

COMBONI MISSIONARIES IN UGANDA

EVANGELISATION FIRST STAGE

North Africa, including Egypt and Sudan, had seen Christian missionaries since the time of Christ and the Roman Empire. Although they travelled some way up the River Nile, penetration deep into the interior was too much of a challenge.

The modern evangelization of Africa started in the XIX Century along the coastal regions of the continent by many groups of missionaries and within a short time a chain of Apostolic Vicariates all around the coast of Africa was established. But the interior of the continent was still largely unknown to the outside world. As soon as the first routes towards the interior were opened, the Church felt the responsibility for the evangelisation of the people living there.

Sent by Egypt, the first explorer to come close to the source of the Nile was an Italian, Girolamo Miani in 1861. He was the first European to reach what today we call northern Uganda among the Madi, east of the Nile. There his porters refused to go further because they would have to pass through impenetrable forests. (Miani carved his name on a Tamarind tree, which was seen by Madi elders up to a few years ago.)

In the years 1838 – 1839, an explorer, Ignatius Pailme, from Central Europe, visited Cordofan, a region in the North Western Sudan. He reported that an estimated 100 million Africans were living in Central Africa, without the minimum knowledge of the Gospel and victims of a cruel slavery. A priest from Malta, by the name Annetto Casolani informed the Holy See. A decree of Pope Gregory XVI of 3rd April 1846 established the Apostolic Vicariate of Central Africa which practically comprised all the territories of the interior of Africa not already part of Vicariates along the coast. Its centre was at Khartoum. It was entrusted to a group of priests of different nationalities with the aim of fighting slavery and preaching the Gospel.

As far as Uganda was concerned, three main routes made the missionary penetration into the interior possible: the northern route via the Nile Valley, through which evangelisation was brought first to Sudan and then to northern Uganda; the southern route from Zanzibar to Bagamoyo, then to the southern shores of Lake Nyanza and by boat to southern Uganda, the third from Mombasa to the north eastern shores of Lake Nyanza. The first route was followed by the Comboni Missionaries, then known as the Verona Fathers, the second by the White Fathers now known as Missionaries for Africa and the third by the Mill Hill Fathers (of the Missionary Institute of St Joseph).

A team of five catholic missionaries from different institutes, sent by Pope Gregory XVI, reached Khartoum on 11th February, 1848. A mission was opened and a boarding trade school for orphans and freed slaves was started. From Khartoum, along the White Nile Valley, missionaries intended to reach the source of the Nile, the zone of the Great Lakes and the legendary Mountains of the Moon (Rwenzori). They established a mission on the Nile at a place called Gondokoro, about 200 miles north of the present boundaries of Sudan with Uganda.

In 1857, Daniel Comboni joined the group, while he belonged to the Mazza Institute. He later founded the missionary Congregation of the Sons of the Sacred Heart which became known as the Verona Fathers. After two years in Southern Sudan, sick with fever, he returned to Italy. In the twelve years from 1848 to 1860, 24 missionaries died along the White Nile from Khartoum to Gondokoro. On 5th September 1861, the Pope entrusted the Vicariate to the Franciscan Order but in less than a year, 22 out of 58 missionaries were laid in graves between Khartoum and Gondokoro. The Holy See closed the Vicariate and entrusted the territory to the Vicar Apostolic of Egypt. 46 graves in just 13 years were too many.

SECOND STAGE.

Daniel Comboni would not accept defeat: he was determined to continue to work for the evangelization and redemption of the African slaves. He believed he was born for this. At the age of 17, when still a seminarian, he made a promise to consecrate himself to the evangelization of Central Africa and he prepared for his future apostolate by learning languages such as Arabic, Hebrew, Spanish, French and English.

After his first experience in Southern Sudan he realised more than ever before the need for evangelization and development. Since many missionaries had no resistance to sickness at that time and Africans brought to Europe were also getting sick and even dying, he spent time reflecting on how this obstacle could be overcome: the methods formerly used were obviously not working, there must be another way of bringing the Good News to Central Africa. In September 1864, "while praying at the tomb of St Peter in Rome, during the beatification of St Margaret Mary Alacoque, there burst upon me like a flash of lightning the idea of drawing up a new Plan for the Christianisation of the poor black peoples. The individual points of the Plan came to me from on high like an inspiration". This became his Plan for the Regeneration of Africa. Its aim was clear: "Let us all work together without any other incentive than that of winning more souls for Christ; let us take each other by the hand; one be our wish; one be our aim, one the commitment of all those who love Jesus Christ: to win for him the unhappy Africa.

This plan re-echoed the principle of other missionaries: To save Africa with Africa. It could have been implemented by taking Africans to Europe, training them and then sending them back to Africa. However, Comboni's methodology would be different: the training had to be in Africa, not in the interior where Europeans could not survive, but along the coast where both Europeans and Africans could safely live. After this illumination, he felt heartened to plan for the evangelization of Central Africa.

He went around Europe, especially Austria and France to get support and managed to persuade others of his idea: while in France he met Mgr Charles Lavigerie, then Bishop of Nancy. This meeting was important for both men. Comboni's Plan for the Regeneration of Africa is thought to have contributed to Lavigerie's own missionary vocation in the years immediately preceding his appointment to the See of Algiers. His strategy of evangelization, the intention that Africans should become apostles and themselves regenerate their own countries was based on an idea which came from Comboni, who presented a stirring "Petition on behalf of the Black Populations of Central Africa" to the First Vatican Council (1870) and in 1872 was entrusted by Pope Pius IX with the mission of Central Africa as its first Pro-Vicar Apostolic. In 1867 he had founded the Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus (Verona Fathers) and in 1872, the Comboni Missionary Sisters (Verona Sisters). Cardinal C Lavigerie started his "Institute of Missionaries for Africa" and the "Missionary Sisters of Lady of Africa" (White Sisters) in 1869.

COMBONI PRO-VICAR APOSTOLIC

The two institutes which Comboni started were a direct result of a challenge which a Cardinal in charge of Propaganda Fide, the Department in Rome which dealt with the Missions, had put to Comboni when he expressed the desire to go back to Central Africa. The Cardinal told him: "Either bring a medical certificate that assures me that you will live for another 30 years or start an Institute". Comboni founded what are now called the Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus and the Comboni Missionary Sisters.

In 1872 he was made Pro Vicar Apostolic; although he was still a priest he had the full authority of a bishop in an area which extended from the south of Egypt to the Great Lakes, ie including Uganda. In 1877 he was appointed Bishop, Vicar Apostolic of the area. His Episcopal See was in Khartoum and from there he planned to visit Uganda. Gordon Pasha, the Governor of Khartoum invited him to visit it, telling him he would meet all the expenses of the trip provided Comboni started a dispensary in Wadelai on the west bank of the River Nile, north of present day Pakwach.

Due to drought and famine in north Sudan and a journey back to Italy for health reasons and the situation of his Institutes, Comboni could not take up the offer to reach Uganda. On 10th October 1881 he died of fatigue and fever in Khartoum at the age of 50. His dream of reaching the zone of the Great Lakes and Lake Nyasa died with him. From 1872 to 1881, 30 of his young missionaries died. From 1847 to 1881, there were 76 graves of missionaries who had died along the White Nile in their attempt to bring the Gospel message to the interior of Africa through the Nile Valley right up to Uganda. These deaths had nothing to do with colonization; the missionaries died bringing Christ. Jesus had said: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age". (Mt.28:18-20). The Berlin Conference was held much later, in 1884.

Cardinal Lavigerie, who knew the vastness of the territory entrusted to Comboni, submitted a plan in 1878 for the evangelization of those territories which had not yet been reached by the missionaries of Comboni. Pope Leo XIII approved the plan and so the sons of Lavigerie took responsibility for the evangelization of the territories south, east and north of Lake Victoria. In the north, not only Uganda but also a large part of southern Sudan was taken from the territory entrusted to Bishop Comboni.

Fr Lourdel and Br Anans landed in Uganda on 17th February 1879. Fr Livinhac and others followed. The great adventure started and reached the milestone of the deaths of the Uganda Martyrs between 1885 and 1887.

THE MAHDIA AND THE MISSIONS OF COMBONI

The intervention of Cardinal Lavigerie was providential because the institutes of Comboni suffered a serious setback in Sudan. Bishop Comboni died in the first stages of the revolution of the religious and political leader Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi. On 29th June 1881, he proclaimed he was the expected Mahdi and urged his countrymen to join him as he rose in arms against the Turkish-Egyptian government of Sudan. While Comboni was dying, the Mahdi and his followers were heading for the Nuba Mountains, where the revolutionary movement attracted thousands of disaffected tribesmen. Here they annihilated two armies sent against them and, marauding across the plains of Cordofan, laid siege to the capital, al-Ubayyid, which they captured. In November 1883 they obliterated an Egyptian relieving force commanded by General W. Hicks. In the course of the campaign, the rebels overran the missions started by Comboni at El-Obeid, Dilling and the farming settlement at Malbes. The missionaries were taken prisoner and subject to terrible torture: the sisters were brutally flogged in an attempt to make them deny Christ and accept Islam. The missions of Khartoum, Berber, and Scellal had to be abandoned.

After the killing of Gordon Pasha, England sent a military force led by Lord Kitchener who defeated the Mahdi in September 1898; Khartoum and Omdurman were free and the missionaries of Comboni could return to their deserted missions.

In January 1894 the whole of southern Sudan and northern Uganda was returned to the Vicariate Apostolic of Central Africa and Mgr Roveggio was appointed Vicar Apostolic. After the defeat of the Mahdi he was able to take up his duties, based at Khartoum. He died of fever in Berber in 1902 and was replaced by Bishop Geyer. At this time, the establishment of missions further south and efforts to enter Uganda were impeded by the problems between Belgian and British authorities over the Lado Enclave.

COMBONI MISSIONARIES REACH UGANDA.

The successors of Bishop Comboni as Vicar Apostolic of Khartoum were Mgr. Francis Sogaro (1882-1894); Mgr Anthony Roveggio (1894-1902) and Mgr Francis Xavier Geyer (1903-1922). Mgr Roveggio applied for permission to enter Uganda in 1900 but Entebbe refused. Mgr Geyer

applied to enter Uganda through the north. Permission was given in 1906. Due to lack of personnel and money it was only in 1910 that he was able to start his journey to Uganda.

THE JOURNEY

The Comboni Missionaries reached Gondokoro, where a mission had first been established in 1848, although there was nothing left either of it or of the nearby mission station of Holy Cross, where Comboni had lived for a short time. But the three missionaries were overjoyed to find their first Ugandan Catholics, some Baganda porters, working in the area. As soon as they heard the new arrivals were Catholic priests, they asked to receive the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist. Their religious fervour impressed the missionaries deeply and enhanced their eagerness to enter Uganda and their hopes for the success of their expedition. They proceeded, by donkey and on foot for Nimule, with 60 porters, and reached it on 2nd February 1910. It was an exhausting journey, travelling across hills and swamps and through forests. In spite of the documents they carried which gave them permission not only to enter Uganda, but also to settle (as long as the location was south of Parallel 3 degrees 30'North and near a Government Centre) the British Officers at the border were reluctant to let them enter to settle.

This reluctance was based on a number of factors: the climate was considered unsuitable for non-Africans; there were too few Catholics in the area, in their opinion, to justify a permanent mission; they regarded the people as too primitive to receive the missionaries and their message of the gospel; they foresaw great difficulty in ensuring the safety of the missionaries.

Bishop Geyer realized that such arguments reflected the personal opinion of one particular officer who was in fact, new to the place. The bishop therefore requested he contact Entebbe for confirmation of the permits. This took four long days but by means of the newly installed telegraph lines, the visas came through in the first telegram to use this line. Of great encouragement to the missionaries - and officers - was the arrival of a tourist expedition led by the former President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt. In the presence of the British Officers, he manifested great enthusiasm for Catholic missions and their contribution to the development of Africa, something he had witnessed in his journeys throughout the Continent.

KOBA – OMACH (PAKUBA)

At last, on 17th February 1910, the missionaries boarded the steamer that twice a month sailed between Nimule and Butiaba on Lake Albert and reached their destination: the Government post of Koba, a settlement on the eastern bank of the River Nile, south of present day Pakwach. It was the 31st anniversary of the landing of Fr Lourdel and Br Amans at Entebbe in the south of Uganda who had arrived in Uganda on 17th February 1879. The group composed of Bishop Geyer, his secretary Bro Cagol and Fr Albino Colombaroli. Fr Albino had been working in Bahr-el-Ghazel in Sudan where he had learned the Luo of the Jur tribe there; he was pleasantly surprised to realize that the Alur around Koba spoke a similar language.

At Koba the missionaries were welcomed by Mr. Paul Hannington, the British Commissioner, son of the Anglican Bishop James Hannington, murdered by order of Kabaka Mwanga in 1885. He received the missionaries kindly and welcomed their proposal to begin a mission there. "Very good, this is exactly what we want here". He gave them permission to use the government "rest house", while they pitched their tents nearby.

However the Comboni Missionaries were not the first Christians in these places. They found men of the Baganda, Banyoro and Alur tribes who had been baptised in the south and now worked for the Protectorate Government in the north as clerks, soldiers and servants. In fact, an Alur catechist was already teaching catechism in Panyimur when the Comboni Missionaries arrived. So the Gospel was first brought to the north of Uganda by lay people! An interesting fact.

Koba was a small village tucked away in a wild corner of land, bound in the south by the Nile entering Lake Albert and in the west, by the same river flowing out of the lake northwards, marking the boundary between Uganda and the Congo. The people of the area were Alur and Acholi. In a letter to the Superior General in Verona, Fr Crazzolaro wrote: "The land of the Alur, properly, is on the other side of the Nile, the western side, the "Enclave", but a number of them have crossed the river to escape from the vexations of the Belgians ruling in the Congo and to seek peace under British rule in Uganda, waiting for the time when they would be able to go back to their land."

