing missions and monastic centres in destinations far removed from their original foundation. This thesis has examined and discussed the problems that Abbot Torres encountered when he became Abbot Nullius of the Benedictine Community of New Norcia and the circumstances that exacerbated this complex situation.
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