

ROSENDO SALVADO AND US ABORIGINES

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It is a very special honour to be here as a representative of the Aboriginal people of New Norcia at this very important symposium. My fellow Aboriginal representative, Karen Ryder, at the last moment was not able to team with me.

Before I say anything further, it is becoming commonplace in Australia at important events such as this symposium to acknowledge the Aboriginal group on whose original country we are meeting, and also to pay our respects to our elders, past and present. As such, I would like to acknowledge the Galician people and pay my respects to your elders and leaders, past and present, and in particular Bishop Rosendo Salvado. I would also like to express gratitude to the Council for the Galician Culture and its president, Ramón Villares, for the invitation and arranging the generous sponsorship to come to this symposium, and I would also like to thank the Australian Embassy in Spain and its ambassador, Jane Hardy, for its generous contribution that allowed me to travel here from Australia.

Firstly, I would like to share with you something about myself and my family's connexion to New Norcia. You may be wondering, as an Aboriginal representative, I am not very dark-skinned, like the people you have seen in photographs. This is because my mother is Aboriginal and my father Spanish – not Galician but Castilian. However, my father and mother were not together when I was born, and I was brought up with my mother's family at New Norcia. My surname, Willaway, is my mother's family name. My family are a part of the Aboriginal tribe of New Norcia and the surrounding region, the Yued Noongar people, and the Willaway family has a long association with New Norcia and the Benedictine monks, which began not long after Bishop Salvado established the Aboriginal mission there in 1847. I especially would like to mention my grandparents, whom I lived with, Harold and Philomena Willaway, who lived at New Norcia for most of their lives. They were both respected elders and played an active role in the community life at New Norcia. And, in recognition

of their ties with the New Norcia Benedictine Community, my grandparents were made Benedictine oblates, and when they died they were buried with the Benedictine scapular in accordance with their oblate rights. My grandfather was even buried wearing a monk's habit that belonged to the then abbot of New Norcia.

One of my grandparent's children joined, at the age of thirteen years, the Benedictine Missionary Sisters of New Norcia. Her religious name is Sister Veronica. When the Aboriginal mission at New Norcia closed, the Spanish Benedictine sisters returned to Spain and Sister Veronica chose to return with them and lived in Barcelona for about five years. She is still a nun and is now based at a Benedictine community in the USA.

The Willaway family is very proud of their long association with the Benedictine Community at New Norcia. For us, it was a positive and beneficial experience. We learnt the necessary skills to participate in modern Australia. I personally feel a very deep sense of connexion to New Norcia, with both Aboriginal and Spanish heritage. As you may be aware, Bishop Salvado's primary purpose in establishing a mission at New Norcia was to Christianise and civilise the Aboriginal people of the area. It must be acknowledged that missions generally in Australia played a crucial role in assimilating Aboriginal people and cultural deprivation. It is a very complex history that needs to be considered in the context of the time and from whose perspective is told. There has been a lot written and said about Bishop Salvado and the Aboriginal mission at New Norcia that he established; however, the Aboriginal voice – or, more correctly, voices – about this is still emerging. Some of this has been positive, and some of this negative. In addition to the positive outcomes, there are Aboriginal people who have said they did not benefit from the experience of New Norcia. Some have highlighted the harsh treatment they received as children at residential institutions during their time at the mission.

Only a few Aboriginal people remain living at New Norcia, with most of the people with family connexions to New Norcia living elsewhere. To help maintain ongoing connexions to New Norcia, the New Norcia Aboriginal Corporation – as I will call it, 'the Corporation' – was established in the early 1990s. The Corporation formally represents the Aboriginal people of New Norcia and

works in partnership with the Benedictine Community of New Norcia to ensure the Aboriginal heritage of the place remains visible.

In this bicentenary year of Salvado's birth, the Corporation has been collaborating with the Benedictine Community in events commemorating Bishop Salvado's life and legacy. As part of this, the Benedictine Community has produced the *Salvado Bicentenary Souvenir Booklet* – I have given Ramón a copy – which was launched on his birthday, the 1st of March, in New Norcia, after a commemorating mass. The Benedictine Community invited the Corporation to contribute a message for the booklet, and I would like to share the message with you:

On behalf of the New Norcia Aboriginal Corporation we extend our congratulations to the Benedictine Community as they celebrate the bicentenary of the birth of their founder, Bishop Rosendo Salvado.

The establishment of the Aboriginal mission at New Norcia had a profound effect on the lives of the local Aboriginal people, the Yued people of the Noongar nation. This coincided with much upheaval for the Noongar people who bore the brunt of the early British colony in Western Australia.

We consider that Bishop Salvado was a friend of the Yued people. Bishop Salvado gained the trust of the Yued people who helped him and his fellow missionaries survive in the bush and to establish the mission at New Norcia.

Bishop Salvado had a deep interest and respect for Aboriginal people in which he recorded the local Noongar language, culture and customs. Those records have provided important historical information about Noongar people [and their families], including being used to support the Noongar native title claim.

In the spirit of reconciliation, we look forward to participating in events commemorating Bishop Salvado's life and his legacy.

In concluding, with Santiago de Compostela being a place of pilgrimage, coming here for this symposium and visiting Bishop Salvado's birthplace in Tui two days ago has been a very special journey for me. It has allowed me to fulfil a dream to pay homage to this great man, whose legacy has deeply impacted my life.