A few days after the arrival of the missionaries, all Acholi and Alur chiefs were assembled together to meet them (*see Bro. Fanti's painting in the church at Pakwach*). Mgr. Geyer, through an interpreter, told them that the missionaries had come to preach Christianity and would like to hear their ideas as to the most suitable place where to start a mission. They replied that they were very pleased to hear that a mission was to be opened among them and they would certainly send their children to learn to read and write; as for the place, the missionaries themselves should inspect the country and choose a suitable place; they would be very welcome anywhere.

The following days were spent in visiting the villages of the five Alur chiefs along the river and of the two Acholi chiefs further eastward. Finally, Bp Geyer decided to plant the first mission station among the Alur of chief Omach, a few miles north of Koba. We read in Fr. Crazzolaro's letter: "The Alur, who are refugees from the west banks of the Nile, have formed a few villages around here. They are simple people, quite accessible and peaceful; those belonging to Chief Omach number nearly 800. Omach himself has come here from Paroketo, on the west bank of the river; he is a good man, quite intelligent, and approachable. He is proud of having us among his people."

The Bishop chose an elevated place some 600 meters from the Nile, and with the help of the Baganda porters and some local workers, the missionaries began to build their house. At the same time, they visited the elders, eager to get to know them, be friends with them and learn their language and customs. In a short time the first hut, 15 yards long and six yards wide, was somehow ready and the missionaries left the camp and took up residence in it. A chapel was added to the main house and the Blessed Sacrament kept in it.

On March 6, 1910, Bp. Geyer blessed a big cross made of two rough tree trunks and with tears of joy in their eyes the three pioneers of Christ raised it high in the sky as a sign of faith and hope. The bishop dedicated the new mission to the Most Precious Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ. They could hardly imagine that in a few years most of the people of Northern Uganda, namely the Alur, Acholi, Logbara, Lango and the Karimojon, would benefit from the redemption which Jesus Christ brought to all humanity through the Cross. Neither could they imagine how many trials they would have to undergo to make their task become true. For "the works of God grow at the foot of the Cross" (Comboni).

At the end of March four more missionaries arrived from Italy; they were Fr. Pasquale Crazzolaro, Fr. Luigi Cordone, Bro. Clement Schroer and Bro. Benedetto Sighele. They were welcomed with great joy and affection by the three pioneers.

Bp. Geyer appointed Fr. Albino Colombaroli superior of the enlarged community, and together with Bro. Cagol he left Omach with the steamer that took them to Butiaba, their first stop on their way to Europe via Kampala and Mombasa. This route proved a much easier one than the Nile route. At Hoima they visited the White Fathers who promised that in due time they would send some catechists to the new mission at Koba. They visited several missions of the White Fathers (Missionaries for Africa) on their way and witnessed their dedication to the apostolate and were encouraged by how much they had achieved. They were impressed by the progress made by the Church among the Baganda. Mgr Geyer told Bishop Streicher who had invited him to visit their mission in Villa Maria Parish, Masaka: "...My Lord Bishop, you do not have a mission, but a diocese: what I see here goes beyond all that I had heard about it; in

Khartoum, there is nothing like what we see here". Bishop Streicher gave him the Acts of the Synod they had held in October 1909. In the journal of Fr Raux, WF we read "...the missionaries of Uganda have realized that Providence has given to the Khartoum mission a good bishop, whose humility and piety are only counter-balanced by his learning and zeal."

Mgr Geyer asked Bishop Streicher for two priests from Hoima and two permanent catechists which he was given. Later Fr Colombaroli asked for four catechists and three were given, though only one, Lazaro, remained until his death. He is buried in the cemetery in Gulu. (A close descendant is now a Marian Brother).

At the beginning of 1911, three more priests arrived and this time by boat to Mombasa, through Kenya to Kisumu then onto Kampala. They were Frs. Fornasa, Beduschi and Audisio. In 1913 Frs. Molinaro and Vignato joined the group. The five living at Omach were very busy making contacts with the people, first with the elders of chiefs of the place. Fr. Crazzolaro writes:" Fr. Colombaroli and I went by donkey to visit Koba, the government outpost. We met the postmaster, the Goan clerk and the "Collector", Mr. Hannington; also the Indian doctor. We were shown a list of our goods, waiting to be delivered when porters would be available. We met merchant Alidina Visram, who said that he was a friend of the missions in Buganda, where he owned many shops. There we found also a telegraph communications system, connecting Koba with Hoima and Nimule".

They visited the people in their villages, caring for the sick and learning the two languages: Alur and Acholi. Learning the language is one of the first duties of a missionary and Fr. Crazzolaro was the most successful in this and after a few months he was able to prepare a simple prayer book and catechism in Alur, (How would you translate into Alur "Trinity", or "Eucharist"? "God" was called "Rubanga", but later Fr. Vignato changed it into "Mungu"). He was the first to put the language in writing, building up the orthography and grammar of the language into a book. The missionaries did this with all the local languages they met.

Soon a little school was started, to which the Chiefs, as promised sent their boys; some came out of curiosity, others attracted by what the missionaries might give. The missionaries knew that education is a key to evangelization; ignorance is one of the greatest obstacles to progress. Delegates from the chiefs would come to offer a goat in exchange for a piece of cloth. The mission was always crowded with people; sick people asking for a medicine; old men and women showing their empty pipes and asking for a pinch of tobacco; young men watching Bro. Clement busy in his workshop and commenting on his tools; everything was so new to them. Most of all, there were crowds of little children, curious and chattering, enjoying the sight of the "mondo" (foreigner) so busy and gentle.

Those beginnings, however, were not easy. Our missionaries were soon faced with quite serious and unexpected problems. As the water from the river was undrinkable unless boiled, the Brother started to excavate a well, but he went down over 15 metres without results. When the rainy season came, the grass roof of the house began to leak badly; it had to be repaired; other huts had to be built in a hurry. The termites badly damaged the chapel, another had to be built. Clouds of mosquitoes rising from the river bank attacked the missionaries, sucking their blood. Fr. Albino, whose health had never been strong, became sick and weak and had to rest frequently. Malaria was a daily unwelcome visitor for one or another of the missionaries; all of them found it hard to adjust to the climate and the new way of life. Poverty was extreme in their house; they lacked proper medicines and even food and rest. The roar of wild animals not far away often disturbed them and even frightened some of them. Communications and transport of provisions were rare and difficult. Their goods were still on the way from Nimule. Worst of all, somebody who did not like foreigners, began to call them "Khartoumi", which was the name applied to slave traders. The Commissioner had to intervene forbidding the use of this nickname.

A very heavy cross was weighing all the time on the spirit of our pioneers: the government's refusal to allow them to establish a mission on the west banks of the Nile (the West Nile), which was for them like God's Promised Land. The British Protectorate Government refused to allow the missionaries to cross the Nile because the boundaries were not yet clear between the British and Belgian governments. All these difficulties did not dampen their courage: they were young, full of enthusiasm for their vocation like St. Daniel Comboni, and encouraged one another with brotherly charity. The good Lord was their consolation and hope.

On 3rd June they celebrated the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus for the first time in Uganda with great joy and devotion. The same day, the first solemn baptism was administered by a Comboni Missionary, Fr. Cordone, to a Ugandan: he was ENJUMA, the Baganda Fathers' house-boy, who took the name of Paulo.

CHAPTER II OMACH I

A few days later, Fr. Colombaroli received a visit from two men coming from across the river. They said that they were Alur and were sent by chief Okello of Panyimur. One of the men had a rosary round his neck. He told the priest that his name was Areni and that he had been baptized in the south where he had lived some years. He added: "Chief Okello, too, is a Catholic. I baptized him together with his wife and sister when they were ill. All the people of the village want to become Catholic. I am instructing many of them in the faith and I lead the Sunday prayers. Chief Okello invites you to his village; he will send a boat to fetch you and will prepare the house for you. Chief Okello wants a catechism in Alur, if you have one or in Kiswahili, and also a rosary, and also some medals for those who come to catechism..." The Father was delighted to hear all this, he gave Areni all that he asked for and fixed a day for his visit to chief Okello.

On the appointed day, "three Sundays plus three days" later, Areni arrived with the chief's canoe. "Chief Okello is looking forward to seeing you, Father", he said. The following day, Fr. Colombaroli embarked on the small boat with Areni and his men and after eight hours of rowing they landed at Panyimur. A little crowd watched while Chief Okello welcomed the Father. "Here is the man of God who comes to teach us", they said. Father pitched a tent near the hut where Areni gathered his little flock. That same evening he assisted at the catechism lesson and prayers at which chief Okello, too, was present. It was all very impressive and promising. "You see, - Chief Okello told the priest - "my father is dead and I do not know where he is now; but I want to go to heaven after my death".

Back at Omach, Fr. Colombaroli related all this to his confreres. "I am sure" - he concluded, - "that if we could open a mission station across the Nile, we would gather an abundant harvest of souls". His dream was not to become true for several years yet, and only after many trials.

This episode, reported in some detail, showed that the Faith had already reached the West Nile; that it had been brought there through the work of zealous catechists, and it proved also just how precious catechists are in the work of evangelization in the Church.

Areni was a Ugandan Alur who was baptized by the White Fathers in Bunyoro. These missionaries had established many flourishing missions in the southern regions of Uganda since 1879 and in 1901 they opened their northernmost mission station at Hoima. From there they extended their missionary activities up to the Nile in the north and into the Congo, leaving well-trained catechists in important places, like Nyarambe. In 1903 they brought with them a native of the area, catechist Daudi LYENGA, and left him at Mukambo. He was very active and with the support of his relatives at Djegi and of chief Keta of Angal, Congo, gathered groups of catechumens in several places. The White Fathers opened the mission station at Nyarambe in 1912 (two years after the arrival of our Fathers at Omach), bringing with them seven Ugandan catechists, who stayed at Nyarambe a few months to learn Alur. Daudi Lyenga went around the chiefs convincing them to send their sons to the school which was started for them at Nyarambe. Among those who went to Nyarambe were: Emilio Opiyo, the son of Onega, from Paidha; chief Okello who took the name of Yohani, from Panyimur; one named Bibi (?), from Padel and others. Lyenga was sent also to build a chapel in several places which were still in the Belgian Congo.

So while the Comboni Missionaries were struggling at Omach we can see that groups of catechumens were being formed by catechists from Nyarambe or by zealous newly baptised in several places along Lake Albert and the west banks of the river (Panyimur, Panyango, etc).

In October 1910, Fr. Colombaroli went to Hoima to learn from the White Fathers how they established their missions. He stayed there one month, less than he wanted because he shortened his stay there because of a sudden bout of illness. However, friendly contacts between the two groups of missionaries in Uganda continued very usefully. On this occasion some

catechists from Bunyoro - among them David BIKOMI - were sent to Omach and they helped establish a regular catechumenate there.

Missionaries from Omach could not follow the Alur people until 1917 when they established missions at Orussi and later Angal.

EXPANSION AMONG THE ACHOLI: GULU

Gulu was being built as the central town for Acholiland and as the new government post for northern Uganda instead of Koba. Mr. Hannington, the Commissioner who was friendly to the missionaries, left for Gulu and the government post at Koba was closed.

At the end of January 1911, Fr. Giovanni FORNASA arrived at Omach after travelling across Kenya, Lake Victoria, Buganda and Bunyoro. Three weeks later, he and Fr. Colombaroli went to Gulu and on February 19, 1911, in extreme poverty, they started the first mission among the Acholi. Fr. Fornasa remained at Gulu, while Fr. Colombaroli went to Italy for urgently needed medical treatment and rest. Fr. Crazzolaro took over at Omach. They were joined soon after by a new group of missionaries, fresh from Europe: Frs. Audisio, Beduschi, Cordone and Br Sighele. This made it possible to exchange personnel between Omach and its first daughter mission, Gulu which was growing daily and there were many people anxious to hear the word of God from the missionaries.

When they arrived in Gulu, the Missionaries were asked by the government to take over the schools for the sons of chiefs, boys who would eventually take the role of their fathers or uncles. The future chiefs had been taught by protestant, not Catholic missionaries but there were no Anglican missionaries when the Comboni missionaries arrived. Missionaries of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) had reached Gulu in 1905, i.e. before the Comboni missionaries, but they had left in 1908. Their schools were given into the care of the Comboni missionaries and they were very upset to find Catholic missionaries in their place when they returned in 1913.

The difficulties the missionaries in Gulu met with are well illustrated by records kept by them. At the end of 1913, a new Assistant District Commissioner, Mr. Postlethwaite arrived at Atura Port. He first met two Anglican ministers, Mr. Wright and Mr. Lees at Otimodere, the first village in Gulu District and he then stopped on his way to Gulu at Minakulu and Puranga to ask the village chiefs about their relationships with the Comboni missionaries. The following is what Fr Crazzolaro wrote on 27th January 1914. "Mr. P Postlethwaite (nicknamed "Bwana Gweno" by the local people) is the new Assistant District Commissioner (ADC). I took some of our boys, pupils of the school to welcome him and sing the British National anthem which they sing fairly well. I was invited to his office a couple of days later. When I went, he told me in the presence of another official, that the chiefs are the real rulers in their villages and therefore they can withdraw as well as grant permission, they can even drive us away. The land to apply for is "crown land" the DC can lease us this crown land for 3 rupees per month per lot. The essence of our conversation is that the mission must leave Puranga where a school was being built. While on his way to Gulu, this new ADC took the chance and placed a new chief there, a young Protestant who – evidently well directed – immediately ordered that our school buildings be moved three miles away, to Palenga. This we did on 6th February 1914. Later on, during the afternoon instruction of our monthly retreat, Mr Postlethwaite came to pay us a visit. Having dealt such a heavy blow, he is now very kind and on visiting the church even genuflects".

