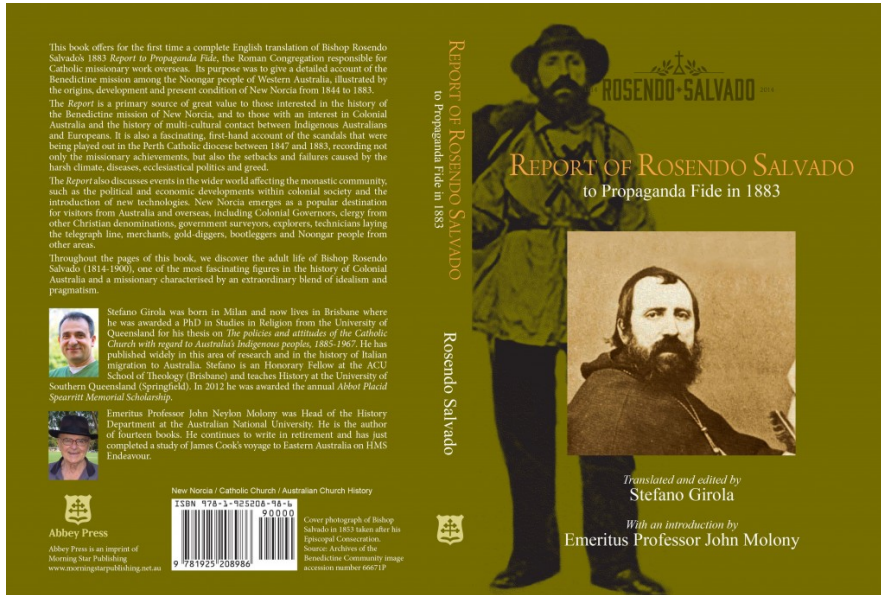


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## BOOK REVIEW – Report of Rosendo Salvado to Propaganda Fide in 1883

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by [The Record](#)

Book cover of *Report of Rosendo Salvado to Propaganda Fide in 1883*. Image: Supplied.

### Review by Josh Brown

Rosendo Salvado is universally known as the founder of the Benedictine Mission at New Norcia, c.130 km. north-east of Perth. In recent years, scholars have shown a renewed interest in this fascinating figure of colonial Western Australia. Known for his enterprising nature and determination in his missionary work, Salvado is less likely to be known also as an accomplished musician and an effective administrator, for his openness to Aborigines and for his proficiency in European and native Australian languages.

The account of his arrival and early years in Australia, his descriptions of the wildlife, languages and peoples, were compiled in his *Memorie Storiche dell'Australia* on a return trip to Italy in 1851. This work is principally the reason for which scholars know him today.

In 1882, the Roman congregation in the Vatican responsible for the supervision of Catholic missionary work, known as *Propaganda Fide*, asked Salvado to prepare an official report on the origins, progress and current state of New Norcia. This report, until now available only in Italian, has recently been translated by Stefano Girola and is available in English for the first time.

Although Salvado produced many reports, the 1883 report is remarkable for its length and detailed account of the topic requested by *Propaganda Fide*. Lengthy descriptions are given of the newly founded monastery in New Norcia and the Benedictine missionary activity, agricultural work, animals and their care, the climate, harvests, poisonous plants as well as the contact between the European and the Yuat-Noongars.

Since the Report was only ever meant for eyes in Rome, Salvado was free to enter into extraordinary detail not only about the practical matters of the Mission, but also to provide his frank assessment of the organisational structure of the early Catholic church in Western Australia, including his assessment of the ecclesiastical politics of the day.

Salvado's tone is innocent and utterly candid. It makes for fascinating reading.

Girola's translation of Salvado's 1883 Report is lucid. The book opens with a foreword by Professor Emeritus of History at the Australian National University, John Molony, which helps

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to place the *Report* in its historical context.

A brief and important chapter in the book addresses the way in which Girola has translated the *Report* and here, he has been meticulous. The translator makes it clear that rendering 19th century Italian into 21st century English is not a straightforward matter. The task is made even more difficult by the fact that the document was never meant for publication. Salvado's language is, we are told, "quaint and, in part, archaic". The Italian in the *Report* is in many ways unremarkable, but it is still the language of a Spaniard which had been to some extent "hispanised" with occasional English structures noticeable. Nevertheless, Girola has succeeded in rendering the richness and variety of the vocabulary of Salvado into modern English, in a way that will be easy for modern scholars to read.

Girola has given us an insight into the difficult questions he has had to face as a translator. How, for example, should one translate *bosco* (bush) and *foresta* (forest) into English, when it is clear that Salvado is referring to the same Australian object? Which is the best way to convey the nuances in modern English of the four different Italian terms Salvado uses to refer to the native inhabitants of Australia: *indigeno*, *nativo*, *Australiano*, *selvaggio*? Girola has taken a sensible path by providing his explanations for his own lexical choices up front.

The solutions he has proposed to the sometimes ambiguous words used by Salvado have provided the reader with a clear translation, and Girola still preserves enough of the tone and richness of Salvado's language that we have a real sense of the original text.

The book is not "just" a translation. There are explanatory footnotes of terms in other languages, people and places, events, and a wealth of other information that has been included to help the reader. In short, this impressive volume will make for absorbing reading and will be of use to historians, linguists, anthropologists, independent scholars and for anyone interested in the history of colonial Western Australia and the early Church in Australia more broadly.

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#### About the Author

The Record is the weekly newspaper of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Perth published on Thursdays. The Record is Australia's oldest weekly newspaper, having being established in 1874. The Record provides a wide range of content - local, national and international news, film, video and book reviews and opinion columns from a Catholic viewpoint.

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Wednesday Pope Francis renewed his appeal on behalf of the tens of thousands struggling to enter other countries as they flee war and violence, asking global leaders to "open their hearts" and doors to migrants and refugees.

"How many of our brothers are currently living a real and dramatic situation of exile, far away from their homeland, with their eyes still full of the rubble of their homes, and in their heart the fear, and often, unfortunately, the pain of having lost loved ones." the

#### Contact The Record

**Address:** PO Box 3075, Perth, Western Australia, 6000

**Tel:** +61 8 9220 5900

**Fax:** +61 8 9325 4580

**Email:** [office@therecord.com.au](mailto:office@therecord.com.au)

**Website:** [www.therecord.com.au](http://www.therecord.com.au)

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