

ARCHIVIO MADRI NIGRIZIA

Historical Summary

Origin of the Combonian Mission

1853-1958

PIE MADRI DELLA NIGRIZIA - SMC

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COMBONI MISSIONARY SISTERS

ROMA – 2025

Historical Summary of Episode 1 (1853-70)

The episode narrates the preliminary events of the congregation, beginning in 1853 with the arrival in Verona of African children rescued from slavery. The narrative focuses on two key figures: Fortunata Quascè, one of the rescued girls, and Daniele Comboni, then a student at the Mazza Institute. The crucial moment comes with the development of the "Plan for the Regeneration of Africa" and the attempt to establish the Good Shepherd Work in various European capitals. The episode also documents the story of Faustina Stampfli, Comboni's cousin, who became one of the first lay missionaries. The narrative culminates in 1869 with the expansion of the Cairo institutes and Comboni's prudent strategy to prepare former slaves as future missionaries.

Historical Summary of Episode 2 (1871-72)

The episode narrates the founding events of the Congregation of the Pie Madri della Nigrizia, beginning on November 21, 1871, with a key meeting at the Major Seminary of Verona. The narrative documents the official naming as "Pie Madri della Nigrizia" and the canonical erection of the Institute on December 8, 1871. The crucial moment came with the acceptance of Maria Caspi, the first sister, whose story as an illegitimate child highlights Comboni's inclusive vision. The episode culminates with the community's move from Montorio Veronese to the house of Santa Maria in Organo in September 1872, and Comboni's appointment as Apostolic Pro-Vicar of Central Africa in May 1872.

Historical Summary of Episode 3

The episode narrates a pastoral discourse on community life and modern mission. The narrative focuses on two fundamental aspects: the importance of prudent use of words in community life and the renewal of missionary commitment. The crucial moment comes with the reflection on "proximity" as a key element of God's style and evangelization. The episode highlights the call to combat modern slaveries and their root causes, such as poverty, inequality, and discrimination. The narrative culminates with a reference to Saint John Paul II as a model of prayer and closeness to people, and an invitation to follow a prophecy incarnated in the missionary charism.

Historical Summary of Episode 4 (1877 -1879)

The episode narrates the significant events of 1877-1879, focusing on Daniele Comboni's consecration as the first Bishop of Sudan and the first missions of the Pie Madri della Nigrizia. The crucial moment was Comboni's consecration in Rome on August 12, 1877, accompanied by members of his Institute, including Maria Bolezzoli and Teresa Grigolini. The episode highlights the first missionary departure of five sisters to Africa, led by Teresa Grigolini, and their challenges in Berber, where they suffered from "African fevers." The narrative documents the expansion of the mission to El Obeid, the establishment of schools, and culminates with the difficult decision regarding Vittoria Paganini's health, who, diagnosed with cancer, chose to remain in Africa. The episode concludes with Teresa Grigolini assuming leadership in El Obeid, unaware of the events that would follow.

Riassunto Storico dell'Episodio 5 (1880)

L'episodio narra il ritorno di Daniele Comboni in Africa nel 1880, un periodo caratterizzato dall'espansione e dalla riorganizzazione delle missioni. La congregazione visse un momento cruciale con l'apertura di tre noviziati distinti: a Verona, El Obeid e Il Cairo, quest'ultimo specificamente destinato alle aspiranti egiziane. Il periodo fu segnato da eventi miracolosi durante il viaggio, tra cui il salvataggio soprannaturale di Caterina Chincarini ed Elisabetta Venturini. La congregazione affrontò la sua prima perdita con la morte di Maria Bertuzzi a El Obeid, mentre la situazione di Virginia Mansour rivelò le tensioni esistenti tra diverse visioni della vita religiosa e l'importanza della conoscenza dell'arabo nella missione.

Historical Summary of Episode 6 (1881)

The episode narrates Daniele Comboni's final return to Khartoum in 1881, a period marked by significant transitions and challenges. The congregation faced considerable difficulties following the departure of the Sisters of San Giuseppe, although Vittoria Paganini's wise response helped restore confidence. The crisis intensified with the Virginia Mansur case, which led to painful misunderstandings that deeply affected Comboni. The episode culminates with the beginning of the Mahdia, when the forces of the self-proclaimed prophet began their uprising against the Turco-Egyptian government and Christian presence, marking the start of a turbulent period for the missions in Sudan.