One day the Governor General of Uganda arrived to visit Gulu and Mgr Vignato decided to go to greet him. As he writes in his memoir: "We thought it our duty, or at least opportune, to go and visit him and pay our respects and greet him on behalf of the mission. I went with Fr Crazzolaro, alas! ... We returned without meeting him, we were refused permission to enter the reception tent. When we reached home I asked Fr Crazzolaro: could we have been more humiliated than this?"

In Gulu, one of the first buildings was a school, under the care of Fr Crazzolaro who had come to Gulu to learn the Acholi language. The fathers asked the White Fathers (their superior at Masindi was Italian, Fr Gramaglia) for catechists and the work of evangelization went ahead. Two catechists of this time are buried in the cemetery at Gulu and deserve special mention for all the good they did: Iakobo Kinggang and Lazzari Baghenda.

In 1911 conflict broke out among the Lamogi. The government intervened and eventually one group surrendered reduced in number and strength by dysentery. Fr Molinaro was informed by Chief Pere of Pabo that the local people were convinced that the dysentery was caused by a magic medicine which the missionaries had given to the soldiers to fire at the Lamogi rebels and their conclusion was: Khartoum tek! The missionaries were powerful!

The missionaries worked on and by 1912, had set up six chapels with schools attached. These were at Pa-Tuoga, consecrated to the Sacred Heart; Dogn-Fign dedicated to Mary Immaculate; Pa-Ucen dedicated to the Blessed Trinity; the fourth at Pa-Ali was under the protection of the Guardian Angels while the fifth was at Pa-Uto under the protection of St Peter Claver and the last was still under construction. As Fr Beduschi wrote to the Superior General in Verona, "These chapel-schools have great influence; the pupils sing what they had learnt of the prayers and catechism while they worked in the fields and shared what they learned with their families; so more and more came to know Christ. The missionaries were full of zeal; by 1913 there were more than a hundred children leaning catechism but as Fr Beducshi wrote again: "But what are a hundred? Next year we want at least a thousand!"

In 1914 World War I broke out in Europe and Gulu felt the repercussions. Fr Crazzolaro was taken to Egypt to be interned; Fr Clemente to India. Brother Fanti was exempted through the intercession of both missionaries and government officials who marveled at the work he did. He was allowed back to Gulu to continue his ministry. But these were hard times for the missionaries; there was no kerosene for their lamps, the bread was scarce and hard. But their enthusiasm continued unabated. Aware of their needs, the superior general sent men and money to help. At the end of 1914, Fr Giuseppe Santambrogio and Fr Cesare Gambaretto arrived in time for Christmas, bringing money useful for paying off the debts incurred in the work done. Later Fr Pietro Simoncello arrived from Italy. The whole of Europe was in flames and yet the offerings of the poor never dried up.

The missionaries decided they needed a bigger building to accommodate the ever growing number of Catholics. Fr Vignato wrote: "We are not aiming to compete with the Cathedrals of Europe, but we would like all the Christians who come to pray to be under the same roof and they are many!" It was made of mud bricks and roofed with straw, but its opening was a great day of celebration. Five government officials were there and it was blessed by Fr Laane and Fr Bazin, two White Fathers invited for the occasion.

The Cathedral Fr Vignato dreamed of became a reality in 1931: ST. JOSEPH'S CATHEDRAL. As the inscription reads there:

This Cathedral is a monument to the faith of the first Christians and to the skill of the Comboni Missionary Brothers.

It was started in the year 1931 and completed in 1941 the Christians made and baked 800,000 bricks at Oytino River and the Christians and Catechumens, every Sunday after the Holy Mass carried bricks on their heads to this site.

The Cathedral was consecrated on 13th June 1947, Feast of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus.

On 24th December 1938, while work was still in progress, the first two priests from Northern Region were ordained: Rev. Frs. John Ongom and Donasyano Bala.

The remains of Bishops Angelo Negri and Cipriano Kihangire were laid to rest in this Cathedral.

In 1984, the original roof with iron sheets was replaced by a roof of copper.

On 6th February 1993, Pope John Paul II entered the Cathedral to adore the Holy Eucharist.

In the year 2000, the original floor was replaced.

The interior and exterior were redecorated in 2000 and 2001.

COMBONI MISSIONARY SISTERS IN GULU 1928

The number of fathers and brothers increased and by 1918 they were working in five mission stations among different tribes in Northern Uganda. At the beginning, the men responded enthusiastically to the message of the gospel, flocking to receive instruction and be baptized but not the girls and women. The wives of Catholics who wanted to get married in church had been instructed in the faith and when these women returned to the village, they talked about this and praised the Christian religion. Gradually other women and girls started to come to the mission to ask to receive instruction and the need to have sisters became obvious. Eventually Mgr Vignato asked the Superior General of the Comboni Missionary Sisters in Verona for sisters to work in Uganda. M. Costanza Caldara and her Council did not wait to be asked twice.

The first Comboni Missionary Sisters reached Gulu in December 1918. There were five of them: Srs. Amalia Lonardi, Rosalba Girlanda, and Luigia Quaglia from Egypt and Srs Carla Troenzi and Camilla Uberti who were in Sudan. The last two had previously worked in Egypt. The sisters met up in Khartoum, where they were joined by Fr Antonio Vignato who had come purposely from Uganda to accompany them on their journey. They stayed a few days to buy what was needed for the journey new house and for the month-long journey ahead. Then they set out, first by boat along the Nile and then on foot. At Lul, they heard the news of the Armistice which brought the First World War to an end. After a day of rest at Rejaf while they hired porters, they began the most arduous part of the journey travelling across savannah and forest for fifteen days. On 6th December they arrived at their destination, to a rapturous welcome from crowds of people who escorted them into the mission. They went first to the Church where they had solemn benediction and the singing of the Te Deum in thanksgiving for their safe arrival.

Sr Carla was appointed superior of this new community. She was the oldest of the group and had already lived three years in the mission of Lul, among the Shilluk of S Sudan. The people of that area were close kin to those of N Uganda and her experience with them was a great help especially at the beginning. The sisters' house in Gulu was simple: four walls of crude bricks, roofed with straw, a small crucifix in each room, camp beds, stools – and nothing else. Though they did not know the language, two sisters immediately began to work in the catechumenate and the nursery school, one in the kitchen and another two in the sewing room. They also began to visit the people in the villages, dispensing medicine and giving out small gifts, hoping by this to attract the girls to the catechumenate. The people were suspicious at first but once the sisters had learnt the language and explained their desire to share the Christian message, they not only made them welcome but loved to be with them. The sisters wrote in their community diary: "The continual coming and going of the local people in and out of our house, soon wore out the floor of the workroom and the veranda". The work of the sisters bore fruit. On the feast of the Assumption, a year after they had arrived, the first seventeen wives of Catholics instructed by the sisters, received Baptism, so forming seventeen Catholic families.

The missionaries began to print the first books in Acholi: a basic grammar, reading books using local fables, a prayer book written by Fr Crazzolaro and the Sacred History of the Old and New Testaments, put together by Fr Cordone and printed with the help of the Sodality of St Peter Claver.

The mission was growing and this was reflected in the fact that a procurator Fr Attilio Consolaro was assigned to Gulu when after the Chapter of 1919, Fr Vignato was called to become Vicar General in Verona and Fr Paolo Silvestri was sent to replace him as superior of the mission with residence at Gulu.

CATECHISTS

Early in 1913, Fr G Beduschil started a formal school for catechists and this was continued by Fr Fornasi. When Bishop Geyer visited the Comboni Missionaries in Uganda, he was particularly appreciative of what had been done for and by the catechists..

In 1919 a secondary school which would develop into training catechists and teachers was founded by Fr Pietro Audisio. It became one of the best in the area much appreciated by the local people who could then enter government positions. . The plan of Fr. Audisio was to prepare full-time catechists as leaders to other catechists, capable to lead the Sunday service where the priest was not available. The subjects taught at the school, were: Holy Scripture, moral, the beginnings of the Church History, grammar, arithmetic and Kiswahili. Another aim was to form catechists for Adult Catechesis. Side by side, the technical school grew. The brothers, especially Bro Simone Fanti dedicated their days to teaching carpentry, mechanics, brick building and **fabbro?** In his report to Propaganda Fide in 1919, Mgr Stoppani, Vicar Apostolic of Bahr el Ghazel, was happy to write that the institution of catechists had been understood and promoted in almost all the missions.

The witchdoctors blamed the presence of the white men for many adversities in their territory. It was not easy to be a catechist in such an atmosphere of suspicion. This was shown when two catechists Daudi Okello and Jildo Irwa were killed in the far East of the District at Paimol in October 1918.

In 1922, the first Congress of Catechists of Northern Uganda was held in Gulu, a major event for the Christians in the area and its success was mainly due to the faith and enthusiasm of Martino Musoke from Gulu, of Aleni from Moyo and Jakubo Kinyang from Kitgum.

The dedication and fidelity of the catechists reached the level of martyrdom in Daudi Okello and Gildo Irwa among the Acholi. They had been baptised in 1917 and volunteered to go to preach the gospel in the east of east Acholi, near Karamoja. They were warned that the place was dangerous, lawless because of the presence of Adui (Acholi who rebelled against the Protectorate Government, Abas (Islamic fundamentalists) and witchdoctors suspicious of the new Christian religion. They were killed on 17th October 1918 in Paimol giving witness to their faith in Jesus Christ by giving their lives to defend his name, just as the martyrs in the south had done years before. The sacrifice of these two for their Christian beliefs has now been recognised by the Catholic Church in which they are venerated as martyrs and have now been proclaimed saints. In 1986, another time of great insecurity in Uganda, sixty two catechists were killed for staying with their people. Every diocese in northern Uganda now has a centre for training catechists.

In 1922, the government introduced the growing of cotton; roads were improved to Lake Victoria and to Atyak from Gulu and plants for its collection and processing.

In 1923, the area in north Uganda and South Sudan was detached from the Vicar Apostolic of Bahr el Ghazal and became the Apostolic Prefecture of the Equatorial Nile with Mgr Antonio Vignato as Apostolic Prefect. He took up residence at Gulu on 19th June 1924.

The missionaries, always attentive to the wish of Comboni to "Save Africa with Africa", in 1925 sent five aspirants to the priesthood to Jinja, the Mill Hill seminary: two from Kitgum, two from Gulu and one from Moyo.

The first missionaries had come on foot or on donkeys, bicycles arrived in 1912, in 1921 the first motor bike and in 1925 the first car!

Gulu soon became a "mother". In 1927 the Congregation of Propaganda Fide in the Vatican, detached Sudan, electing a new Apostolic Prefect in Mgr Giuseppe Zambonardi with Mgr Pietro Simoncello with the same charge in Uganda. Soon after, in December 1929 the whole District of Karamoja was given to the Apostolic Prefecture of the Equatorial Nile as well as two thirds of the district of Lango. It had been in the care of the Mill Hill Fathers who found it difficult because of lack of personnel.

The work of the mission continued expanding. Chapels were built, catechists trained to staff them and primary schools erected in the most important places. The missionaries built a junior school on the hill near the mission. After much discussion it was decided to invite the "Brothers of the Sacred Heart" of the American Province though their Mother House was in Spain, to come to take over this school. They accepted and in 1932 the first five: Brothers Norbert, Louis, Colman, Camillus and Oswin arrived and the school was given the name St Aloysius College. Because of the pressing need for teachers in the village schools, Teachers' Training Schools (Vernacular)

had been offering a two year course after the first classes. The one in Gulu had been reorganized by the Verona Fathers in 1928 with students coming from all over the North to attend. The Sacred Heart Brothers took charge of this too and transferred it to Lira. To ensure a certain standard of intake for this training, students had first to follow a course at intermediate level. Thus an intermediate school was begun by the Verona Fathers in Arua, so that students from West Nile could be more easily able to join the training in Lira.

The seminary, Cathedral, Boys Primary School, the catechumenate with its dormitories, all grew on the higher ground, since the original site had been found unhealthy, infected with Sleeping Sickness.

In 1934 the "Normal" School was opened for Girls and in 1935, the Girls Catechumenate. The sisters moved into their new house in that year too.

On 10th December 1934 the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide crowned the work of the missionaries by elevating the Prefecture to Vicariate. Mgr Angelo Negri became the first Vicar Apostolic on 25th August 1935 with residence at Gulu.

THE LITTLE SISTERS OF MARY IMMACULATE OF GULU

The first girls who expressed a desire to be religious sisters were also pupils of the mission school in Gulu and they came from different missions in the Prefecture: Moyo, Arua, Ladonga, Angal and Gulu. When they told the Apostolic Prefect, Mgr Vignato of their desire to be religious he encouraged them to continue their education in Gulu in the Teachers' Training College under the direction of Sr Angioletta Dognini. She became the co-foundress of the Congregation of the Little Sisters of Mary Immaculate of Gulu with Bishop Angelo Negri.

OMACH II

The population at Omach was dwindling but work in the mission was growing. The fathers were heavily engaged in the schools. The best schoolchildren, especially, the sons of chiefs, were prepared to take up work as "karani" or catechists. Bro. Poloniato visited all the villages, taking care of the sick and preparing children for the catechumenate.

In 1912 the whole mission of Omach had to be rebuilt - this time in another place, on a little hill sloping down to the Nile. It meant long and hard work for the Brother and his hired workers: cutting the trees in Bunyoro and transporting them at serious risk, across the Nile.

Three years had passed since the foundation of Omach, but no solemn baptism - except that of Njuba Paul - had yet been administered. A few dying babies had been baptized "in articulo mortis", some of whom survived such as: Peter Wathum, whose parents were Joseph Openji and Maria Nyilak and who became a leading Catholic of Panyimur; Aloysius Alal, also of Panyimur and John Oton of Pakwach who both became catechists. The deadly disease called Sleeping Sickness brought by the Tsetse fly was endemic in the area, many died, especially babies.

The missionaries thought it necessary to give the catechumens a long training before admitting them to receive Baptism. At last, on June 6th 1913, twelve of them, chosen from among the best, were solemnly baptized by Fr. Colombaroli, in the presence of Chief Omach and his elders, with 230 catechumens gathered into and around the overcrowded church. They came from various places: Paroketo, Ragem, Angal, Alwi, Panyimur and Nyrambe. It was an unforgettable day for Omach; it brought rejoicing and encouragement to the missionaries and all the people.

A week later Fr. Colombaroli blessed the first Christian marriage between a newly baptized and a catechumen. To remember this event, a cross was erected near the house of the new couple and the place was called "Lalarwa", Redeemer's village, a name which clearly expressed hopes for the future.

More solemn baptisms were administered in the following months. In November, Fr Bernabe, an assistant General from Verona, on an official visit to the missionaries, baptised four adults. Fr. Fomasa and Fr. Audisio were encouraged to start more catechumenates around Omach and Koba, and even on the west banks of the Nile. At the end of the year 1913, Otor had 42 catechumens, Odwonga 30, Labwong 35, Koba 76, Manero near Nimule 70; giving a total of 388 catechumens, not counting the first of all, chief Yoanna and catechist Areni of Panyimur, The catechumens living in the mission were 135; the Christians 42. These were the first fruits of three years' hard work, and the seeds of the Church that would grow in the West Nile.

What caused the missionaries to hasten the baptism of catechumens was the threat of an epidemic of sleeping sickness which was spreading northwards from Bunyoro. There was also a political factor: the colonial authorities of Congo and Uganda at last, finalized the question of the "Lado Enclave" and the transfer of the West Nile region from the Congo to Uganda. When the government of Uganda had ordered all the people around Omach to leave the area: the Alur to cross the Nile onto the west bank and settle in their own homeland; the Acholi to move eastward away from the river, the missionaries were very anxious to follow the Alur across the river but they met with the authorities' persistent refusal to establish a mission there. To their poverty and sickness were now added solitude, and distrust of some local officers besides uncertainty about the future. With the passing of time, the missionaries were allowed to visit the Christians and catechumens whom some zealous Christian or a catechist gathered together in various places, like Panyimur, Panyango and others...

An attempt made by Fr. Joseph BERNABE in January 1914 to build a house and chapel at Panyango (Awiny) had to be abandoned by order of the District Commissioner. The incident caused friction between the civil authorities and the missionaries and formal permission to visit the catechists' posts in West Nile was suspended for about a year.

Comboni missionaries did not expect opposition from civil authorities but misunderstanding arose, usually because the missionaries did not know English well, nor were they familiar with the system of British administration. The administration assumed the Anglican faith was paramount, patterned on British use, while the Comboni missionaries fostered the spread of the Catholic faith with complete dedication and zeal, sometimes aggressively so. This disturbed the government whose motto was "cooperation, not competition" among different denominations.

About this time, some changes of boundaries were made also in the missionary administration: the southern Sudan and northern Uganda, including the West Nile, were detached from Khartoum and annexed to the Vicariate of Bahr el Ghazal. The Vicar Apostolic, Bp Antonio STOPPANI, came to Uganda in December 1913, and visited mission stations of Omach and Gulu. He admired the heroic efforts made by the missionaries, and renewed their physical and spiritual energies by bringing them more missionaries: Fr. Antonio VIGNATO, Fr. Umberto CARDANI, Fr. Giovanni Battista PEDRANA, and Bro. Simone FANTI.

YET MORE DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED BY THE MISSIONARIES

The environment was not as bad for health as Bahr-el-Ghazal in South Sudan, where five missionaries died in one year and three others had to return to Europe for health reasons. But living conditions were harsh. Wild animals were not an uncommon danger. Elephants, leopards, and lions disturbed the mission. In 1915, on their way from Omach to Gulu, Fr Vignato and Br. Co faced down a lion and its mate for seven hours at night. The missionaries were sure that their guardian angels had saved their lives. Events in the wider world also affected the missionaries.

In June 1914, two Christians from Panyimur arrived at Omach with a letter from Fr. LAANE, superior of the White Fathers' mission at Nyarambe, Congo: "I have to inform you that the authorities have definitely fixed the boundary between Uganda and Congo. The catechist posts of Parombo, Pagwata, Padel and Pamora now belong to Uganda so they are under your jurisdiction, like Panyimur and Panyango". Six catechist posts in West Nile! How could two priests, Fornasa and Audisio, cope with them? The two Fathers went to Panyango to see the District Commissioner; the visit was successful: the catechists of those six places were allowed to stay in their office, thank God.

On August 10th 1914, Fr Laane, Superior of the White Fathers mission at Nyarambe, arrived at Omach. Bro Poloniato was seriously ill and during the night had received the last Sacraments; Fr Bombieri had an attack of black water fever; Fr Fornasa went to the river to receive the visitor.

"The whole world is on fire", Fr Laane said as he landed, "Germany and Austria have gone to war against the Allies and you are considered enemies and prisoners of war". I am not allowed to enter your house, but only to give you this message and leave within ten minutes. The steamer will no longer stop at Omach to deliver or fetch the mail: I will try to help you and do you this service from Nyarambe".

Shocked by this news, Fr Fornasa could only stammer his thanks to Fr Laane for his kindness. As the steamer departed with his visitor, he felt oppressed by a terrible desolation: here they were, left alone in a place of death, prisoners at Omach which they had set up with so many risks, hardships and hopes. He did not have the courage to tell the sad news to the two sick confreres; he went to the chapel and prayed: "My God, are we not your messengers of peace and truth? Your will be done, just help us to do it".

After some days Fr Bombieri recovered and Bro Poloniato regained enough strength to be carried to Gulu. The young Bro Nicola Co came to replace him and the work continued. For over two years the missionaries were confined to Omach in agonizing circumstances: a dwindling and confused population as many were gradually leaving; few catechumens and pupils, plenty of sickness all around, solitude, tribulation and death.

Why were the missionaries confined as "enemies and prisoners" at this time? In Europe and so also by the British authorities in Uganda, Omach was called "the Austrian mission". Omach was still considered an offspring of the Austrian Mission of Khartoum which is what Khartoum was called in Comboni's day. Bro. Schroer and Bro. Simone Fanti, being Austrians, were sent to concentration camps

Yet the missionaries continued to be very active, ministering to those who remained at Omach, and crossing the river to visit the growing communities in the west. The first girls were admitted to baptism on 10th October 1914. The first three Alur catechists, Lore, Mondo and Okema were doing so well that it was decided to start a special school to train aspirant catechists.

By order of the civil authorities, on 16th October 1914 Chief Omach with the people of his village crossed the Nile to settle in his homeland, near Paroketo. Three more Alur Chiefs, Uma, Manero and Koba with their people had to leave. In the following months many single families or groups had to, or chose to, leave and seek a place or a job in the nearby districts, as far as Masindi, Gulu and even Arua. Christians and catechumens took with them the seed of faith.

In October the catechist Yoanna came from Hoima with his young spouse Julia. They took charge of the catechumenate until Albino Okema, Alur, would replace them in 1916.

In November: Fr. Fornasa administered the solemn nuptial blessings to 14 couples. "Lalarwa" grew into a small village. The training of catechists was – and still is – an important part of mission methodology throughout the world. The Comboni Missionaries knew that the penetration of the Gospel of Jesus into the north of Uganda could not have been done so successfully if it had not been for the generous work of the catechists – those from the south and those they themselves prepared. The catechists have more stability; they know the language and the mentality of the people and are part of their life. Outstations, chapels and Eucharistic Centres were entrusted to them. They were often expected to manage small bush schools where children were taught the catechism as well as reading writing and 'rithmetic.

In January 1915 Fr. Fornasa left Omach for Gulu mission to replace Fr. Vignato who went to start the new mission of Kitgum.

Easter 1915 was celebrated with great solemnity and joy, as 55 people crossed the river and came to Omach to celebrate the feast and to witness 12 young men and 3 girls baptised. "The heart of this missionary was deeply moved and consoled by the heroic acts of these Christians who proved themselves to be emulators of the first martyrs" (Fr. Audisio).

On that date, August 15, 1915, the total number of Christians was 137; only one school was active. In October Fr. Dominic Spazian arrived to replace Fr. Bombieri who was transferred to Helouan, Egypt, to direct a big school there. Fr. Spazian gave an important push to schools and catechumenates at Angal and Nyapea. On the west bank the Alur were busy re-settling in their own land; 15 catechists were officially installed as their leaders. But that feast of the Assumption had also a note of disappointment: Chief Yoanni of Panyimur did not come to celebrate with us. He was bitterly disappointed when he was not admitted as a member in the new administration of the West Nile district; a disappointment for the missionaries, too. Religious discrimination?

The Register of Baptisms, which is still kept at Angal mission, shows that in those three years the missionaries baptized 183 adults; many of whom were from the catechist posts in West Nile: Panyimur, Paroketo, Panyango, Panyigoro, Alwi, Parombo, Pamora .

At the beginning of 1916 the government gave a sign of appreciation for the efforts of our missionaries on both sides of the river by renewing the permission for 15 catechists' posts and the Christians gave proofs of renewed fervour.

On March 14, 1916, a furious storm razed to the ground nearly all the mission buildings: chapel, house, schools, and workshops. Thank God, no one was seriously injured. Life went on!

In July 1916, Fr. Vignato who was in charge of the four missions: Omach, Gulu, Palaro and Kitgum, came to visit Omach, - he brought a gift for the confreres: a bicycle! - and stayed for several weeks to give encouragement to both the missionaries and the faithful. He baptized 8 catechumens, confirmed 83 Christians: and counted 195 living faithful.

There was also an official visit of some members of the civil administration; they were joyfully welcomed by the missionaries and "all the population of the mission". So in this atmosphere of relief and hope - thanks also to the cheerful character of young Bro. Nicola CO - preparations were being made to celebrate solemnly the feast of All Saints, November 1. But...

On October 29 1916, Bro. Co was struck by black water fever; all efforts to save his life were of no avail and, after renewing his religious vows, he died, 32 years old, on the very day of All Saints. Hundreds of Christians, catechumens and pagans came from both banks of the river to mourn him; they showed how much they loved him and the mission. He was the first victim among the Comboni Missionaries in Uganda. His death was interpreted as the final price to be paid after seven years of trials working to bring the Gospel. His grave at Omach was marked by a cross - THE CROSS AT OMACH - until his mortal remains were taken to Angal and buried in the cemetery there.

Six days after the Brother's death, the official permission came at last from the British in Masindi to establish a mission among the Alur in the West Nile!

Fr. A. Vignato came from Kitgum, crossed the Nile and explored the Alur district in search of a suitable place for a mission. He visited Panyango and Padyere, crossed the Nyarwodo and reached Okollo; he then returned to Angal where the Acting District Commissioner of Arua was waiting to meet him. Angal had already drawn the attention of Fr. Vignato, but the British Officer convinced him to opt for Orussi, which he described as ideal for a mission and a place of rest. He added that he had already ordered the local chief to find enough workers to build the first houses as soon as possible. Fr. Vignato accepted the advice (?) of the British Officer.

Gradually the Fathers, catechists, Christians and catechumens moved out of the decaying area of Koba, crossed the river and climbed up to Orussi. As they began to settle in those new surroundings, they did not feel the same enthusiasm for Orussi as the ADC had shown: it was such a cold place! How could anyone who was used to the hot climate of the Nile live here? Fr. Vignato tried to dispel all fears and help by working hard to complete the buildings of the new mission; but he got ill and had to leave for Gulu.

By February 1917, the two priests at Orussi, Fr. Audisio and Fr. Spazian, were joined by Fr. Giuseppe SANTAMBROGIO; Bro. Poloniato also re-joined the community. They all tried hard to get the mission going full swing, but all sorts of obstacles and problems cropped up: no catechumens from Padyere or Jonam were willing to go to Orussi; those who were there began to fall sick with pneumonia or meningitis and had to be sent home; and quite a few died too.

Orussi was too near the Congo border and too far from the main Alur centres in Uganda which made the missionaries feel as much isolated as they were at Omach. There were many villages on the mountains of Okoro, but the government had forbidden all activities in that area for fear of political disorders among the local population after the deposing of great chief Amula. In addition, the weather that year was so bad that they could not move about to visit the villages. The missionaries felt as depressed as their little flock of Christians, schoolchildren and catechumens.

In August, Fr. Vignato went to Orussi, examined the situation, and realized that he had made a mistake when he accepted the advice (?) of the British ADC. He apologized to the Fathers and told them to look for a more suitable place.

Considering all the difficulties, obstacles and disappointments met by our pioneer missionaries in north Uganda in their relations with the colonial officers, from the first incident at Nimule in

February 1910 to their moving to Orussi in November 1917, there arose a strong and almost general suspicion that the British were unwilling to have them in Uganda. God prevailed.

Frs Santambrogio and Audisio came down from Orussi, explored various places in Padyere, and finally on the advice of some local leaders and catechists, decided in favour of ANGAL, where they were warmly welcomed by Mukungu Edward Onoyo ... The missionaries were granted 100 acres of land for the mission on Angal hill, for 50 year at 20 rupees a year...

Temporary buildings were started immediately, and by December 1917 Angal Mission was already a busy place. Christmas 1917 was solemnly and cheerfully celebrated with the participation of many Christians from Jonam, Padyere, Omach and even Okoro. The missionaries felt that they had at last reached the "Promised Land", and they looked to the future with renewed hopes and enthusiasm.

From Angal the missionaries and their catechists moved out to all parts of the Alur country. Everywhere they were warmly received by the chiefs and the people.

In 1926, Mgr. Vignato blessed the foundation stone of the new church, started by Bro. Emilio BETTI and continued by Bro. Emilio BATTISTATA and other brothers. It took them four years to build it, a large and very beautiful church which Mgr. Vignato inaugurated solemnly on November 1st 1932 dedicating it to St. Anthony of Padua, the wonder-worker saint.