Historical Summary of Episode 7 (1881 -1882)

The episode narrates the critical events leading to the beginning of the Mahdia (1881-1882) and its first consequences for the Pie Madri della Nigrizia. The narrative focuses on Teresa Grigolini and the challenges she faced under the controversial leadership of Don Losi, who prevented her from fulfilling Daniele Comboni's last instructions. The episode highlights the historic profession of Fortunata Quascè, the first African Pious Mother, and documents the origins of the Mahdia under the leadership of Mohamed, who emerged as the Mahdi in Dongola. The crucial moment came with the siege of El Obeid and the capture of the missionaries in Delen, resulting in the sisters' imprisonment. The episode culminates with the tragic death of several sisters in captivity and Don Losi's refusal to allow the renewal of religious vows, leaving the sisters in a precarious spiritual situation during their captivity.

Historical Summary of Episode 8 (1883 - 1900)

The episode narrates the most dramatic period in the history of the Pious Mothers of Nigritia during the Mahdia (1883-1899). The congregation faced an extraordinary trial when El Obeid fell to the Mahdi's forces, resulting in the sisters' captivity. Teresa Grigolini and her companions demonstrated exceptional courage in resisting forced conversion to Islam, enduring torture and mistreatment. The crucial moment came with the apparent forced marriages to Greek merchants, a survival strategy that allowed the sisters to maintain their faith in secret. The episode culminates with the innovative return to Sudan in 1900, when Francesca Dalmasso and Maria Bonetti entered the country as lay teachers, demonstrating the congregation's adaptability and perseverance.

Historical Summary of Episode 9 (1895-96)

The episode narrates a critical period in the history of the Pious Mothers of Nigritia, focusing on the administrative and financial division between 1895-1896. The congregation faced significant challenges when the Jesuits questioned their relationship with the vicariate. The crucial moment came when Monsignor Roveggio proposed a contract that would eliminate the monthly subsidy to the mother house. Maria Bolezzoli, described by Comboni as "a woman of piety and judgment," demonstrated crucial leadership in rejecting this agreement that would have compromised the congregation's future. The episode also highlights important changes in the organizational structure, including the successful defense of the Sacred Heart of Mary as the provincial headquarters in Egypt.

Historical Summary of Episode 10 (1897 -1900)

The episode narrates the life and work of Costanza Caldara, the second Superior General of the Pie Madri della Nigrizia, whose leadership lasted more than thirty years. The narrative highlights her direct connection with Daniele Comboni, who prophesied her future role as Superior General. The episode documents the significant achievements of her administration, including missionary expansion, the acquisition of properties such as Boccaleone in 1905 and Cesiolo in 1914, and her firmness in maintaining the sisters' presence in Sudan against Monsignor Geiger's pressures. The crucial moment came with the division of the vicariate in 1913 between Khartoum and Bahr el-Ghazal, and its resolution during World War I. The episode culminates with her inclusive vision of vocations, rejecting discrimination based on economic grounds, and her role in the consolidation and expansion of the congregation.

Historical Summary of Episode 11 (1914-19)

The episode narrates crucial events under Mother Costanza Caldara's leadership, focusing on the congregation's strategic expansion. The crucial moment was the acquisition of Cesiolo in 1914, a property that solved the Mother House's space problems. The narrative documents the important decision to accept the mission in Asmara, marking the first expansion outside Central Africa, and highlights Sister Pia Marani's figure, who discovered that mission is defined not by geography but by human need. The episode culminates with the fourth general chapter in 1919, Costanza Caldara's re-election, and significant expansion in Africa with new communities in Gulu, Wau, and Kitwun, facilitated by the support of Countess Ledochowska and the Sisters of St. Peter Claver.

Historical Summary of Episode 12 (1923-33)

The episode narrates crucial events in the congregation's history, focusing on the initiation of Daniele Comboni's beatification process. The narrative documents Professor Grancelli's historical research, culminating in an important biography published in 1923. The crucial moment came in 1928 with the simultaneous opening of the process in Verona and Khartoum, highlighting Costanza Caldara's significant testimony about Comboni's sanctity. The episode also records the definitive approval of the Constitutions in 1925, the missionary expansion that included an innovative community for emigrants in France, and the fiftieth anniversary of the first vows in 1926. The episode culminates with the historic leadership transition from Costanza Caldara to Pierina Stoppani in 1931, and the latter's tragic death in 1932 during her first visit to Africa.

Historical Summary of Episode 13 (1933-58)

The episode narrates the leadership period of Mother Carla Troenze, the fourth Superior General, who assumed the position following the sudden death of Mother Pierina Stoppani. The narrative documents the congregation's global expansion under her direction, including new missions in Asia Minor, United States, and Brazil. The crucial moment came in 1934 with the foundation of RAGIO, the congregation's first historical publication. The episode highlights her wise defense of the missionary charism and her ability to adapt it to new frontiers. During her tenure, the congregation reached its maximum expansion with 175 new communities and over 2,000 members. The episode culminates with post-war growth, including numerous openings in Italy and expansion into Mozambique and Latin America, until her retirement in 1958.



Suore Missionarie Comboniane

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