A month later, Fr. Spazian, Fr. Pietro VIGNATO and Bro. Battistata went to NYAPEA and started there the first mission in Okoro. Angal gave to her first daughter a dowry of 2,750 Catholics. Twenty years later, in January 1952, Nyapea had her first daughter, WARR, while Angal gave birth to PAKWACH¹.

THE COMBONI MISSIONARY SISTERS IN ANGAL 1924

M Carla came from Italy in 1923 with four new sisters: Cesaria Lanaro, Alessandrina Negri, Serafina Castagnaro and Cecilia Ronchi. The latter remained in Gulu while the others went to begin the community in Angal. They found much work waiting for them and many deprivations. One of these was to find no house awaiting them and they had to make do with one of the grass huts of the catechumenate. However the people were delighted to have the sisters and responded to the invitation to learn about Christ: the catechumenate flourished and this more than paid for the hardships of the beginning. A few years after their arrival, the sisters of this community began a new apostolate: that of giving refuge in the mission to the elderly. Many of these had been accused of being witches and of having worked witchcraft against others and were badly treated as a result. Many had been beaten and had undergone trial by fire and iron and were then usually left to die in the forest. The missionaries decided to welcome them into the mission so they could finish their days in peace, preparing to die and meet the God who loved them.

¹ Here are other "offspring":

From Angal, Nebbi (1963), Orussi (1964), Parombo (1966), Akanyo (1999).

From Nyapea: Paidha (1963), Owenjo (?), Zombo (2009).

From Warr: Zeu (1966), Kango (1998).

From Pakwach: Wadelai (1982).

From Parombo: Panyimur (1983).

From the REGISTER OF BAPTISMS of Angal:

number of Baptisms, including those "in articulo mortis", administered:

- a) when the missionaries were at Omach (Feb.1910-Nov.1916) = 294
- b) when the missionaries were at Orussi (Nov. 1916-Oct.1917) = 74
- c) when the missionaries were at Angal (Oct. 1917-April 1920) = 431

From the beginning, the sisters in Uganda had depended directly on Mother House in Verona but this was changed during the General Chapter of 1925, when Uganda was made into a Province with M Carla Troenzi as the Provincial Superior. In the years that followed, the apostolate of the sisters became better organized as new sisters arrived regularly from Italy to open more communities. These reinforced existing numbers and replaced sisters who returned to Italy to recover their health.

NYAPEA

In December 1932, the day after the inauguration of the church of Angal the missionaries decided to build a new mission station among the Alur, up in the mountains which bordered with Belgian Congo. The area was well populated: about 30,000 inhabitants divided into five groups each with their own chief: Kango, War, Zeo, Nyapea and Payida. The first missionaries were Frs Pietro Vignato, Domenico Spazian and brother Emilio Battistata. They built a small house for the missionaries, an equally small chapel and buildings for the catechumens and a school. When the division was made from Angal, 2750 Christians were in the mission territory of Nyapea and by April 1933 some of the older catechumens were baptized and by 1935 there were more than 5000 Christians.

THE COMBONI MISSIONARY SISTERS IN NYAPEA 1933

The sisters opened a community here in November 1933 with Sr Adolfa Parati as superior and three new sisters from Italy: Srs Raffaella Ferrerio, Dirce Salvi and Annetta Cortese. Mother Rosalba accompanied them to the new mission and helped them to settle. The sisters went on safari often, visiting the villages around the mission where the people, the Alur, welcomed them warmly.

PALARO

After the establishment of Omach and Gulu, the missionaries thought of expanding by opening a third mission south of Gulu on the Nile near Foweira. After pondering all the pros and cons of this choice, it was decided to go north instead, towards Nimule. In mid 1912, Fr Colombaroli returned from Italy accompanied by Fr Giuseppe Zambonardi. In October of that year, they went to Nimule to meet the commissioner, Mr. Moore, who was very pleased to see them. He told them to explore the territory to find a place which suited their needs. They went to Lokai, and met the chief Tikaya, who accepted them warmly. Next day, the missionaries crossed the river Asswua and met the chief Abdallah, (his name was evidence that the slave traders, the Arabs, had been in the territory of Madi). The chief asked them to build a school. After the missionaries, reported back to him the commissioner suggested they visit Palaro and invited the chief of Palaro to Nimule. This was Rasigala Baker, who after some resistance accepted the missionaries at Palaro to start the mission. They reached his village on 14th October 1912 to begin the mission station. The advantage of choosing this village was that although among the Madi, Acholi was spoken too. The missionaries did not have much choice because further north the boundaries were not yet clear. They began to study the new language of Madi but were particularly happy because as yet there was no protestant influence among this people.

Bro. Savariano, from Gulu, joined them soon after to start the buildings of the new mission helped by Bro. Clement from Omach. In this simple way the seed of the gospel sprang up in the Madi land. The first school was started in Palaro under a tree with 25 pupils brought by the chief Rasigala who after his initial hesitation helped the missionaries very much. The strategy for the evangelization used by the Fathers was education in cooperation with chiefs of the place, in using customs and language of the people. The drums were used to call the children to school. They would write on the earth, using fingers and sticks. It was not easy to start a school without books and others scholastic material.

The fathers were the first to write down the alphabet of the Madi language and numbers. It was the beginning of Madi literature. The waraga started to attract chiefs, asking for schools. With the help of some Baganda teachers, the mukungus of Gibrini and Sai had their schools. In just a few months Palaro became a solid mission with various buildings. Small boards were distributed to pupils for writing, prepared by the brother. The fathers appointed catechists as the essential collaborators in spreading the word of God to different places. The first catechist was a Muganda, by name Philip, appointed to Pabo chapel at the invitation of the chief Laton Betal. A catechist was also a teacher. So waraga and lejo Rubanga dri went together. Fr. Zambonardi, in his Memoirs, says that at Christmas Mass that year, there were only the three missionaries and their cook a Muganda present. So no Madi had been baptized in those months. Teaching was done in Acholi because the fathers did not yet know the Madi language. The life of the missionaries was spent in teaching in the schools, visiting the people in the villages, and meeting chiefs. The first baptism was administered to babies in "articulo mortis". The missionaries introduced new vegetables and plants into the area including sweet potatoes, pawpaw and oranges.

On the first Easter celebrated in Palaro in 1913, the first 30 boys began their catechumenate, being given a medal of the Blessed Virgin Mary. They were called "Boronzi Rubanga dri", the children of God. In April, 1913 Fr. Molinaro, a young priest, came from Italy to help Fr. Zambonardi, while Fr. Colombaroli went to visit the mission of Gondokoro, in Sudan. Fr. Umberto Cardani joined them in Palaro on Pentecost Day 1914.

Before the arrival of the British in Uganda, the Madi chiefs already had guns. They bought them from the Arabs by exchanging ivory, girls, slaves and/or cattle. When the British came they gave orders to the chiefs to surrender all guns to the commissioner in Nimule; the chiefs did not obey, they hid them. The Commissioner Manara sent Askaris to recover the guns forcibly; chiefs and people were punished. Fr. Zambonardi sent his protests to the commissioner, citing the suffering of the people and the bad behaviour of the soldiers. Notwithstanding attempts at control by the

government, the smuggling of guns by Muslims, Ethiopians and Arabs with the complicity of local chiefs, continued for many years.

At this time changes were made to the territory of the ecclesiastical province which had centred on Khartoum. The Superior General of the Comboni Missionaries in Verona wrote to his missionaries in Uganda on 27th August 1913 that the Apostolic Prefecture of Bar el Ghazel had been erected, detaching territory from Khartoum so that Omach, Gulu and Palaro now came under the jurisdiction of the new Apostolic Prefect Mgr Stoppani, based in Bar el Ghazel, still thousands of miles away.

When Fr. Molinaro arrived in Palaro, he began to learn Madi language, considered very difficult by other missionaries, very different from Alur or Acholi. He was the one who made a systematic study of the grammar of the language and set out the orthography of it. Because of the difficulty in rendering the right meaning of some words, such as Virgin, God etc. foreign words were introduced like Virgo, Rubanga. One can imagine the difficulty of the missionaries to translate, scrupulously the words Trinity, Sacraments, virtue, paradise, hell, grace, celibacy etc. In October 1913 Fr. Bombieri came from Sudan through Nimule to join the other fathers. In the beginning of November 1913, Fr. Bernabè, representative of the General Administration, came to Palaro to visit the missionaries and their works. In this way the Comboni Missionaries were linked to the Superior General in Verona and to Propaganda Fide through their representatives.

Many of the catechists who came from the south went back when they found the language too difficult and the climate and food too strange for them. The local people also looked on them with suspicion. The permission of the chief of the place was needed before appointing a catechist to a chapel and this chief could send also him away. This could happen even when the parents wanted the catechist sent by the missionaries. Furthermore, the British had made a rule that the chief was the one responsible for sending children to school at the mission. Simeo, a Muganda, a good man and well prepared, was appointed as the first catechist of Pabo chapel. In the beginning of the mission, only boys were sent to school for instruction. Usually, parents, chiefs and custom considered girls unfit to learn, useful only for domestic work at home though in Palaro some girls were able to receive instruction. In general, in the first years, the missionaries did not push to have girls and women in the mission.

Of Palaro Fr. Zambonardi in his Memoirs says: "In general the population is not against the mission; our relations with chiefs are very good and they have never refused help to us; they are eager to send their children to school. We can conclude that the mission is going well". No force or intimidation was used by the missionaries to make anyone to believe or embrace the Catholic Faith. In fact, they were in no hurry. In Palaro there was no adult conversion, no adult baptised for the first three years. The fathers busied themselves by moving from village to village, speaking to the people, helping them, in particular the old and the sick. They knew that the witness of their way of life would be the means to bring the Madi people to embrace the Good News. What they believed was shown by how they lived: quote that they may see your good works and give praise to your heavenly father

Fr Molinaro wrote of their difficulties in learning the language of the Madi people; it was considered much more difficult than Luo languages: Alur, Langi, Acholi. "Children were happy to teach us new words and sentences and we diligently wrote them down in our notebooks in order to understand the grammar. Very soon, we realized that the children were playing tricks on us: what yesterday they would say meant white, today was black and so on. We understood that the elders did not want us to learn their language. The elders were hoping that we would get discouraged and go away. They were treating us the way they had the Jadia (the slave traders) or the Equatoria (the Egyptians). After trying a few ways we found one which worked: children were always around us so with a sweet or a holy picture we were able to make them speak and make remarks we could learn and so we gained new words for our vocabulary. As we used what we learned this way, people were amazed at how we knew these expressions. The elders were unhappy at our progress but we had found a way".

In May 1914 two more missionaries arrived in Palaro, Fr. Pedrana and Fr. Cardani. Mgr. Stoppani, the Apostolic Prefect of Wau, Bhar el Ghazal, also came to visit the missions in June of that year. There was great jubilation to greet him and even Chief Rasigala was present. Mgr. Stoppani congratulated with the missionaries for the progress of the mission, visiting some outstations like Pabango and Gibrini during his stay. This journey showed his courage and zeal, he traveled from Wau to the Comboni Missionaries stations in Uganda, using any means available: bicycle, donkey, boat and on foot, walking miles and miles, under rain, hot sun, in peril from animals, suffering hunger, all without knowing any of the languages of the people, he managed by using Arab words.

Fr. Zambonardi, the superior of the mission of Palaro was eager to bring the Good News to the people along the river. On the 8th.August 1914, with the aim of meeting chiefs and bringing children to the mission for instruction in the faith, he began his safari. He took four Baganda porters, among them an ex soldier of Kabaka Kabarega, named Makaku, and two Madi youth as cooks; he traveled by donkey. At the first place, Lajobi, Fr Zambonardi met Chief Opitoro, at the second Ali, he met Chief Wic, who promised to build a school and asked for a catechist. He also promised to send his sons Androga and Fulu to Palaro for instruction.

After meeting Chief Jada, he met Chief Sururu at Pakele. Since he was reluctant to allow his children to go to the mission, he said he had none and gave a slave instead. When he reached Lowi he met Chief Ayo Kabir, a powerful man in the area, with many wives and cattle. He gave his son Maku for Palaro. At Adropi he met Chief Cokiri who gave three sons to be instructed and asked for a catechist, promising to build a house for the catechist and a school where he could teach the faith. From Adropi he went onto Liri which was a crossing point to reach Gimara on the other side of the Nile. At Pacara Chief Acholi gave his brother and a boy for instruction. Fr Zambonardi and his group, including the boys gathered along the way, returned to Palaro on the 26th August 1914. By July of that year, there were 250 youth for instruction in the catechumenates in Palaro, and four schools in the surrounding villages.

Buildings were constructed for the boys coming from afar. In the beginning the Acholi language was used in the school but soon the Madi language was introduced. The prayers and the first part of the catechism, used by the White Fathers were translated into Madi with some simple songs. A text book was printed in Khartoum, for writing and reading in Madi with few stories collected from the boys and some pictures. On the cover was the picture of a rabbit. That is why the pupils called the book the ETOGO. The fathers and brother used handwritten papers for teaching.

Fr. Zambonardi describes Christmas 1914 in moving words. The catechumens were many and they led the procession into the mission, each group with their catechist: Aleni from Lowi, Philip from Zaipei, others from Palaro and Atyak; they filled the mission compound. The open air mass was sing in Latin by a choir of some Christians and many pagans: it was like the Day of Pentecost in Palaro. But the missionaries were aware that few asked for baptism. The parents liked their children to learn the Waraga but opposed their children becoming Christians; the new teaching forbade their pagan practices, and they were afraid their children would lose their Madi identity. The few who did accept included Rasigala's son, Jada, besides Drako, Bay, Olorogo, Moi and Yosef Agasi. The first 5 baptisms in Palaro were given by Fr. Vignato on 24th. of January 1915 in the presence of a great gathering and chiefs: these are the names: Yosef Agasi, Albino Okello, Federiko Roma, Angelo Oto, Umberto Oyio.

The distance from their homes to the mission was an obstacle to the people receiving instruction and so from 1915, the missionaries set up a catechumenate in each chapel. When the newly baptized Albino Okello was sent as catechist to the chapel Ali, he was the first Madi catechist.

Difficulties for the missionaries and their work of evangelization arose from the opposition of Protestants. A certain Mr. Fisher, a pastor from Gulu with the approval of the chief, brought a protestant catechist to Baroli where Bro. Savariano was teaching catechism. That was the start of competition between Protestants and Catholics among the Madi area. This Mr. Fisher would take

the sons of chiefs to Gulu for instruction. Chiefs, who wanted to be favoured by the British Protectorate Government, would encourage the Protestant catechist and forbid the children from going to the Catholic one.

But the people wanted the Christian faith. Fr. Zambonardi writes that in February 1915 there were requests from the chiefs of West Madi asking the missionaries to bring them "waraga" and "lejo Rubanga dri" also. These chiefs were Kutulungu of Metuli, Lukere of Metoru, Yambayamba of Moyo, Keny of Adrupele and Andira of Loropi. But they were still forbidden by the government to cross the river: the area was infested with tze-zte fly; boundaries of the territory and so the administration too was not yet clear, neither was there proper security. With no schools possible in West Madi, these chiefs sent their sons to Palaro. Fr. Molinaro, who had learned the Madi language well, was in charge of their teaching. About this time, Atyak passed under the jurisdiction of Gulu by order of the DC Mr Postlethwaite who informed Fr. Vignato of the change; Atyak, was Acholi speaking. On Pentecost Day 1915 another 12 catechumens received the sacrament of baptism and by the end of that year the catechumens at Palaro were 300.

Though West Nile was part of the Vicariate of Bar el Ghazel, its centre was very far, a thousand kilometres away so the Apostolic Vicar appointed Fr. Vignato his delegate with full powers for all missions in Uganda. The territory known now as West Nile lying between the Albert Nile and Congo up to Nimule, was under the direct domain of King Leopold II of Belgium. (There is a monument erected at Alikoa, near Offude Mountain in Maracha, as a memorial to Belgian soldiers). After the death of the king, in December 1909, according to a treaty of 1910, this territory was annexed from Belgium to Sudan in June 1910. In 1912 a treaty was made to exchange districts between Khartoum and Entebbe. In January 1914 West Nile became Ugandan while Nimule and Gondokoro became Sudanese.

KITGUM

In 1912 the British Protectorate Government in Uganda established a permanent military post in Kitgum. The Comboni Missionaries requested permission to establish a mission there and this was accepted. The Protestants had long been there and were strong in numbers.

In 1915 Frs Vignato and Beduschi went to see the area and chose for the site of the new mission a slight hill, just a kilometre away from the government post.

In March of 1916, Frs Pedrana and Gambaretto, soon followed by Bro. Poloniato arrived to settle. With the help of the local people they built a house for the missionaries, followed by a school which was soon full of children eager to learn about the Catholic faith and of course, the church which was dedicated to Mary Immaculate and officially opened on May 1st 1916.

Life was hard often there was little food. One evening, having nothing to eat themselves and nothing for the catechumens, while praying in the church, a great cloud of white ants flew up and all set about collecting them, two sacks full in fact, plenty to feed them all; the war in Europe affected the missionaries, money was scarce. The Protestants were also an obstacle to their work of evangelization and their catechists were many throughout the area. But little by little, as the mission grew and the number of catechumens increased, so did the esteem of the government officials who came regularly to visit. In 1917 an epidemic of Blackwater fever broke out. When the people asked the witchdoctors its cause they pointed the finger at the Europeans. This was a time of insecurity and uncertainty and in 1918 the two catechists Daudi and Jildo were killed.

But the first baptisms were given in 1916 and at the end of that year there were 500 catechumens spread throughout the chapels. In December 1918 there were 400 baptised and over a thousand catechumens. Because of the vastness of the territory, Mgr Vignato decided a new mission station should be opened at Kalongo. The brothers: Poloniato, Fanti and Amadeo worked hard to build the new mission and it was ready at the end of 1918. They next built a house for the Comboni Sisters who arrived in 1920. Its new church was blessed by Mgr Vignato on the feast of the Immaculate Conception in 1923.

COMBONI MISSIONARY SISTERS IN KITGUM 1920

The General Council responded promptly as before when asked for more sisters to begin a new community in Kitgum. They sent Srs Benedetta Colombo, superior, Dosolina Gamaretto, Primina Colombo, M Giuseppa Carminati and Raffaella Consolaro. Sr Carla Troenzi spent a couple of months helping the new community to settle. As soon as they knew a few words of the language the sisters began to teach catechism to the omen and girls and made apostolic journeys which they called safaris. They visited and treated the sick in the villages and always had a good word for the children and a smile for everyone. Thus in a short time they gained the trust of the local people. Gradually they expanded their work so that besides instructing and having overall care of the catechumens in the mission the sisters also ran a nursery school. In this the older ones were prepared to receive their first Holy Communion. They also cared for the sick who came for treatment, including many who suffered from leprosy. The more seriously ill were visited in their homes and in this way, the sisters sometimes had the opportunity of baptizing a dying person or making sure any Catholics received the Sacraments before they died.

THE FIRST COMBONI SISTER DIES

In 1928, Sr Elena Mezzera became gravely ill in Kitgum with acute rheumatism. The sisters sent a message to Gulu but because of the heavy rains and the fact that the bridge was down, the news did not get through until after Sr Elena had died on 25th July. Her heart had been affected by the disease. She was the first Comboni Sister to die in Uganda and was only 35 years old. All the Christians of the mission and from the villages around came to her funeral and burial in the mission cemetery.

THE COMBONI MISSIONARY SISTERS IN KALONGO 1936

KALONGO

The last born mission station of this period was Kalongo divided from Kitgum because of the vast number of inhabitants. The place was very wild at the beginning, inhabited by lions on the mountain (known at that time as Gebel-el-avur or Mountain of the Wind) and by elephants. The missionaries found plenty of wood, always an advantage for their building and expansion and plenty of fresh water, also a great benefit. On 2nd January 1934, the first missionaries arrived with Mgr Vignato to accompany them. They were Frs Fiocco, Calegari and Brother Luigi Caldarola. The early years were difficult mainly because the mission was so isolated from the others already founded and also for the poverty the missionaries suffered. It took a year to build a decent house built of bricks for the missionaries and other buildings housed the catechumens whose number increased quickly until those baptized by 1936 were 3800. Brick buildings were a necessity since termites ate everything of wood including the Via Crucis!

THE COMBONI MISSIONARY SISTERS IN KALONGO

The sisters who went to begin a new community there in July 1936 were Sr Leondina Lotto, superior, and Srs Lucidia Vidale and Amata De Monti with M Rosalba at the beginning to help them to settle in. As their diary records, they found the early days hard, the climate took time to get used to and the sisters often suffered from fevers. They had only been there a few months when Sr Lucidia fell seriously ill with blackwater fever and died. She was the second Comboni Missionary Sister to die in Uganda and is buried in Kalongo.

MOYO

The missionaries had already realized it would be better for them to leave Palaro and cross the Nile to find a more central place for the mission among the Madi and so bring them the faith. They were helped by the fact that many chiefs asked visiting commissioners for the missionaries to be allowed to come to West Madi because their land was too far from Palaro. These were Mr Roger and Mr Towin who then asked the governor of Masindi to allow the Comboni Missionaries to open schools to the West of the river. Fr. Vignato received a letter giving permission. Frs. Molinaro and Cardani were chosen to go to and at the end of 1915, they travelled to meet the chiefs of West Madi at Loropi with Joseph Agasi acting as their interpreter. The great chief of Adrupele (Dufile), Kenyi, introduced the other chiefs to the missionaries: Andira of Loropi, Mgbamgba of Moyo, Lukere of Metu-oru, Kutulungu of Metuli and Molembe of Arinyapi. All of them accepted to welcome religion and schools in their lands and showed their willingness by building chapels and schools near their villages.

On 14th February 1916, Fr. Zambonardi followed them by going through Lajobi, Ali, Pakele, Lowi, Adropi and Pacara. He crossed the Nile by canoe at Loropi from where he proceeded to Amua, Goopi, Metuli, Metoru and Moyo. He was surprised to see evidence that the chiefs were eager to send their children to learn the "waraga" and "lejo Rubanga dri". Wherever he went he was welcomed by chiefs and people.

In March 1916 the missionaries were still in Palaro: Zambonardi, Molinaro and Cardani. They were very strict in admitting candidates to baptism, fearing that they would not be faithful to the faith. So those pupils they were not sure of were not admitted to baptism. Fortunately these, because they were literate were taken by the government as interpreters, officers and sometimes became means of spreading the Good News, in building chapels and helping the catechists. When the missionaries moved out of Palaro they left evangelization in the safe hands of the catechist of Lokai, Aleni, who had come away from Sudan and moved to Palaro, where he became a teacher and supervised chapels. Yosef Agasi, son of a chief, one of the first five baptized in Palaro who married Magdalen in church was installed chief of Palaro by the commissioner.

Once the Commissioner Eden had sent a letter authorizing the missionaries to transfer from Palaro to West Madi, they made their preparations. They crossed the river in canoes, bringing along all they thought necessary. They landed at Loropi, where chiefs were waiting in the Taia (rest house) to welcome them. Chief Keny of Adrupele made a speech in which he told his people: "The Fathers will teach our children the waraga and the lejo Rubanga dri": they are our brothers". The missionaries passed through Amua, Metoru, Goopi and finally reached Moyo, the place chosen between the villages of Yambayamba and Bandassi. On 3rd November 1916 Mgr. Vignato confirmed Moyo as the place to build the new mission. He then proceeded to Omach for the funeral of the first Comboni missionary in Uganda, Brother Nicola Co. who was buried there. When Angal became a mission, his relics were moved and buried in the cemetery of Angal.

On 3rd January 1917, Brother Fanti Simone, with skilled workers arrived in Moyo from Gulu to begin the construction of the mission. Bro. Savariano came from Palaro to help. Two laymen were also sent from Palaro to Moyo: Faustino, son of chief Yambayamba and David, also son of a chief, who was deported by the government, because found responsible for the killing of a British officer. These two laymen worked with brothers hand in hand in building the mission, at the same time teaching people the faith. From the beginning of evangelization, the laity was involved.

Fr. Zambonardi tried to find a new route between Palaro and Moyo. He went to Liri and crossed the river there, landing at Relly and went onto Gimara There he found a different people, Kuku, with a different language and customs from Madi. From Gimara there were two routes: one going to the Logbara and the other to Moyo, which he reached on the 10th March. There he replaced Fr. Molinaro who went back to Palaro to give the last instruction to the catechumens before Baptism.

The last Easter was celebrated at Palaro on 8th April 1917, the last big feast before the missionaries left it in the hands of the catechists and teachers in July. Fr. Zambonardi with Brothers Fanti and Savariano and the catechist Yakobo and a few Christians went back to Palaro for the feast. Fr. Zambonardi recorded some reflections on the work done in Palaro. Baptisms had not been many, the people were reluctant to let go of their traditions. There was also a problem about marriage in church. At this time, all those baptized were male, no girl had been allowed by the family to be baptized. This meant there could not be a Christian marriage. Parents feared that in sending girls for instruction, there would be no dowry later. The fact that a Christian could only have one wife was also seen as an obstacle.

The commissioner of Nimule gave permission to missionaries to cross the Nile going to the territory of Lokai so Fr. Cardani with 9 catechists (all Neophytes), crossed into Sudan into the territory of Lokai at Nimule. The chief Lobai, an ex-pupil of Palaro, helped the Father to post the 9 catechists in different places. In this way the Madi became missionaries of the Madi. In due time Loa will become a great mission. It is reported that the catechists were altogether 38 (neophytes.). When the fathers' house in was ready, all goods were taken from Palaro to Moyo

On August 15th feast of the Assumption of Our Lady into Heaven mission of Moyo on the west bank of the Nile was officially inaugurated by Fr. Vignato. During his speech Mr. Place, Commissioner of Gulu, who was present at the ceremony, forbade the people to call the fathers by the nickname "Khartoumi" which had connotations of slave traders. Fr. Vignato blessed the church with a great crowd around. Many catechists were there with their catechumens and Christians from Lowi, Pakele, Zaipi, Adropi, Pacara and Androga. The chiefs present were Yambayamba, Kenyi, Andira, and Lukere. On that day, Fr. Vignato administered confirmation some of the baptized. Fr. Zambonardi, who was the superior of the mission, reported that on 25th June 1917 there were already 400 catechumens, among them 70 girls, 60 sons of chiefs, 50 Christians resident in the mission; there were also 30 chapels with 38 catechists. Many of these people were from the abandoned mission of Palaro. In their writings, the missionaries who worked among the Madi, praised them for their openness to the message of the Gospel and their welcoming spirit.

Brother Fanti was the first great builder of Moyo and it was he who started the first "artisan school" in West Nile. Fr. Zambonardi worked with great zeal, together with Frs. Molinaro and Cardani. After the celebration of the opening of the mission a terrible plague of meningitis killed 500 people including many youth. Fr. Molinaro wrote to the Superior General on 16th October 1917 that the mission looked abandoned and desolate because of the plague and starvation, most of the children had been sent home; only twenty catechumens were left in the mission because they were going to be baptized on All Saints Day. Among these there were four from Palaro whose parents wanted to take them away. But they refused to go, saying "also at home people are dying".

The year 1917 was a year of heavy rain. The Nile overflowed so much that the plain of Loropi became a swamp right up to the foot of the hills. As Omach and Palaro were started in sufferings and hardships so Moyo was too. Notwithstanding these great difficulties, evangelization was carried on in West Madi by catechists who were scattered all over the territory, sustained by the local chiefs. Where the catechists were not enough, the missionaries those newly baptized to teach the catechism. The school chapels were always crowded with pupils. It is true that during the period of plague and starvation some elders and women opposed the boarding schools in the mission and accused the missionaries of being the cause of the death of the (few) catechumens who died in the mission.

For three years there were only two priests in Moyo station: Fr. Cardani and Fr. Molinaro because Fr. Zambonardi had left for the mission of Arua. They divided the work between them: while one visited the chapels on the right side of the Nile periodically, the other visited those on the left. Finally on 5th July 1920, Fr. Pietro Foglio and Brother Ignazio Rama arrived in Moyo. Fr. Foglio came to be considered the second founder of Moyo while Bro. Ignazio made the first kiln for baking bricks. It was a practical way of teaching the people how to use their own resources and material for improving their standard of living. After a little while Fr. Molinaro left for Torit in Sudan to work among the Lotuko.

In the beginning, the mission of Moyo was completely free from the influence of Protestants: there was no competition and evangelization of the Catholic faith was carried out peacefully. By 1924, there was a network of catechists established all over the territory of the mission. Fr. Paravisi Alessandro on 23rd December 1927 wrote to the Superior General: "We thank the Lord that gave to the Madi abundant blessings. At this time we have 500 people in the mission. In the outstations, where the catechists are, there is a great movement towards the church. We feel that the Grace of God moves the hearts of the people to conversion. On Easter Day we blessed the new church, which has already become rather small". In 1924, Mgr. Vignato sent two Banyoro catechists, women, to Moyo: Prudenzianna and Cecilia to take care of girls and women who increased in such numbers. They were so good that the people called them "mama". They remained in Moyo until their deaths and are both buried in the mission cemetery.

From the mission records we find these figures: on the Epiphany 80 baptisms were given and the new Church was blessed by Fr. Foglio; in May 82 baptisms were given; July 85 baptisms were given; October 120 Baptisms given; December 238 baptisms were given. In February 1928 Mgr. Vignato blessed the new church of Pakele built by Fr. Paravisi and brother Frigerio. Before that, in 1926, the Brothers Alessio and Attilio helped the government in building the new hospital in the town of Moyo. Mr. Low was in charge of it. In this year the ADC also came to live in Moyo.

In 1928 a terrible famine again devastated the Madi area. The missionaries did whatever they could, helping the poor and starving people. Brother Frigerio wrote of those days: "Here in Moyo too, the number of Christians is growing steadily but there is famine this year; many have no food and die". Brother Frigerio came to Moyo to replace Brother Ignazio who left for Gulu.

THE COMBONI MISSIONARY SISTERS IN MOYO 1926

Sisters Adalgisa Corradini and Domitilla Micheli arrived from Italy and with Sr Eugenia Berlato from Arua they began a new community of sisters in Moyo. M Carla went to help them to settle. The mission was situated not far from the government post in an undulating valley with the distant range of mountains to the north marking the border with Sudan.

ARUA

In February 1918, the Comboni Missionaries started the mission of Arua. Thus within a few years the cross had been planted among the three main ethnic groups of West Nile: Logbara, Alur and Madi. From those three missions the Faith spread to all villages, gathering to Christ's Church a people of adorers who now number well over one million.

The first safari to Arua by a Comboni missionary was made by Fr. Audisi from Angal who went to visit the Alur Christians who had gone there from Omach to work with the British Commissioner. While there he baptized 4 Alur children. On 13th November 1917, Father Zambonardi and Bro. Savariano were sent from Moyo to Arua to explore the possibility of establishing a mission. They reached Lifori and then went down to Gimara. The chief of the place explained them the way to take. They crossed the River Koci and reached Langi where they met the first mukungu of Aringa, Mr. Ali Bilali.

In his Memoirs, Fr Zambonardi described the people as very cordial. They also met the Jago, Addallah. From the names, the father understood that the influence of Islam was already spread in Aringa by Chief Fada al Mullah Adu. All mukungus and jagoes were Muslim. But here the father was allowed to celebrate the first mass in the Logbara land on 16th November 1917. They proceeded to the rest-house of Aringa where they met the DC of Arua, Mr. Weatherhead who was pleased to see them. He gave them a letter for his secretary and told them to wait for him in Arua which was his residence. On 18th they reached Omugo where they were struck by the riches of the Logbara, who owned cattle and whose fields were under cultivation.

They crossed the River Ora and reached the rest-house of Offude; from there they admired the Mount Jebel.Wati (Eti).They saw the remains of the monument and the graves of the Belgian soldiers buried there. Chief Kemure gave them new porters and next day they travelled through Maracha where the chief was Alija. On 24th November 1917 they finally reached Arua after crossing the Anyao River. They met as arranged with the DC Weatherhead and through him with Entebbe. Their journey had taken six days.

Fr. Zambonardi spoke also with some chiefs around Arua and with the few Alur Christians who lived there and met Catholic Goans who were traders there. The missionaries noticed a hill west of Arua across the river Anyao, a quiet place belonging to the chief Adroni, which they judged would be ideal as the site of their mission.

There were various reasons for the decision to establish a mission in Arua, the main one being the desire to bring the Good News to the people there, although as the missionaries told the DC they were also concerned about the spiritual welfare of the Baganda and Alur Christians who lived there. The fact that West Nile had already been declared a District with its own Commissioner was attractive too; it was a strategic place for evangelization.

The missionaries were also aware that both Islam and Protestants had a foothold in the area. The British Commissioner welcomed them. Fr. Vignato wrote a postcard from Gulu to Fr. Montanari: "Mr. Ashton Warner wants by all means the mission of Arua where famine is at home". Fr. Vignato, in a meeting with the missionaries in Gulu, discussed the opening of a mission in Arua. He then wrote a letter to the Superior General in Verona on 18th January 1918 in these words: "We have come to a conclusion about a big task which faces us: to face any difficulty for the foundation of a mission in Arua among the Logbara. Fr. Zambonardi will go there with Fr. Fornasa. We have considered both the difficulties and losses we might meet if we delayed our opening of a mission in Arua. There are many Muslims and Protestants there but the civil authorities insistently invite us. We have decided to commit ourselves in this to Divine Providence". Fr. Zambonardi was the right man to do the job, plant the Catholic faith in Arua. He reached Arua with Fr. Fornasa on 14th February 1918 from Moyo. Fr. Fornasa was chosen as his companion because he was his classmate and could speak Alur and knew the Alur Christians from Omach. Here again we note that the first to bring the Good News to Logbara were Christian lay people from different parts of Uganda.

The Logbara did not like the Protectorate Government at all. Twice the people of Udipi attempted to kill the DC Weatherhead, who established himself in Arua in 1915. The Logbara believed that using a spell would make them immune to bullets used by the soldiers: the spell would change the bullets in harmless little stones. In 1919 the Commissioner sent reinforcements and about three hundred people died in Udipi. Some escaped into Congo and others were arrested. From that time the DC forbade the Logbara to carry bows and spears. Because of the insecurity, the District Commissioner asked Entebbe for an assistant and Mr. Driberg arrived as ADC. The Acholi nicknamed him *Bwana tong, Mr. Spear*, because he went about with a spear in his hand.

Because of the hostility of the Logbara, the authorities refused the missionaries permission to establish chapels with catechists in the territory. This was the time when Weatherhead erected the gallows in Arua town. After three years of British occupation, Fr. Vignato traveled from Gulu to Masindi, where he met the Provincial Commissioner, Mr. Eden, who gave him permission to establish chapels and schools.

The place the Comboni Missionaries wanted was occupied by the people led by Chief Adroni. They welcomed the fathers with arrows and spears. Fr. Zambonardi informed them "that he did not want to fight but to build a school, if anybody claimed compensation for the land, he was ready to pay. The people, satisfied by the words of the father, put their bows down and went away. The DC Weatherhead gave orders to Chief Adroni to provide workers to build the mission and receive payment for the work done. They were not interested but a small house and a classroom were built on the slope of the hill. At that time there were no other buildings on the land given to the mission. Slowly the people became friends, bringing gifts to the missionaries of eggs, sweet potatoes and papaw. Some even asked to be allowed to build their homes near the mission

On 3rd March 1918, about thirty Baganda and Alur were enrolled for the catechumenate. It was hoped that their example would draw the Logbara to want to receive instruction in the Catholic faith.

The DC Bwana Gerekede through the Muslim chiefs succeeded in marking out roads like the one between Arua and Rhino Camp and to build some rest houses for him and tourists which were also used by the missionaries. He was the first to make people to pay *musoro* (tax): two rupees a year.

Rev. J Dobson wrote in " Down in West Nile": "In 1918 Mr. Frank Gardener arrived with his wife and his brother Alfred, hoping that in West Nile they would not be attacked by black water fever as in Congo. The two brothers built houses, dug a well and learned the language. In the beginning their services were conducted in Kiswahili; later they used a Hymnal and Book of Prayers in Luganda sent from Kampala. By the end of 1918 there were already three *kanisa* where the people gathered to pray in the name of Jesus Christ: Vurra, Ezoku and Eruba. "That year people were ravaged by epidemic and we were not spared". Gardener sent a message to the Catholic missionaries asking for help and though ill, he came. He was diagnosed as having black water fever. The whole of the Gardener family went to Kenya and from there some years later returned to Scotland.

Between 1918 and 1923 twenty different protestant missionaries worked in Mvara. In 1922, Mr. Mount of the African Inland Mission completed the first Logbara translation of St Mark's gospel. During that year a group of 22 were baptized in Mvara. "The Quakers in Kenya, Tanganyika and Congo were a sect, but in Uganda they were known as The African Inland Mission and were associated with the Anglican Church. The British Protectorate Government had in mind to divide West Nile according to the three religious denominations: the Madi to Catholics, the Logbara to Islam and the Alur to the Anglican Church. Because of the particular political situation at that time in West Nile they failed to succeed completely. When the schools run by catechists started, the DC Weatherhead sent children to their school but, as the missionaries came to realize, he sent

the sons of chiefs to the Quakers as was the general practice already throughout Uganda and to them the sons of peasants

The years 1918 and 1919 were years of great epidemics and starvation. These epidemics were meningitis, smallpox and Spanish fever. It was obvious that they were brought and spread by the soldiers through their frequent movement from one place to another. One way to prevent spreading illnesses was to avoid any gathering but the people did not know this, neither did they have any protection or medicines.

Famine came at the same time to make the life of the people worse. The cause was a long period of drought. In all Uganda people were dying in a great number. The government and missionaries were not ready to meet and cope with the situation. The government used the missionaries, both Protestant and Catholic in the distribution of "pande", beans and pistachio and ground nuts.

Fr. Beduschi from Angal wrote to Verona on 3rd October 1918: "There is a terrible famine and pestilence in our districts. More than 1000 people died in Angal in 4 months; in Arua people lack everything and the fathers are demoralized. The Quakers received thousands of bags of beans to distribute to the people. We Catholics cannot help in any way for lack of means".

The two missionaries Zambonardi and Fornasa were committed in building schools and going on safaris though it was difficult to move around in those days because of the sickness and famine. A work of priority of this first year 1918 was the appointment of the catechists to the centres where chiefs resided such as Offude, Logo, Maracha, and Terego. Though there were not yet any Logbara catechists, four Acholi ones arrived. We know the names of two of them: Cirillo of Kitgum and Giancarlo of Gulu. After having learnt the Logbara language, Rafael, an Alur worker from Angal, settled in Arua at the service of the British Protectorate Government and it was he who accompanied the four catechists to the appointed chiefs. The DC wanted to order them away because they did not have permission from Entebbe but the chiefs convinced him of their need for catechists/teachers.

Fr. Zambonardi wanted to be surrounded by good people and good families in the mission. This was a practice of the Comboni Missionaries from the time of Comboni and his settlement at Malbes. At Ediofe were Rafael and his wife Caterina; Damiano, a good builder of huts; the first Christian Logbara family Aprili, his wife Teresa and Celina, their daughter who had been sent by the Dominican Fathers from Farajje in Belgian Congo; Philip, a cook, sent by the missionaries of Aba in Congo; which was also where the Quakers came from to Uganda. There was also a Munyoro builder, Bagyenda.

At the end of September 1918, Fr. Zambonardi was invited to go to Aru in Congo, just 25 kms from Arua, by Mgr. Reginald van Schoote, Apostolic Prefect of Nyangara. The Prelate was paying a visit to the mission of Aru. This mission had been started in 1915 and was cared for by the Dominican fathers of Farajje. It had 1900 Catholics, 3189 catechumens and 26 chapels. Fr. Beduschi also visited this mission in October 1918 and both were disappointed at the methods of evangelization used by the Belgian missionaries. They felt it was too superficial and that the people were left alone for too long between visits from their priests.

At the end of 1919 Fr. Zambonardi made his last safari from Arua to visit Chief Kenyi in Koboko. He saw that the language was different from that of the Logbara since the people are Kakwa, similar to the Bari in Sudan in customs and language. About 3000 of them lived in Uganda, while others were divided between Congo and Sudan. Fr wrote in his Memoirs that "the Kakua are better educated and dressed because they have been in contact with Europeans and Arabs" in the time of Emin Pasha.

From Nimule through Moyo, Fr. Enrico Redaelli arrived in Arua on 19th March 1919. He came by bicycle from Nimule to Moyo alone, and had several flat tires on the way. He knew English well and learned the Logbara language quickly. He was popular among the people and in 1929 was

teaching in the post primary school and in the Seminary of Gulu. He became the Education Secretary for the Equatorial Nile Province. In 1932 he was based in Lodonga and later in Arua as Director of the Normal School for Teachers Grade C. This school produced a good number of teachers for the district; Ediofe Boys Primary School and Lodonga Demonstration School and Nyapea Boys were the first schools to benefit from having these first teachers. The buildings of these schools are still standing, a witness to the importance the missionaries gave to education in West Nile.

COMBONI MISSIONARY SISTERS IN ARUA 1922

Fr Simoncelli, the superior of the mission of Arua, took the opportunity while attending a catechetical congress held in Gulu to visit M Carla and tell her how much his mission needed sisters. M Costanza Caldara and her council agreed and sent: Sr Elisa Peroseni as Superior, with Srs Eugenia Berlato, Odilia Oss Bals and Natalia Baggi. As their community diary records: they began "rich in faith and enthusiasm" dedicating themselves to the small dispensary, the catechumenate and the beginnings of a nursery school. As was usual, they also looked after the cooking and sewing. They went out on safari to visit the people in their homes and in this way "to bring to many the knowledge and love of Christ", numerous infants were baptized as well as those who were dying, especially in the first years.

LADONGA

In 1920, a Comboni Missionary called Valcavi, came from Congo and visited Adu. He asked Chief Adu to give him a piece of land to start a mission. At first he was refused, but the Commissioner was sympathetic to the idea and insisted the chief give him land. Adu gave him Lodonga. The first Christians were Ambrogio Guma, his father Edward Chabe and Giorgio Ariga from Robu. It was extremely difficult to preach Christianity among the Muslims. Once Fr. Valcavi asked the British Commissioner to come to meet the missionaries whose morale was low. He told them to be patient and to suffer as Jesus Christ did. His words were little appreciated by his listeners; perhaps they wanted some action to deal with the petty annoyances which the Catholics and their catechumens and were subjected to by the Muslims.

On the feast of the Sacred Heart, June 1927, the missionaries: Frs Pietro Valcavi and Ferdinando Sembiente with Brother Amadeo Salvadori officially began to work there in Ladonga, a station detached from Arua. This had come about for two reasons: because the territory under the jurisdiction of Arua was far too big and to work in an area where there was a strong Islamic influence.

The missionaries found 17 Christians baptised in Arua and spread in various places: Omugo, Aringa and Koboko. These were the first places chapels were built, distant enough from the main station of Ladonga. The missionaries facing the hostility of the Muslim community lamented their late arrival, convinced that if there had been sufficient personnel, they would have halted the spread of the Islamic faith. More than a third of the area was Muslim, the chief was muslim and so were most of the subchiefs. Just around the mission the fathers wrote, there were 500 or more fathers of families who adhered to the beliefs of islam. But the missionaries as usual worked indefatigably and in pockets where islam had not yet reached, baptised the people. Their work bore fruit; on the first celebration of Christmas all the Christians of the mission gathered in Ladonga and pagans and Muslims joined them. There were more than 600 catechumens who followed instruction from their catechist in the subchapels for three or four years before being given the sacrament of Baptism. In May 1929 the first Baptisms were given and by the end of the year more than a thousand had been baptised. Number continued high and by 1936 more than 3500 had been administered.

The first buildings were replaced and the church too; a primary school was begun and declared by the Provincial Commissioner to be one of the best in the Protectorate.

THE COMBONI MISSIONARY SISTERS IN ARINGA/LODONGA 1929

The mission that was known as Aringa when the sisters first went there and later as Ladonga, is situated half-way between the missions of Moyo and Arua among the Logbara people. In 1929, the first four sisters: Sr Marziana Vanalli from Arua, Idelma Alberti, Teresa Colombo and Ortensia Poli opened the community there. The sisters eventually opened a school for girls in the mission although there was opposition from some parents. They also began a dispensary which was much frequented, since the government one was quite far and the area had many cases of sleeping sickness and leprosy.

GOLDEN JUBILEE OF THE FAITH IN UGANDA

In 1929, the Catholic Church in Uganda celebrated its Golden Jubilee and the Verona Fathers joined in the ceremonies at Rubaga Cathedral in Kampala. They had also been present four years earlier when this church, served by the White Fathers, was consecrated as Uganda's first cathedral. After the jubilee celebrations in the south, the Apostolic Visitor, Bishop Hinsley, visited the Prefecture of Equatorial Nile: "He showed himself a true father", the Gulu community diary records, taking an interest in all their activities. He advised the sisters to begin boarding schools for girls. With his encouragement, the sisters redoubled their efforts to persuade the parents to allow their daughters to board at school. Eventually after inspection by the Government Schools Supervisor, both the boarding schools for girls in Gulu and Kitgum were given official approval.

LIRA

The Comboni Missionaries started their work among the Lango at Lira in 1930, long after the Protestants. These missionaries had established a many, many schools and had a large number of catechists working among the people. Almost all the chiefs and sub-chiefs were protestant as also about 25,000 of the people. The Catholics numbered only a few hundred, most of whom had been baptized in Gulu or in the mission of the Mill Hill priests at Luala.

By a decree of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide dated December 1929, two thirds of the District of Lira where most of the Lango tribe lived, (the Kuman tribe was left to them since they had already established a mission station among them) was taken from the care of the Mill Hill Missionary Institute and given to the Comboni Missionaries. In March 1930 Fr Pietro Simoncelli, superior of the mission with Brother Fontana, began the foundation of the mission at Ngetta, about five miles from the government offices.

When the buildings were sufficient, these two left the place to Fr Casari, Fr Malandra and Fr Chiavegato. There were few catechists to help them and this was reflected in the scarce number of catechumenates. One of the first missionaries wrote: "the region has plenty of roads and two small ports (Atura and Kacung) where boats call in along Lake Kyoga. Murchison Falls blocks their passage to Lake Alberto. There are numerous swamps and so it is not a healthy place though the new mission has been built on a small hill as a safeguard. The soil is rich here and a lot of cotton is grown. The population is dense compared to other areas and there is definitely room for more mission stations; it is a pity we could not have come here earlier. The Protestants are well established here, having come some years ago". The Protestants had a very clear strategy: they prepared the local people to be the administrative class, helping them in all ways to enter Government service. Since the country was vast, and the British working for the government comparatively few, the government needed people to work for them everywhere. The Langi chiefs and sub chiefs recognized that their authority was confirmed by the Protestant Protectorate Government and therefore adhered to that religion. To get on in life, they had to be Protestant. They did not therefore welcome or favour the Catholic religion. But the missionaries worked hard and their good example, spirit of sacrifice and charity, bore fruit in the following years, as they baptized many Catholics.

In Ngetta there was a catechumenate and a school by 1931 and much work was being done to prepare catechists. But in April 1933, a violent storm totally destroyed the church at the mission. There was no money available but houses needed to be built for the catechumens and the students of the school. The technical school in Gulu came to help: a new church was built, a new house for the missionaries, the existing one restructured to be a home for the Comboni Missionary Sisters who arrived in September 1933. And at the beginning of 1934, a new bigger school was ready for the boys and their former one was ready to welcome girls into their own Primary School. The parish register showed 3000 had been baptized, not many compared to the number of Protestants, but the people were becoming accustomed to the Catholic missionaries and accepted them.

THE COMBONI MISSIONARY SISTERS IN LIRA 1933

During 1933 more sisters arrived from Italy for the two new communities planned. The provincial Superior, Sr Rosalba, went to Lira to open a new community in September of that year with Sr Maria Mazzelli as Superior and Srs Maria Lenna, Gesuina Tremolada and Lucidia Vidale. The sisters settled in quickly and after their coming there was an upsurge in response to evangelization among the people. The boys school already had the first four classes through the girls had only the first one: the sisters took over the care of both besides that of numerous catechumens and a busy dispensary. The girls of the area were eager to attend school and their parents encouraged them.

KARAMOJA.

From 1846 to 1878 Karamoja was part of the Vicariate Apostolic of Central Africa. In 1878 it became part of the Apostolic Delegation of Equatorial Africa and Congo and in 1883 it became part of the Apostolic Vicariate under the jurisdiction of the White Fathers and when the Vicariate

Apostolic was divided on Jan 1894 it was transferred to the Vicariate of the Upper Nile under the Mill Hill Fathers. In Dec 1939, the old Apostolic Vicariate of Central Africa was divided and the newly established Apostolic Prefecture of the Equatorial Nile was entrusted to the Verona Fathers and Karamoja was added to the new Prefecture. So Karamoja was detached from the Eastern Province of Uganda and joined to the Northern Province. It was a vast area of about 28000 square kilometers with 65590 inhabitants according to government figures. The Apostolic Prefect of the Equatorial Nile, Msgr Vignato sent the first Catholic missionaries to Karamoja in 1933. However, the Labwor had already been visited by the priests from Kitgum mission in 1918: "Fr Pedrana went as far as Labwor doing a round trip of about 300 km which took 20 days".

KANGOLE

Because of the scarcity of wood, the procurator at great expense bought a five roomed house in Masindi and had it transported at great cost to Kangole. Soon there was a small chapel a school and stores. The first missionaries were Frs Molinaro and Lorandi joined soon after by Fr Moizi. There work was hard mainly due to the shifting population of a pastoral semi nomadic people. But the school was busy and there were some catechumens and Christians. There were 11 catechists and Fr Molinaro learned the language and prepared a prayer book in the local language.

1933 to 1955

Kangole (Mater Dei) Mission 1933.

On 19th April 1933 Fr Luigi Molinaro and Bro Lorandi arrived in Kangole where they opened the first mission in Karamoja. The original mission was at Lopiida near the present police post, and while the buildings were being set up the missionaries stayed at the Rest House at Ngoleriet. Fr Molinaro the first Comboni Father to settle in Karamoja wrote in his diary: "I have received the visit here in Ngetta, Lira of my friend Fr Scheut of the Mill Hill Fathers, superior at Toroma mission in Teso. He is coming from Kitgum and has just toured Karamoja, a territory he described as "stolen" from them as he remarked with a smile, by us Verona Fathers. He does not regret the fact. "If Bishop Campling" he says, "could see that desert, he would say as I did when I left it: "thank you Lord for taking me away from these thorns!" Fr Scheut is the second Mill Hill missionary to visit Karamoja. I heard later from the Karimajong themselves that a few years earlier, an old priest had visited Pian and Bokora riding on a donkey."

The site of the mission had been chosen two months earlier in Feb 1933 when Mgr Vignato and Fr Molinaro made a tour of Karamoja. They stopped overnight at Toroma, as guests of Fr Scheut, who suggested that Kangole might be a good place to begin a mission. He gave a number of reasons: it was on the road leading to Moroto, the District HQ; it was on the banks of the Omaniman River, giving some assurance of finding water; it was the home of Lomanat chief of the Bokora; it was also the most populous place in Karamoja. The DC, Mr Preston, (called Acholi Mataar), an old friend of Mgr Vignato, had agreed that it was a good place for the mission and helped the missionaries prepare the necessary documents in order to get permission from the Protectorate Government in Entebbe. From Kangole and Moroto, the two missionaries visited Kotido, Loyoro and Kopoth and then went back to Gulu via Orom and Kitgum.

Br Luigi Calderola put up a wooden house in just three months and in August 1933 the two missionaries left the Rest House and moved to their new buildings. Bro Lorandi built a kitchen and a small school of two rooms. To the west of the school, they began to build the chapel. The missionaries obtained a brand new Guzzi Motorbike with a side car. However when the rainy season began, this was not practical, so safaris were then made by bicycle and an ox –driven cart to carry goods. The missionaries travelled extensively throughout Karamoja from the "Greek River" in the south to Kamion in the extreme north.

F Scheut had baptised two Karimajong: Romualdo, a Dodoth and Ciriako, a Matheniko who became catechists and also interpreters for the missionaries. With their help, Fr Molinaro translated the basic prayers: the Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be etc into Ngakarimajong.

Eventually with his knowledge of the Lotuho language of Sudan, similar in structure to Ngakarimojong, Fr Molinaro, (helped also by the grammar of the Teso language, a sister language to Ngakarimojong, written by Fr. Kiggen, a Mill Hill Father), he wrote a simple grammar. Later a prayer book and the catechism were put together. The name of God was translated with the Luganda term "Katonda" at the suggestion of Romualdo and Ciriako, because they said that for Ngakarimojong, Akuj was firmament. Later Akuj came to be used.

In September 1933, Fr Luigi Moizi came from Gulu to be the second priest at Kangole. At the beginning of 1934, the missionaries' house, the school, church and houses for the catechumens were ready. "On the eve of Corpus Christi", Fr Molinaro wrote, "we received an unexpected visit from Christians of Labwor with their catechist Alfonso Ayepa, from Nyakwai. They had been baptised at Kitgum, 200 km away from Nyakwai. At Easter they heard of the new mission in Kangole, only 100 km from their place so they came, bringing chickens, eggs, milk and an invitation to visit them". On 28th Oct 1934, the first seven from this area of the immense territory of Karamoja were baptised. This catechist, Ayepa was zealous in spreading the faith among his people: he had started building the chapel even before the missionaries arrived and gathered Christians and catechumens around the mission. Later a string of chapels with their own catechists started, one after the other: lokopo- Bokora; Nabilatuk – Pian; keem, Wiawar – Labror, Loyoroit – Labwor, Kanawat and Panyangara – Jie, Loyoro – Dodoth; Lolacat and Napyananya – Pian.

In November 1934, Br. Lorandi left and was replaced by Br Alessio Chiavegato Ariga. Br Rodolfo Arosio came to build the parish office. He built it between the fathers' house and the church, then left. In the same year, a proposal came from Mgr Hinsley, Apostolic Delegate for the Missions in Africa, who lived in Nairobi, (later Archbishop of Westminster 1934 and Cardinal 1947) to give Karamoja to the Passionists but the General Administration of the Verona Fathers preferred to keep this territory for its own missionaries. At the end of 1935, Fr Peano (coming from Moyo) who remained until the end of 1936, replaced Fr Moizi. In February 1937, Fr Felice Farina Apaloyerangiro arrived to stay. Over a period of five years, the number of baptisms had reached 30, a disappointing number for the Vicar Apostolic and the Regional Superior of the Verona Fathers, Fr Valcavi. They were accustomed to "the triumphs of the faith" in other parts of the Vicariate. So again, the idea of giving up Karamoja was discussed (back to the Mill Hill Institute this time), but this idea too died and the Verona Fathers remained.